Revival Tarries Because Repentance Is Not Preached

By Henry Blackaby

The following is edited from a message given at the Heart-Cry for Revival Conference in April 2006 at The Cove, Asheville, North Carolina U.S.A.

The theme of this message is that revival tarries because of a neglect of the essence of Jesus' preaching to God's people. What was the essence of the preaching of Jesus? When you see Jesus preaching, you are looking at the heart of the Father. Jesus said, *"…I do nothing of Myself; but as My Father taught Me, I speak…"* (John 8:28). *"…all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you"* (John 15:15). As the Son of God delivered the message from the heart of His Father, the first word out of His mouth was, *"Repent"* (Matt. 4:17). This was the essence of Jesus' preaching.

Who was Jesus speaking to at that time? He was speaking to God's people. John 1:11 says, *"He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him."* Did He then say, "I am not going to preach to them anymore"? No, He kept on preaching to them because it was a life and death message. He knew a lot more than the people knew, and He knew how critical the message was. Our problem is that when people do not listen to us, we quit, or when things get tough, we quit.

As a pastor for thirty years, I have assumed that I am a spiritual physician. I stand for perfect spiritual health. I see sick Christians all the time. I don't get upset with them. I simply say, "That's why God has me here." God has given me the capacity to be a spiritual diagnostician. When I see someone misbehaving, and sometimes misbehaving in terrible ways, it does not get me upset. I just say, "Lord, help me to understand. Why is this Christian behaving this way? He is expressing spiritual disease, but where is it coming from? Lord, help me to know how to diagnose what is happening and then address the root cause." I found that when the root cause was resolved, all of the symptoms disappeared.

I have never yet known God to place me in a difficult situation where He didn't have all the resources to bring the people from where they were to where they ought to be. And what an incredible joy when they realize their pastor has a shepherd's heart and stays with them until they are healed spiritually. Then the joy of the Lord and the power and the presence of God fill the life of the church family.

Neglect of Preaching Repentance

When our Lord came, He had a very specific message for His people. As I go across this land and around the world, I am noticing something significant. There is a terrible neglect of preaching repentance to God's people, and so God's people are full of sin. Yet they cry for revival, and God essentially says, "No, no, no! You are full of sin. I want you to know that My arm is not short that it *can't* save; My ear is not heavy and *can't* hear, but your sin has come

Phoca PDF

between you and Me, so I *will not* hear" (Isa. 59:1). Does He not say here that if you keep and guard sin in your heart, the Lord will not hear you? Surely a pastor should say, "I had better deal with sin in the life of God's people."

Some people feel that praying for revival is a substitute for repentance – that somehow God will be pleased if we ask Him to come in power. God says something like this: "I have been here all along, and I didn't leave My power in heaven. The problem is not with Me. It is with you. You do not know how to recognize My presence. You are not responding to Me." All the power of God, all the fullness of God, dwells in His Son who is the head of your church. So your church is at all times filled with the fullness of God. The problem is that we are not appropriating. We are not responding to His presence and His power.

"Repent" Is a Positive Word

So the first word out of the heart of Jesus to His people was *"Repent!"* The most positive word from the heart of a God with perfect love is *"Repent."* That is not a negative word. It is the most positive word from the heart of God because God always accompanies it by saying, *"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."* In other words, "Repent because the entire kingdom of God is right next to you waiting to be unfolded into your life." Although it is the most positive message from the heart of God, it is one of the most neglected. As long as God's people won't repent, revival will not come.

Confession is not repentance. Confession is the first step toward repentance. Confession acknowledges that I believe my sin is as bad as God tells me it is, and therefore having confessed my sin, I must repent. You need to let your confession lead you on to genuine repentance, which is an awareness you are going in the wrong direction. Do you know why there is no power in your life? You are going in the wrong direction. It is spiritually impossible to be going with Christ and not experience the power of God.

The disciples had to leave what they were doing and go with Him, did they not? Peter couldn't experience the power and the almighty presence of God and stay at his fish boats. He had to go with Jesus and be where He was. The reason that many of us are not experiencing the reality of the presence and power of God working clearly, observably, is because we are going in a self-centered direction and asking God to join us.

Jesus said to the people, *"He who is not with Me is against Me"* (Matt. 12:30). The average Christian does not believe that. He or she would say, "Lord, I am not going *against* You; I am just not going *with* You." But Jesus would say, "If you are not going with Me, you *are* going against Me." And then He added a very significant truth: if you are not actively gathering the people of God, you are actively scattering the people of God. So Jesus turned to the people and He said, *"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand"* (Matt. 4:17).

