

Girolamo Savonarola

by David Smithers

David Smithers' sermon on Girolamo Savonarola highlights his prophetic role in the Reformation and the urgent need for prayer and holiness in today's Church.

Scripture: 2 Chronicles 7:14, Psalm 51:17, Matthew 5:6, James 5:10, 1 Peter 4:17

Topics: "Prayer Life", "Christian Revival"

Description

David Smithers preaches on the life of Girolamo Savonarola, a burning prophet whose tears, prayers, and passionate preaching sparked reformation and revival in Italy. Savonarola's prophetic calling, fervent prayer life, and unwavering zeal for holiness and truth serve as an example for the Church today, highlighting the need for self-sacrifice, prayerful devotion, and a sacrificial love for Jesus in a distracted and fainthearted age.

Transcript

In James 5:10 we are exhorted to "take the prophets for an example". A careful study of the "Holy Men of Old" can kindle both the fires of self-sacrifice and prayerful devotion. However, prophetic examples are not confined only to the pages of the Scriptures. Though often neglected, maligned and forgotten, God's prophetic torches have always burned throughout the history of the Church. One such burning prophet was Girolamo Savonarola. Through his tears, prayers and passionate preaching, the seeds of reformation and revival took root in Italy.

Born in Ferrara, Italy, September 14, 1452, Savonarola was the third in a family of seven children - five sons and two daughters. As a boy his devotion and fervor increased as he spent many hours in prayer and fasting. At times he would kneel in church for many hours engaged in earnest prayer. He was very contemplative, and his soul was deeply wounded by the sin and worldliness he saw all around him. The luxury, splendor, and wealth displayed by the rich in contrast with the awful poverty of the lowly peasants weighed heavily on his tender heart. Italy was the prey of petty tyrants and wicked priests, and dukes and popes who strived with each other for political power and control. These things brought great sorrow to his young soul which was burning for holiness and truth. He talked little, and kept to himself. He loved to wander in lonely places to sing or more often weep, giving vent to the strong emotions which tore at his heart. "Prayer was his one great solace, and his tears would often stain the altar steps, where he sought aid from heaven against the vile and corrupt age".

One day, he saw a vision of the heavens opened, and all the future calamities of the Church passed before his eyes. He then heard God's voice charging him to warn the people. From that moment he was convinced of his prophetic calling, and he was suddenly filled with a new unction and power. His preaching was now with a voice of thunder, and his rebukes against sin were so terrific that the people who listened to him sometimes went about the streets half-dazed, bewildered, and speechless. His listeners were often so overcome with tears that the whole church echoed with the sounds of sobbing and weeping. Workmen, poets and philosophers, all would burst into tears under his passionate preaching.

Savonarola's zeal for prayer seemed to increase day by day. While engaged in prayer, he would sometimes fall into a deep trance. Often he was so completely gripped by the power of the Holy Spirit that he would be forced to retire to a secluded place. Some of his biographers relate that on Christmas Eve, in the year 1486, Savonarola, while seated in the pulpit, remained immovable for five hours, in a trance, and that his face seemed illuminated to all in the church.

The influence of Savonarola eventually grew greater than ever. The people of Florence abandoned their vile and worldly books. All prayed, went to church, and the rich gave freely to the poor. Merchants restored ill-gotten gains. All the people forsook the carnivals and vanities in which they had indulged, and made huge bonfires of their worldly books, obscene pictures, and other things of the kind. The children marched from house to house in a procession, singing hymns in the streets. Soon Savonarola's fearless sermons aroused the anger of many, and especially of the corrupt pope and cardinals of the Roman Catholic Church. He was then threatened, excommunicated and finally, in 1498, by express order of pope Alexander VI, he was beaten, strangled and burned in the public square of Florence, Italy.

The life of Savonarola exemplifies many precious qualities that our fainthearted and distracted age so desperately needs. We are barren and deficient in prayer, patience, purity and most importantly a sacrificial love for Jesus. Until we as the body of Christ return to these holy principles, true reformation and revival will not be realized; Oh Lord break our hearts and open our eyes!

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