

John Oxtoby

by David Smithers

The sermon highlights the life and prayer ministry of John Oxtoby, emphasizing the urgent need for revival in the Church today.

Scripture: 2 Chronicles 7:14, Luke 18:1, Acts 1:14, Ephesians 6:18, James 5:16

Topics: "Revival History", "Prayer Movement"

Description

David Smithers preaches on the decline and weakness of the Church, drawing parallels to the rise of the Primitive Methodists in the 19th century as a response to the decline of England's early Methodism. The Primitive Methodist movement aimed to return to the Christianity taught by John Wesley, leading to conflict with the English Methodist Conference. Despite being despised by Wesley's successors, the Primitive Methodists followed the pillar of revival fire through fervent prayer and reliance on God's guidance, exemplified by praying men like John Oxtoby, who spent hours in prayer for revival and saw miraculous answers to prayer in public assemblies.

Transcript

A call for revival presupposes the decline and weakness of the Church. The rise of the Primitive Methodists in the 19th century was the result of the decline of England's early Methodism. The Primitive Methodist movement endeavored to return to the Christianity as taught and practiced by John Wesley. Only sixteen years after John Wesley's death, the English Methodist Conference found itself in conflict with some of its most zealous ministers. These ministers were eventually expelled from the Conference for holding camp meetings and open-air services. Many in the Conference considered such meetings out of order and void of proper supervision. What had been esteemed by Wesley had become despised by his successors. Like the Wesley's, the Primitive Methodists followed the pillar of fire, rather than the traditions of men which make void the commandments of God. This pillar of revival fire is always best seen from the heights of bent and callused knees.

Chief among the Primitive Methodists' praying men was John Oxtoby, affectionately known as "Praying Johnny". Praying Johnny was not known for his culture or great intellect, he possessed neither. What he possessed was the faith that moves mountains. He was of average height, sharp features, light brown hair and brown eyes. His speech and words were not considered eloquent to the ears of men, yet they were always sweet to the Father's ear. "Six hours each day he usually spent on his knees, pleading with God, in behalf of himself, the Church and sinners." The Primitive Methodists loved to preach, pray, sing and shout.

John Oxtoby was certainly no exception to this rule. "When travailing in anguish for a revival in the neighborhood in which he was laboring and when deeply anxious to see the glory of the Lord revealed, he spent many hours in secluded retirement; and has sometimes in this manner devoted whole days and nights to God."

Praying Johnny not only exercised the power of prayer in the closet, but also in the public assembly. Often in answer to his public prayers whole assemblies were slain by the power of the Holy Spirit. Strong men struck with conviction fell to their knees and cried for mercy. Through the testimony of John Oxtoby's prayer life, Jesus Christ was seen not only as a God who hears, but also as a God who speaks. On behalf of despairing saints, Praying Johnny touched the heart of Jesus and brought back precise words of direction and encouragement.

The legendary story of Oxtoby's intercession for Filey illustrates his persistence in prayer. The town of Filey had resisted the efforts of many preachers and each one had been driven out until all efforts were abandoned. "Oxtoby himself undertook the mission, and when he came within sight of Filey, he fell on his knees in agony of soul. Under a hedge he wrestled in prayer and wept and interceded for the success of his mission. A passing miller heard his voice and stopped in astonishment. The miller heard Johnny Oxtoby say, 'Will thou make a fool of me, God? I told them at Bridlington that thou was going to revive thy work, and thou must, or I shall never be able to show my face among them again, and then what will the people say about praying and believing?' He continued to plead for several hours. The struggle was long and heavy but he would not give in. At last he rose exclaiming, 'It is done, Lord, it is done! Filey is taken!' And it was. Fresh from the presence of God, Oxtoby entered Filey and began singing in the streets. 'Turn to the Lord and seek salvation' was his theme and soon a crowd of rough fishermen flocked to listen." The fire of God fell as he began to preach. Men trembled, hardened sinners wept and while he prayed many fell on their knees crying for mercy.

If our churches and communities are not radically transformed in the same way our Christian liberties will very soon be swept away by a tidal-wave of oppression and sin. Our nation is on the verge of self-destruction, and our only alternative is revival! As a nation we have continued to stray because the Church has stubbornly failed to pray!

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