Hear that same note in an awesome way, delivered at the close of Jesus' ministry when He was with His disciples, and it comes in Luke 24. Use these verses as a spiritual plumb line to measure your own personal walk with God. However, I need to warn you: the culture in which we live equates religious activity with relationship with God. Our culture believes as long as we are actively in the prayer meeting that we are in fellowship with God. That is not true. You can

Phoca PDF

be in a hundred prayer meetings and be out of fellowship with God. It is not religious activity. It is relationship, and the relationship may produce the activity, but the activity rarely produces the relationship. Whatever you do ought to be incorporated as a part of the relationship with Him.

Understanding the Scriptures

Here is what you hear in Luke 24:45, because He was going to give them His final instruction before He went back to the Father: *"He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures."* Is that happening in your life? Are you spending significant time in the Word of God where God can open your understanding so that in your time in the Word of God you come face to face with God? Are you understanding Him as He reveals Himself in His Word? Are you letting God touch your mind and heart with the Scriptures?

The Lord Jesus felt that if there were some last things He would do to prepare His people for the mighty global activity of the Father, it would be that they must understand the Scriptures. They must see the activity and purpose of God as God has revealed them. Many Christians function more on what I call evangelical Christian humanism. That is when evangelical Christians reason out of their own heart and their own head with no Scripture. That is called humanism, but it is evangelical humanism. The world doesn't need our best thinking; the world needs God's revealed thinking. I have heard many groups of individuals mention how they have come to decisions, what they are planning to do for God and how God made His will known to them. As I listen to them, there will be no Scripture given. When a person comes to me and tells me what God said he or she ought to do, the first thing I ask them is, "What Scripture did God use to bring you to that conclusion?" Often they have an embarrassed look and a fumbling for words; they haven't had a word from God.

Here is what Jesus did: He *"opened their understanding that they might understand the Scriptures. Then He said to them, 'Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day'"* (Luke 24:45-46). When I read it I began to say, "This Christ is living out His life in me, so there is going to be something that looks very similar to this in my own life." Paul put it this way: *"I have been crucified with Christ"* (Gal. 2:20). He didn't just say Christ was crucified *for* him. He said, *"I have been crucified with Christ."* But He also added: *"Nevertheless, I live."* Did Christ die? Was He raised again? Did you die? Has the living, resurrection life of Christ flooded your life? Did God release any power in the cross to give you victory over the consequences of sin and to give you victory over the power of sin? If there is no resurrection power, then sin has won. But Christ *was* raised from the dead, and there *was* released that same power that raised Jesus from the dead. This same power is given to everyone who believes (Eph. 1:18-21). Are you experiencing resurrection power?

When I read this, I began to apply it. I found the Spirit of God saying, "Henry, that is an absolute necessity in your life also." If you are in union with Christ, you are going to experience what He did. Then notice what Jesus said must be preached: *"Repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem"* (Luke 24:47). That is the heart of the message of God. That's the heart of the message of Jesus. Repentance and the remission of sins would be preached.

But I don't hear the preaching on repentance to the people of God. In whole segments of our

Phoca PDF

society, if you were to come with a powerful message on repentance to God's people, they may be very harsh on you. They don't want to hear that message. They want to hear that the whole kingdom of God is waiting to bless them. But the prerequisite to the kingdom of God is repentance. You have to get your life aligned with Him. The heart of God's dealing with you and me is to deal with our sin. That is the essence of the reason He died.

Why We Do Not Preach on Repentance with Passion

I want to divert for a moment because I think there is something in the heart of the Lord Jesus that is often missing from us and that's why we do not preach on repentance with a passion. I sensed not long ago that you cannot understand John 3:16 unless you understand the word in that verse, *"perish."* Why did God's love go to the extent of laying down the life of His Son? It is because God knows what happens when a person goes out of this life without a saving relationship to Him through Jesus Christ. He knows that they perish!

What are some of the pictures that Jesus gave about a person who perishes? That person goes out into *"outer darkness"* (Matt. 8:12), totally devoid of any light whatsoever – forever with no relief and no turning back, utter outer darkness. He will be cast *"into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels"* (Matt. 25:41). Everlasting is never ending.

Is that a popular message in our day? Do you know why people don't respond? They have no fear of God or of the reality of what it means to perish. Do you know why our society is casual and careless about how we live and behave, and why we don't pursue our own children who are not walking with the Lord or family members who are still lost? We've forgotten what it means to perish, and when one of those goes out into eternity without God and without Christ, they perish forever!

