

## Revival: What Can I Do?

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

Loved ones, we're studying revival these Sunday evenings through the summer. We really do hope to keep doing it for most of the summer. And I would just remind you again what real revival is. It is a mighty sovereign act of God and you remember, when we talked of the revival in the Hebrides in the '40s and the '50s, you remember, we talked of how the preacher was on his way home and thought nothing was happening and then you saw the lights of everyone's cottage lit up and he found that people were out on the front door step confessing their sins to God and crying out to him for mercy and forgiveness that for ordinary people to do that kind of thing there must be a whole atmosphere of awareness of God's presences.

And it's the same in the 1905 revival in Wales, you remember that Evan Roberts would at times come to a room like this that would have been filled from about three PM, or four, or five PM in the afternoon with hundreds of people and he would climb over different people to get into a spot, and then he would get up and say, "Let us pray," and then he was never heard from for the rest of the eight or nine hours, because the meeting would go on into the early hours of the morning and God would move among people and convert loved ones to Jesus, and fill others with the Holy Spirit, and heal others.

So you can see revival is a mighty sovereign act of God, it isn't something that preachers produce or even that people produce. It isn't a technique or a way of witnessing to Jesus, it is a mighty act of God's Spirit whereby he seems to be able to saturate the air with his own presence so that everybody is vitally alive and alert and knows that Jesus is right here among them.

So loved ones it is an act from heaven and it is a sovereign act and in that sense it is something that man cannot control except that God has given us a great promise, you remember, and it's that promise in 2 Chronicles 7:14. And it's the promise that God made to Solomon after building the temple. He said, "If ever there comes a time when in fact my presence will disappear from the temple, or if there ever comes a time when people will pass by and nod their heads and say, 'Ha, what has the Lord done to this house and to this people?'" If there ever comes a time when God's house becomes a byword among the nations, then God made this promise 2 Chronicles 7:14, "If my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land."

So loved ones, God says, "I will act from above. I will forgive their sin and I will heal their land from above vertically by a mighty act of my Holy Spirit if on the horizontal level my people will humble themselves, and pray and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways." So the Father has promised that if we fulfill certain conditions he will come down in revival power.

Now loved ones, that is what is needed when a land gets into the state of our present land. If you read the New York Times today, you saw that the crime rate in New York is not really going up, it's been going up for years, but the arrests now are not following it. The police can no longer control the rise in the crime rate in New York and where New York goes the rest of us follow. And the incredible thing about our nation at the moment is, that we have a whole lot of religion and we have all kinds of churches that are filled to overflowing, and all kinds of new churches that have started, but the crime rate continues to rise.

And you remember, what happened of course, in the revival in Wales- it went like this - “The social impact was astounding, for example, judges were presented with white gloves, not a case to try, no robberies, no burglaries, no rapes, no murders, and no embezzlements, nothing. District councils held emergency meetings to discuss what to do with the police now that they were unemployed. In one place the sergeant of the police was sent for and asked, ‘What do you do with your time?’ He replied, ‘Before the revival we had two main jobs to prevent crime and to control crowds at football games. Since the revival started there is practically no crime so we just go with the crowds.’ A counselor asked, ‘What does that mean?’ The sergeant replied, ‘You know where the crowds are, they are packing out the churches.’ ‘But how does that affect the police?’ He was told, ‘We have 17 police in our station but we have three quartets and if any church wants a quartet to sing they simply call the police station.’”

It changes the way people live and it changes the way the society operates. And what we need in America is revival, not movements among churches, not increases in church membership, not wonderful methods of building up churches, but loved ones what we need is revival. God’s spirit coming down and making us as vitally aware of him as they were in the days of Pentecost. And you remember, there was a kind of hush that constantly was upon them all in the days of Pentecost. There was a sense they said of fear everywhere because of the mighty acts that God was doing among them.

