

Revival Men: Leonard Ravenhill

by E.A. Johnston

Leonard Ravenhill was a man of prayer and passion for revival, who lived to see God's presence and power in his life and ministry.

Duration: 19:08

Scripture: Psalm 42:1, Isaiah 61:10, Matthew 6:33, John 1:23, Acts 1:8, Ephesians 3:8, Philippians 3:13

Topics: "Revival Men"

Description

The sermon transcript describes the powerful speaking abilities of a preacher named Leonard Ravenhill. The transcript includes an illustration of a visit to a woman's cluttered and dirty house, highlighting Ravenhill's ability to captivate listeners with vivid descriptions. The sermon also emphasizes the importance of being close to God and having a strong prayer life. Ravenhill's passion for God and his desire for a genuine demonstration of the power of the gospel are highlighted. The transcript concludes with a personal anecdote describing Ravenhill as a frail old man who exuded a powerful presence.

Transcript

Our subject today in our series of Revival Men is the greatly used Leonard Ravenhill. When one studies the last century and men that God used greatly for revival, the name of Leonard Ravenhill figures prominently. This man lived and breathed revival.

Leonard Ravenhill was a flame for God, he was ignitable for Christ, and he impacted thousands to pray for revival in our time. Ravenhill had a far-reaching ministry comprised of prayer, preaching, and pen. His most hidden ministry, and perhaps his greatest, was his prayer life.

He literally lived on his knees, wrestling with his God to impact eternity. He had an extensive preaching ministry as an evangelist, pastor, and teacher. But perhaps he is best known for his book on Revival, *Why Revival Tarries*, which has sold over a half million copies worldwide.

A recent biography on his life has appeared entitled, *In Light of Eternity*, written by Mack Tomlinson, and it's 600 pages of pure dynamite. Ravenhill's greatest theme on which he preached was the judgment seat of Christ, and all who heard him preach on this subject were confronted with eternity and the doubt of that eternity. He lived his life in light of the judgment seat of Christ, for we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that everyone may receive the things done in his body according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.

I remember Ravenhill most for his descriptive sermon illustrations. They always were a jewel fitly placed to bring out his text and theme. Often his sermon illustrations could be so gripping as to give you a sense of the presence of God and the loveliness of Christ Jesus.

He had a delightful and insightful sense of humor. Listen to one of his favorite comments about John Wesley's usefulness for God. When John Wesley died, it was discovered that he left six pounds, six silver spoons, a well-worn minister's gown, a handful of books, and what was the other thing? Now, let me think.

Oh yes, the Methodist church. But Leonard Ravenhill will mainly be remembered for his fiery quips on the Christian life. His zingers, his one-liners were full of life and force, full of conviction, full of truth.

And when he preached, he was like a shotgun. He hit you all over. We will begin our study of his life and some of these comments from him, which not only amuse but sting, Ravenhill would say, my main ambition in life is to be on the devil's most wanted list.

A man who is intimate with God never needs to be intimidated by men. Are the things you are living for worth Christ dying for? Popular evangelists reach your emotions, but true prophets reach your conscience. You never have to advertise a fire.

If your church is on fire, you will not have to advertise it. Get on fire for God and men will come and watch you burn. There are only two kinds of people in the world, those who are dead in sin and those who are dead to sin.

The only time you can really say Christ is all I need is when Christ is all you have. Entertainment is a devil's substitute for joy. We look for medals, but God looks for scars.

A man must hear the voice of God before he can be a voice for God. I don't want to meet a man who's preached more than me or written more books than me. I want to meet a man who is more of God's presence than me.

The world is not waiting for a new definition of the gospel, but for a new demonstration of the power of the gospel. Well, friends, that last comment of Leonard Ravenhill really typifies him the best. He was a man full of the presence of God.

I once asked my friend, Al Whittingill, to describe to me best the summation of his mentor, Leonard Ravenhill. Al Whittingill thought about it and then told me the following story. I was walking into his car and he was at that time a frail old man and I was holding onto his elbow as we walked.

And it was like holding onto a volcano. And that's true, friends. Ravenhill was a volcano for God, a fiery, smoking, thundering volcano that alarmed and awakened all who stood close by.

This is especially seen as you listen to his sermons. And as you listen to Ravenhill preach, you will say with the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, did not our heart burn within us? It is almost impossible to listen to a sermon by Leonard Ravenhill and not come under conviction and be stirred to go and do greater things for Christ. You could have a personal revival just listening to this man's sermons.