God intends to give you all the fullness of the presence of God, but the alternative is that you perish. Think through some of the Scriptures where it mentions outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matt. 8:12; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30; Luke 13:28), where the fire will never be quenched and where the worm does not die (Mark 9:44-45), both soul and body cast into hell (Matt. 10:28; Luke 12:5), where the lake burns with fire and brimstone (Rev. 21:8), where there is torment day and night (Rev. 20:10). And then Jesus said in a parable, *"There is a great gulf fixed, so that those who want to pass from here to you cannot, nor can those from there pass to us"* (Luke 16:26).

But in Ephesians 2:12 there is an amazing sequence of words saying that a person who is without God and without Christ is also without hope. The only provision God made for eternal salvation is Christ. If one goes out into an eternity without Him, and without God, there is no life whatsoever.

It seems in the mercy of God that He let my life encounter a great many people without hope, and they were standing just a breath away from suicide. When people get to the point of suicide, they have come to the point where they see two alternatives: either to continue in this awful hell that they're in or take their life and get out of it. What they need is a third alternative. I have helped hundreds of people avoid suicide by bringing to them this third alternative. Before I could get to some, they ended their life. Yet when I could come to them with God's good news, I

Phoca PDF

said to them, "You are going in the wrong direction; turn around. Let the living Christ whom God has provided be the One who radically transforms your life. Go with Him from this moment on and you will experience all the fullness of God."

The Truth Sets Free

It's not human reasoning that turns a person around; it's the Word of God that turns a person around. I always shared the Scriptures, and then I literally saw the Spirit of God take the Word of God and bring a radical transformation in that person's life. He saw the truth. Jesus said, *"If you abide [continue] in My Word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free"* (John 8:31-32). I was present when I saw the truth of God setting souls free. They were never the same again, but were radically different.

Romans 6:23 says: *"The wages of sin is death…."* The writer was speaking to God's people. We have applied that passage to lost people and you can, but don't neglect to apply it also to God's people. If they keep on in their sin, then everything in their life will die. The payoff of sin is death.

And that is what I would say to a couple who is struggling in their marriage. In thirty years of pastoring, I saw only one divorce, and that was a person I couldn't get to. Do you know what set them free? Truth set their marriage free. It never crossed my mind that two Christians had to divorce. I don't care what the psychologist said; I don't care about incompatibility. I know that the power of the living Christ can set God's people free and marriages free and keep them together. One of the great neglects of our day is that we don't tell people that they are going in the wrong direction and then help them to see what God's direction is.

Do you know what happens when a husband repents? It creates a highway for the healing of his marriage. Right now one of the great disasters among God's people, especially the leaders, is pornography, but almost nobody is willing to talk about it. Pornography is one of Satan's greatest tools to destroy the life of a Christian. It will destroy your marriage, your children, your ministry and your church. Don't go in that direction! It's going to kill you. Turn around and go in the right direction, which is to unite your life with Jesus Christ and let Him bring into your life all the incredible presence and power of God.

The Shepherd in Pursuit of the Straying

When I began my ministry, one of the things that I read in the Scripture was when Jesus said, *"This is the will of the Father who sent Me, that of all He has given Me I should lose nothing"* (John 6:39). It is still the will of the Father that of all He gives you, you should lose none. If you are a pastor, that should be an absolute for you. Scripture says God adds to the body as it pleases Him, and they are His. He entrusts them to you, and He is not willing that you should lose one of them. After thirty years of pastoring in three major churches – two in California and one in Canada – my wife Marilyn and I sat together and asked the question: apart from those who moved out of the cities to another city, did we ever lose members? After thirty years of pastoring, we could not remember ever having lost one member.

People will say, "Henry, that is amazing." And I'll say, "No, that is biblical." That is God's plan

Phoca PDF

and God's purpose, and when that is displayed before a watching world – how we love one another, and pursue one another, and hold on to one another, and forgive one another, and are patient and kind with one another – then the world is attracted to the Savior who is creating that in our hearts.

What about you and your church? Do you have people who used to be there but aren't there and nobody cares? You have lost the shepherd's heart. What did Jesus say the shepherd did when one was missing? (Luke 15:4). Let me ask you, if Christ is going to live out His life in you, what do you suppose He will do when He knows one is missing? He will affect your feet and get you pursuing. You say, "But it creates so much hurt." It does. Your feet will bleed and you will be bruised and broken, but there will be a moment when you hear the bleating of that little sheep and when you call out, there will be a huge sense of excitement: "Somebody has found me!" When you pick up that bruised and bleeding sheep, and put that one on your shoulder and bring the straying one back to the fold, God says the whole of heaven breaks out into rejoicing over the one sheep that returns (Luke 15:7). I refused as a pastor to let any be lost from the flock. We pursued them, and I taught the church how to pursue them, and they did and they redeemed them when they returned.