Now that is revival and it comes when God’s people seek him with all their hearts and are prepared to make the changes that he asks for. Now, the key loved ones to the changes is found in a parable that we have often read and it’s Matthew 13 if you’d like to look at it. Matthew 13:3-8, and it’s called the parable of the sower but it really is the parable of soils, the different kinds of soil and the soil is your heart and mine. And Matthew 13:3, “And he told them many things in parables, saying, ‘A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seeds fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured them. Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they had not much soil, and immediately they sprang up, since they had no depth of soil, but when the sun rose they were scorched; and since they had no root they withered away. Other seeds fell upon thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.’”

And then they asked him to explain it and in Verse 19 he explained, “When any one hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what is sown in his heart; this is what was sown along the path. As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is he who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; yet he has no root in himself, but endures for a while, and when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away.”

And then Verse 22, I thought that was many of us, “As for what was sown among thorns, this is he who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the delight in riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful.” And I wonder how many of us here maybe are like that ground. Where either the cares of the world or the delight and riches have grown up and choked off our first love of the Savior and our first desire above all to obey him the moment he spoke. And I think a lot of us like to think we’re not rich and yet we all have most things that we need and it is very easy for the things that we have to become the chief source of our joy and our delight. And it is easy to begin to depend more and more on either the cokes that you can look forward to or the records that you can play on your stereo, or the car that you can look forward to driving, and it is very easy for your delight in life to move off the Savior and to move onto other things.

It's very easy for the cares of this world to choke our love of Jesus. Our little worries and anxieties, the sheer job of making ends meet, and of making life work, and of meeting the practical requirements that we have to keep life going. It's very easy to find your days filled with those things and you who first met the Savior and every moment were thinking, "Lord, what do you want me to do? What do you want me to do next?" You begin to be concerned with other things than Jesus and you don't have time to listen does he want you to speak to somebody in the office, you're so busy getting your work done and you're so busy getting your work done because you planned all kinds of things to do with the money that you get from that work.

And it's surprisingly easy for God's dear children to allow the cares of the world and the delight maybe not in riches, but the delight in things that we own and things that we have, delight in friendships that we have. I know this sounds terrible, but delight even in our dear wives or our husbands. Delight in even our dear friends, or our guys, or our girls, or even delight in the loved ones here in the body, it is very easy to begin to delight yourself primarily in people and in things, and not so much as you did at the beginning with your Savior.

Now as you do that the soil of your heart gets harder and harder, and the Holy Spirit comes along and where before he could say, "Open your mouth and I will tell you what to say." Now he has to chop a bit at the soil and even then it gets more and more difficult for him to get in. And you resist him when he tells you to do something and that piece of soil goes harder and then you resist him again when he tells you to get up and pray every morning at five or six and that piece of soil gets a little harder. And then he prompts you to give a little more money than you're giving and you resist again and you don't even know you're resisting but gradually you're saying no to him more often than you're saying yes. And the soil of your heart gets harder and harder, and then you wonder why you come to church and somehow don't get the movement, or the stirring in your heart you used to before and you wonder why you can sing the old songs, and why you can read some of the books, and somehow your heart doesn't rise with excitement. And it's now a long time from you sense the presence of the Lord in your own heart.

Now loved ones, that's because the soil of your heart is getting harder and harder because you're resisting God more and more on the things that he commands you to do, and the one thing that you and I can do in that situation is do what Josiah said, "Break up your fallow ground." You can do that, you can break up that fallow ground, that ground that has become fallow, that has become so dead and dry that nothing grows in it and that no seed can pierce it, and that no water from the Holy Spirit can soften. You yourself can break up your fallow ground.

I know because I've done it and the way you break up your fallow ground is you look at your own life and you see where there is disobedience in it and where there is sin. Now loved ones, Satan has brought about a great myth among us over these past months and years, and it is this myth that self-examination is introspection, and introspection leads only to depression. Now introspection is looking in to see if you feel a love for God. That's introspection. Introspection is transcendental meditation where you try to quiet all your mind and make it absolutely passive so that no thought passes through it. That is introspection.