Allow me to give you a sense of his power as a speaker from the following sermon illustration he often used. I was a pastor in England and a lady in my congregation invited me over to her house for tea. Her house was a pigsty.

She was a pack rat and collected boxes and books and bags, anything she could find in the street or buying a yard sale. I entered her tiny dwelling and literally had to step over rows of books just to get to her cramped kitchen. There in the sink was a pile of dirty dishes that had to have been there at least a month.

Mildew was growing on the top dish all fuzzy and green. She reached into the sink and pulled out a dirty cup that had black tea grinds still in the bottom of it and stains all to the top. And she handed me that dirty cup and told me to sit down at the table.

I did. She then asked me how I like my tea with sugar or milk. I said neither.

She said good. She had neither. She then grabbed a pot off the unlit stove and poured out a cold tar like fluid into that dirty cup and she handed it to me.

I was her pastor. It would offend her if I did not drink it. I held that cup in my hand, that dirty cup, and I stared down into it and my mind went back 2,000 years to a man who had a cup handed to him, a cup full of the filth and rottenness of sin, and he had to drink it.

His face peered out from that tea cup to me and I thought of my rotten sins he had to take from me and the sins of the world. Listen friends, Leonard Ravenhill had a gift of bringing you face to face with eternity. When he preached, he made you feel ashamed because of your own lack of prayer, your own lack of witness, your own lack of faith.

He would often come down hard on pastors and Christians who needed a sharp rebuke. He had this to say about modern preaching and modern preachers. I'm furious when I think of the scatterbrained preaching of this day.

When I read some of the sermons of the great men of the 1600s, I am humiliated beyond words about the slop the radio and TV preachers present as the gospel. I could rejoice if half of them died tomorrow. A lady mentioned that her preacher prays for the dead.

When I'm asked if I do that, I say no, I just preach to them. Listen to some of his other stinging comments about preaching. If Jesus came back today, he wouldn't cleanse the temple, he'd cleanse the pulpit.

There are three things missing from modern preaching, immensity, intensity, and eternity. There are three kinds of preaching, mouth to ear, head to head, and heart to heart. A message prepared in the head will only reach the head, but a message that burns in the heart will set other hearts on fire.

There is a terrible vacuum in evangelical Christianity today. The missing person in our ranks is the prophet, the man with the terrible earnestness who is totally otherworldly, the man who is rejected by other men, even good men, because they consider him too austere, too severely committed, too negative, and insociable. Let him be as plain as John the Baptist.

Let him for a season be a voice crying in the wilderness of modern theology and stagnant religion. Let him be as selfless as the apostle Paul. Let him say and live, this one thing I do.

Let him reject ecclesiastical favors. Let him be self-abasing, non-self-seeking, non-self-glorifying, non-self-rejecting, non-self-righteousness, and non-self-promoting. Let him say nothing that will draw men to himself, but only which will move men to God.

God have mercy send us prophets. Leonard Ravenhill had a wry sense of humor. His witticisms are legendary.

He commented on comparing Norman Vincent Peale and the apostle Paul by saying, Peale is appalling and Paul is appealing. His remarks could be arrows that stuck in you. One day he was being driven to a meeting by a pastor who had a radar detector on the dashboard of his car.

Ravenhill pointed to it and asked the pastor what the gizmo was. The man said it was a radar detector. Ravenhill dryly replied, Oh, I see.

I have one of those as well. It's called a conscience. Another time he was in a prayer meeting and a flashy evangelist was leading the prayer as they sat in a circle.

The evangelist was yelling, Give it all to God. Give it all to God. We must give it all to God.

Just then Ravenhill leaned over and tapped the man gently on the arm and said, Tell me, brother, does that include your Rolex? He was something else. One of the most remarkable aspects of his life was the fact that a constant stream of preachers would appear at his door in Lyndale, Texas, to seek his advice. They would come at all hours of the day and night, and he would graciously invite them in and give his time to them.

He answered his own phone. He was a very accessible man, unlike many famous preachers today, where they have an army of secretaries that guard them from the public. But the main thing about Leonard Ravenhill was his passion for Christ and revival.

He was a Christ-intoxicated man that lived to see revival in his day. He wanted to see and know Jesus and his God in a more intimate way. He often spoke of his friendship with A.W. Tozer and how they would pray together in the office of Tozer's Chicago church, how they would lay prostrate on the floor and lay there silently, just worshiping God for hours at a time.