If you are going in the wrong direction with the watch care over the people of God, He is saying to you, "Repent! You have received what was Mine, and you have been careless with them. You had all the excuses: 'They won't respond well. I have tried and they are not going to respond,' etc., etc." All of it is self-centered, none of it is God-centered. God is saying, "I want to pursue them with you, and when you get to them watch how I touch their heart if you use the Word of God."

Aren't you grateful that God identifies Himself as your Savior when the enemy sees you in your sin and you claim to be a child of His? God owns you as His own. I remember getting a call and they told me that so-and-so is in jail, and he says he is a member of your church. I said with a loud voice, "Yes, I am his pastor. I will be down." I heard the chuckling of the police department. When I got there, with a loud voice I said, "I am so-and-so's pastor," and they were chuckling. I couldn't care less how they thought about it. But when so-and-so heard that his pastor had come to the jail cell, he cried his heart out. He was redeemed. He never again ran into that activity.

Could it be that you are going in the wrong direction concerning the redeeming of God's people? Maybe you have settled into Satan's lies: "They won't come; go after the ones who are really responsive; don't bother with all of those who are not responsive." I have heard all of the reasoning, but the truth is that God is a shepherd who pursues His own and He wants to do it through us.

So I have said, "Lord, is there anything I need to repent of? Have I taken the counsel of the world and gone after it? Have I become self-centered and have forgotten to be God-centered? Then I need to repent. I need to forsake the ways that hinder revival."

Repentance Is Prerequisite to Revival

What facilitates a revival is a cleansed and a returned people of God. But we are neglecting

Phoca PDF

the message that Jesus brought to His people: "Repent!" Revival is when the fullness of God returns to the people of God because they have repented from where they had been going to where God now wants them to be with Him. When you get right with God, you will experience the incredible presence and power of God. Do not ask God to come in power if you are not first going to ask Him to cleanse you and to make you holy and to make you the kind of person He could bring others to. If you are not seeing the power of God working in your life and through your life, there is something from which you need to ask God to deliver you and set you free. Is it your mind? your heart? your actions? What is it that doesn't match the holiness of God?

Don't just rededicate your life. One of Satan's great tools is to talk about rededication. If you move from God, the only way to get back is to repent; it is not to rededicate. Many would rather rededicate than repent. It is much more comfortable that way because you don't have to acknowledge your sin. You can just say, "Lord, I want to turn around and do what I ought to." But He said, "If you want to turn around and come back to Me, you need to repent that you departed in the first place, and I will tell you where you departed."

Repentance is a deep sense of grief over our sin and a new freshness of what it means to perish. Repentance means to say, "O God, don't let me be casual or careless in my walk with You. Don't let me ever be satisfied to live without Your expressed presence and power in my life. Whatever is hindering You from working, would You reveal it to me? And immediately I will repent of that."

Most of us are just one prayer away from being totally yielded to God. Somehow we hesitate with that one simple prayer: "Lord, I yield everything in me to everything in You." Some of you are saying, "I'm not going to stay where I have been. I am going to move to a whole new level of relationship to God. I want a new freshness with God."

Prayer

Father, You know what awaits every life that is wholly released to You, those who suddenly realize their life has not been experiencing the power and realize maybe it's because they are going in the wrong direction. With all of their heart they turn around and say, "Lord, I want to go with You!" Father, You are the only one who can create that desire within us, and You do. Jesus, You cried out to the people of Your day and in just a few short years those who responded came to experience what it is like for the whole kingdom of God to work through them and the whole of the Roman Empire was turned upside down. Father, You don't make it complicated. You just say, "Will you go with Me?" The disciples who were fishermen immediately joined You, and for the first time in their life, they experienced what it was like to be present when Your kingdom came to open blind eyes and to heal the lepers and the crowds, and to still the storms.

O God, we want to be with You, so we release ourselves to You in ever-increasing measure that it may be evident that we have heard You, we have turned back to You, You show us what we need to repent of. Then a watching world will begin to see what happens when You revive Your people and attract a lost world to a Savior that they see in us. Would You bring a special anointing on each one whose heart has been opened to You? We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

Phoca PDF