Introspection is trying to look at Jesus and then trying to look into your heart and see what it feels like as you look at Jesus. The moment you take your eyes off Jesus you're no longer looking at him, you're looking at your heart and it's [Finney 14:48] says, it's like trying to look at an object with your eye and at the same time look at the retina of your eye to see the image of that object in it. It's impossible. The moment you take your eyes off the object you're no longer

looking at it so when you look at the retina of your eye you see nothing there, no image at all. That's what introspection is, it's looking inside to see if you feel the presence of God.

Loved ones, that is utterly different from self-examination. Self-examination is essential if you're going ever to know how you stand before God. And I urge and encourage you to see that there is a vast difference between introspection and self-examination and the only way to break up your fallow ground is to begin to examine your own life. And that's what I did when I saw a coldness and a dryness developing I decided I will look at my own life and I will deal with my sins. That I can do, I can deal with my sins. I can look at the things that are wrong with my life and I can change them, then it's up to God the Holy Spirit to bring revival. He can bring it or he may not bring it but it's up to me to break up my fallow ground.

Loved ones, that's where it begins. It does not begin with wanting, or yearning, or hoping, it begins with examining your own life with breaking up your own fallow ground and set about it in a workmanlike manner. And you know, God is so good he gives us dear human beings something that we can do. We can't bring down the angels from heaven, we can't create the kind of atmosphere that he creates in a land, but we can deal with the sins in our lives and we can turn from those sins.

First of all, look at the sins of omission. Are there any sins of omission in your own life? And be real and honest about them because those are places where you have been resisting the Holy Spirit. You see, one of the problems with many of us when we get into a time of dryness is we say, "I don't know why it is. I don't know why it's happening. I do feel dry. I haven't witnessed to anyone for months. I haven't led anyone to Jesus for a year. I don't like prayer meetings. My heart is cold. I hate the Bible study that I have to do every day. I try to keep away from prayer meetings. I try to keep away from spiritual things. I try to pretend I'm a Christian even though I don't feel like a Christian, but I don't know what's wrong."

Loved ones, then look at the sins of omission in your own life. Are there any sins of omission? And if you read old Finney's book you know, you remember how he says ingratitude, ingratitude to God, have you thanked God for the blessings he's given you in your own life? Have you thanked him? And not have you thanked him months ago, or weeks ago, but have you thanked him today? Do you thank him each day for not only the material blessings he's given you but for the spiritual patience he's shown to you over the years? Is there ingratitude in your own heart? Has there grown up in your heart and attitude of that's what God is for, that's his business, that's what he's supposed to do, he's supposed to give me those things?

Is there any warm gratitude in your heart to your Father? And you know, if you say, "No there isn't." There is a way to begin, begin to list the things that he has given you and begin to thank him for those things. Is there a lack of love for God in your heart? Do you know what it is to love a person? It's amazing how many of us have trouble thinking what it is to love a person. It's strange how many of us don't really know what it is to love a person. We know what it is to need a person, or appreciate a person, but we don't really know what it is to lose yourself, to lose all sense of yourself in your love for somebody else. Now, do you ever love God? Do you ever sit before him in prayer and just love him, just love him and tell him that you love him.

And I wonder how many of us must appear to our Father as people who just think he's a kind of slot machine, or a gift machine that we put our prayers into and we expect to get something back but we don't ever treat him as a dear Father and we don't ever tell him we love him. Do we lack love for God? If we do old Finney would say, "Note that down, it's a sin that we need to repent of and we've

to turn from, and we've to change our way of going from this time on." Do we lack a love for the people who aren't saved? How much time have you spent today praying for somebody who isn't saved?