On one occasion when Ravenhill was in Chicago in the early 1950s, his hotel caught on fire, and he rescued his fellow evangelist by pushing him out the second-story window and then jumping out the window of the hotel himself, breaking the bones in his legs and arms and his chest. As he lay in the cold snow helpless and in great pain, a police officer came up to him and asked him what he was doing there in the snow. Ravenhill replied curtly, what does it look like I'm doing, playing tennis? But if you want to get a sense of Ravenhill's passion for revival, you must read his books, books with such titles as Revival, God's Way, Revival Praying, Why Revival Tarries, America is Too Young to Die, Sodom Had No Bible, and Meat for Men.

Leonard Ravenhill was a wordsmith. He could put sentences together that would just startle you. Listen to some of his remarks taken from his pen.

God-hungry men find God. As the heart paneth after the water brooks, so the souls of the upper room crowd panted for the living God. Spiritually naked, they fled to Him that they might be clothed upon.

With the blessed spirit empty, they craved to be filled. Powerless, they tarried until they were endued. Bankrupt and beggar-like, they pled the riches of His grace.

Then this fear-filled crowd became fire-filled messengers. Without question, the greatest need of the hour is that the church shall meet her ascended Lord again and get an adument that would usher in the revival of revivals just before the night of nights settles over this age of incomparable corruption. Yes, Ravenhill was a preacher.

Yes, he was a prophet. But if you really want to know the secret to Leonard Ravenhill's fruitful ministry, you must examine his hidden life of prayer, the life he lived on his knees, alone with his God. Leonard Ravenhill was first and foremost a man of prayer.

Listen to his heartbeat for prayer. I believe most of us will need the tears wiped from our eyes when the books are opened at the judgment bar of God and our personal prayer record is read. We Christians are in captivity on many levels today, personal, domestic, church, and missionary enterprise.

But fetters break and dungeons fall when prayer is made by the church unto God, prayer without ceasing, prayer that might shatter our status quo, prayer that drains us of every other interest, prayer that excites us by its immense possibilities, prayer that sees God as the one that rules on high, almighty to save, prayer that laughs at impossibilities and cries, it shall be done, prayer that sees all things beneath his feet, prayer that's motivated with desire for God's glory. I believe the place of prayer is not only a place where I lose my burdens, but also a place where I get a burden. The only power that God yields to is that of prayer, who will deny himself good food, or good company, or good rest, that hell may gaze upon him wrestling, embarrassing demons, liberating captives, depopulating hell, and leaving in answer to his travail a stream of blood-washed souls.

Listen, friends, the key to Leonard Ravenhill's power lay in his prayer life. He accomplished more in his prayer life than all of us put together. That man groaned in prayer, he labored in prayer as a woman given birth, he travailed for the souls of men, he cried out to God to send revival, and like Jacob, would not let go of God until he received a blessing from on high.

Let me close this message on Leonard Ravenhill by using one of his most beloved sermon illustrations on a life of prayer. He would often comment, Robert Murray McChain is remembered as a man of prayer. After the saintly pastor's death, a visitor went to see the great church where McChain prayed and preached.

The sexton showed him around. Some of McChain's books were still there. Sit down here, said the sexton, leading the young visitor to the chair where McChain used to sit.

Now put your elbows on the table. The visitor obeyed. Now put your face in your hands.

The visitor obeyed again. Now let the tears flow. That was the way Mr. McChain used to do.

Then the amazed visitor was led into the very pulpit where the impassioned McChain had once poured out his soul to God and poured out God's message to the people. Put your elbows on the pulpit, instructed the old sexton. Now put your face in your hands.

Now let the tears flow. That's the way Mr. McChain used to do. And then Ravenhill would close this illustration by saying, to be much for God, we must be much with God.

Friends, would you like a prayer life like that? Ravenhill stated before he died that he believed his recent heart attack came as a result of his laboring in prayer one night. I believe that. What cost counts and what

counts costs.

Leonard Ravenhill knew the price and cost of a hell-storming ministry and a prayer life that took heaven with violence and by force. Oh, friends, how we need a touch of Leonard Ravenhill for our day. How we lack his passion.

We lack his fire. We are bankrupt in our prayer lives. Oh, God, send us an ounce of Ravenhill for our day to reach this generation of lost sinners.

Send, oh God, a great revival to our land that we can behold your majesty and presence once again as you have moved in former times. Move again, oh Lord of glory. Oh, ancient of days, come again in a great spiritual awakening that will flood this desperate land of ours with your spirit and fill our houses of worship with your presence.

Do it, great God. Do it for thy namesake, for thy glory. We pray.

Amen.

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