And I know your heart probably misses a beat because it probably is incredible isn't it how many of us here today not only haven't prayed for somebody who isn't saved but it's not quite a new thought but it's a strange thought to us, we don't have much time for praying for people who aren't saved, we're so busy praying for all the things we need. Well that's want of love for the heathen, it's want of love for the unsaved and where Jesus' Spirit moves he moves with a constant love for all who do not know him.

Do we have a lack of love for our relatives, and our fathers, and our mother? There'll come a day, surprisingly soon, for many of us when they will be beyond our care and beyond our concern. Do we love them and do we pray for our parents, and for our brothers and sisters, and for our sons, and daughters every day, or have we in our own hearts a hard and cold lack of love for those whom we are supposed to love with all our hearts? Do we pray every day? Do you pray, do you seek God in prayer each day?

Oh, I don't know how your heart is but it was such a relief to me when I began to see some of these things because I saw I can do something about it, I can do something about it. And if your heart wants more of God and you're not praying every day, loved ones start there. Start praying every day and confess that sin before God, that you have not sought him in prayer, that in spite of Jesus' clear example that every day a great while before day he went into the mountain to pray, if you haven't followed that example, "Early in the morning will I seek thee," if you have ignored those parts of God's word, loved ones, you're ignoring plain commandments that God has put in black and white for you.

If you're not - revival will never come to your own dear heart. In fact, you don't really want revival if you're not seeking God daily in prayer. And I would urge you on it, you know, because I know how clever, or I thought I was clever with myself, you had it every third day, or every fourth day, or you did it every day for two minutes, or once in a while you did 10 minutes. And loved ones, it's not the way you treat the king of the universe. This is our God, this is our Creator, this is the one who has given us all we own. Do you pray to God every day? Do you read his word every day?

And do you see that if there is a lack of life in our hearts and our lives, if there is a lack of revival spirit in us and we're not reading his word, then no wonder. We're simply not obeying the plainest commands of God, that he thy law will I meditate day and night, and if you do that you'll be like a tree planted by rivers of waters. And you wonder why you're not like a tree planted by rivers of water, why you're not blossoming with fruit and with leaves every day, and why you're not giving shade to all kinds of other people from a noonday sun. It's because you're not meditating on his law day and night.

And if you say to me, "Well, it isn't the book? Aren't the books good?" The books are good but his word is his word and he has promised that he will make his word living in our hearts if we will study it and mediate upon it. Do you study his word? Until you study his word he is not able to bring life to your dear heart. And then Finney says, "Do you attend the means of grace?" And that means communion, and then it means the preaching services in the mornings and the evenings each Lord's day. And then it means the prayer meetings and Sunday morning down at Colony Inn and the prayer meetings on Sunday evenings, and then it means the prayer meetings on Friday, and then it

means the fellowships on Wednesday.

And you know many of us have fallen into gross laziness because we think we're not an ordinary church and thank goodness we don't need to go to all these kinds of things to make people think we're members. But loved ones, that's not the importance of those things, those are all means of grace. They're all means that God has of giving grace to your life and your heart. And I remember putting out, you remember, a monthly checkup and it listed all the means of grace that we had here in the body and I asked you to go down it and to note the ones that you did not come to. And I know it was very easy to think, "Oh you mean, if I come to all these I'll get into heaven?" But really, the purpose of it was to bring before our dear hearts that there are things that we can do to get right with God.

And so often you know, you would sit there and say, "Yes, my heart is dead, and dry as a husk but I don't know what to do." Well loved ones, you can do these things. You can examine your attendance at the means of grace and you can start coming to those and you can start attending them. Is there any sin of omission in your life? And you yourself will know other things that you've omitted to do. It's when the Holy Spirit says to you, "Do this," and you don't do that. That's a sin of omission. When the Holy Spirit tells you to do something extra and you don't do it, it's a sin of omission.

And then sins of commission, are there sins of commission in your life? Is there pride in your life? And a man or a woman can look at their own life and can see if there's pride. Do you ever wonder is so-and-so looking at me? Does so-and-so see what I'm like? Do you ever put on a dress or put on clothes and think primarily of how much it will make other people appreciate you rather than how well you will look in your Father's eyes? Is there pride in the things that you do? Do you do a think and then look around to see who has seen you do it? Or, are you concerned less people miss what you have done? Do you find yourself somehow bringing it round in conversation, what you have done, so they will appreciate you?

Loved ones, that is you with Jesus here on the cross and you standing in front of him like that, covering him up so that the world cannot see him. That's what it is. It's a silly miserable little poverty stricken creature with rags of righteousness falling off their body standing in front of the king of kings in his golden gown and saying, "Look at me, look at me, don't look at him. That's sin. Pride is sin because it's drawing eyes to you rather than drawing them to Jesus." And then is there envy, do you ever have envy in your heart or your life? And too many of us say, "Oh yes, I have envy but everybody has envy." But loved ones, envy is the desire for a position that God at the moment has given someone else. Envy is the desire for some looks, or some possession that somebody else has, or some talent that somebody else has.

It's crying out to the Lord God of the universe, "I should have had that. You're an unjust God, I should have had that. I want that." It's challenging God. It's saying to God, I want to be God. I want to redistribute these gifts and talents, and that is sin against the maker of the universe and he cannot dwell in a heart that has envy in it. Or, do you experience selfishness, a desire for things to be right in your own life, an unreadiness in fact for things to be better in somebody else's life than in yours? And you know so often we say, "Oh thank goodness that didn't happen to me." And we really do mean that.

We're far from Moses, you know, who said, "about the children of Israel then wipe me out from your book", or from Paul." We're rather saying, "I'm glad I'm in his book. I'm glad it isn't me." And

many of us are selfish, we are always looking for our own advantage. How many of our dear lives, you know, are filled during the day with thinking, "How does this affect me? This action that is taking place in work, how is it going to affect me? This thing that they're now going to do at church, how is it going to convenience me or inconvenience me?" Do you find yourself looking at everything from your own point of view, from your own selfish point of view? That's sin and it's something you can stop.

You can stop that. You can. You can stop that loved ones. You can stop thinking always of yourself. You can, ordinary people – dear ones, Socrates, Plato, the noble heathen, the noble pagans, they lived unselfish lives. You can live an unselfish life. This is falseness, you know, where we all say, "Oh no, the only way I can live an unselfish life is if Jesus comes in." Jesus will only come in if you're willing to live an unselfish life. He alone can enable you to live a fully Christ centered and God centered life, but you yourself can turn from your selfishness. And Finney would say, "Note down the things in your life where there is selfishness. Note down the times when you're always thinking of your own comfort."

Finney says, "Is there a desire to avoid self-denial in your life?" And I think he puts it maybe better than I can when he talks about it– he says, "There are many of us that far from avoiding self-denial, we reject it as un-reasonable. There are many Christians who are willing to do almost anything in religion that does not require self-denial. But when they are called to do anything that requires them to deny themselves - that is too much. They think they are doing a great deal for God and doing about as much as He ought to ask in reason. If they are only doing what they can do about as well as not, but they are not willing to deny themselves any comfort or convenience, whatever, for the sake of serving the Lord. They will not willing suffer reproach for the name of Christ, nor will they deny themselves the luxury of life to save a world from hell so far are they from remembering self-denial is a condition of discipleship that they do not know what self-denial is. They never have really denied themselves a pinch for Christ and for the gospel. Some are giving up their abundance and are giving much, and are ready to complain that others don't give more when in truth they do not give anything they need, anything that they could enjoy if they kept it. They only give of their surplus wealth."

Now loved ones, when we're living that way we're missing revival. We're beginning to shave down the cross to the point where it's bearable to carry it and it no longer is pressing us into the ground and into the tomb where alone resurrection takes place and this cross presses down to the point where the Calvary life can come out.