

The Prayer for Revival (Psalm 89)

by Maurice Roberts

The sermon emphasizes the importance of praying for revival with a biblical standard of spirituality and importunity, using Scripture as the foundation for our prayers and pleading boldly with God to vindicate His own truthfulness.

Scripture: Psalm 60:4, Psalm 89:19, Psalm 89:38, Psalm 137:5, Isaiah 62:6

Topics: "Effective Prayer", "Spiritual Revival"

Description

Maurice Roberts emphasizes the weakness in prayer in modern times, attributing it to the neglect of Scripture, resulting in prayers falling short of biblical standards. He highlights the urgent need for believers to pray with biblical spirituality and importunity, especially in the midst of alarming times. Roberts urges for a deep immersion in the Scriptures, particularly the Psalms, which provide a rich source of prayers for revival, exemplifying how to plead fervently before God for the restoration of His truth and power.

Transcript

Weakness in prayer is a feature of our times. One chief cause is no doubt the widespread neglect of Scripture. Despite our modern privileges of books, prosperity, and education, our prayers fall conspicuously short of biblical standards, not merely in point of utterance but in urgency as well. Perhaps our prayers are better in secret than what we judge in public, but who would deny that, whatever our attainments, we are much below a scriptural standard and quality of prayer?

This poverty in prayer is seen to be all the more serious when we ponder how alarming the times are in which we live. By the hand of His judgments on the church and on the nation, God is clearly calling to us as His people to be mighty in prayer. We are surely guilty at this present time of not stirring ourselves up to do the part of the intercessor so that fallen truth may be raised again in power.

Only Scripture, read in the realistic light of our modern sinful world, can train us to pray with a biblical standard of spirituality and importunity for the revival we so greatly need. We need to enter personally and profoundly into the Scriptures so that our souls may become saturated with the power of those arguments in prayer with which the Scriptures abound.

In particular, the Psalms are a storehouse for many of the biblical prayers for revival. Various psalmists give us whole compositions entirely devoted to the topic of revival. For example, David in the sixtieth psalm and Asaph in the seventy-fourth psalm teach us by their inspired utterances how to lay plea upon

plea, argument upon argument before God in the confident hope of receiving an abundant answer. However it is in the eighty-ninth psalm--in the sublimity and grandeur of Ethan's God-breathed words--that we have perhaps the most extensive and elaborately argued prayer for revival found in the Bible. It is a prayer that we should study for ourselves in the context of our present sad condition as the holy people of God. What follows is but a suggested outline for such an undertaking:

I. God's Mercy Is Shown in a Covenant (vv. 1-4)

In this psalm, David is a type of Christ and His "seed" are the children whom God has by sovereign grace given Christ from everlasting (vv. 3-4). The psalm opens with praise, teaching us that all our crying to God, even when we are heavily burdened for His cause, should be prefaced by an adoring appreciation of His truth and faithfulness. He has not chastened us more than our sins deserve.

In addition, notice that the man who prays here is orthodox. There is no support for the notion of a prayer for revival that is ignorant of sound doctrine. In fact, the first four verses reveal at least the following doctrinal apprehensions:

There have been eternal transactions between the Father and the Son to save His people (vv. 3-4).

Christ's spiritual kingship is perpetual (v. 4).

The attributes of God are involved in making good His covenant promises to His people (vv. 1-2).

II. How this Covenant Affects the Elect (vv. 5-18)

In order to stir ourselves up to cry powerfully to God for revival, we need to be moved like the psalmist is here with ecstatic wonder and triumphant exultation in the limitless power and faithfulness of God. His sovereignty over the nations, which rages like the waves of the sea, is absolute (v. 9). He is the monarch of all the earth, of whom and through whom and to whom are all things (v. 11). Thus, the covenantal engagements of the Lord to His people constitute Him to be their constant benefactor and Savior and, at the same time, the enemy of their enemies. His mighty arm and strong hand are matters of jubilation to them since they are His people.

III. The Terms of This Covenant (vv. 19-37)

In these verses, a list of promises is made by the Father to Christ, indicating the terms of the covenant between the Lord and His people in the Redeemer:

Christ as the Mediator has Himself been the subject of election to office by the Father (vv. 19-20).

As the Anointed of the Lord, Christ must have the place of preeminence (vv. 23-27).

All Christ's enemies will be beaten down before His face (v. 23).

Christ's dominion over creation will be unlimited (v. 25).

The Father's promises to Christ are infallibly sure (v. 28).

Christ's people will have eternal life (v. 29).

The elect shall be chastened when they sin but not allowed to fall away (vv. 30-33).

Christ's reign over His people will be everlasting (vv. 35-37).

IV. Pleading because of God's Apparent Breach of Promise (vv. 38-52)

Because of his knowledge of the promises that God the Father has already made to Christ as the head of the elect, the psalmist now pleads with God to revive His fallen cause:

1. Expostulation with God (vv. 38-45). As we see here, regard for God's glory in the earth will lead a holy soul to contend with God. Such boldness, far from being presumptuous, is our duty in dark times. It is our responsibility to compare what God has promised us in His Word with what He is in fact doing in our days. If He is not manifestly blessing His church, but rather giving her over to reproaches and to disgraceful weakness, then it is an expression of our love to Him to be fired with holy boldness on the basis of His covenant pledges to us as His people.

If He has infallibly declared that the gates of hell shall never prevail to destroy the church, must we not question Him when He permits, as now, great inroads of the powers of darkness upon us? If God has given Christ the heathen for His inheritance, can we remain dumb in our prayer life about the countless multitudes perishing all around us? If the Lord has called preaching the wisdom of God and the power of God, can we dispassionately allow sermon after sermon to be preached with no appearance of that wisdom and power in our midst? If God has promised to avenge speedily His elect who cry to Him day and night, should we not be exercised with deep concern that mighty answers are not sent to us?

When God's ways do not appear to match His promises, our duty is not to be inactive under the plea of His sovereignty but to copy this psalmist in an intense intercession that God would graciously vindicate His truth by raising up His cause. The seeming conflict between God's promises and His providence should, by their juxtaposition, arouse in us an ecstatic frame of soul akin to indignation and laden us with intercessory prayer that much glorifies God.

Such a spirit is distant by whole worlds from the attitude of imagining things to be not so bad as they are. The psalmist makes no attempt to hide from the fact that the situation in which the people of God in his day found themselves was exceedingly bitter. Instead, he stirs himself up by enumerating instance upon instance of God's wrath upon them. If we do not have the honesty and courage to do the same, our prayers for revival can never ascend from a heart burning with zeal for God's honor and fanned to flames at the thought of His promises to us seemingly being unkept.

2. A swift answer desired (vv. 46-48). The psalmist is praying for revival in the spirit of one who desires a swift answer: "Remember how short my time is," he pleads (v. 47). Ought not the importunity of our prayer for revival show faith that God is well able to pour out His Spirit upon us in this generation and not merely a hundred years from now? What right have we to assume that the next generation will be a fitter time for God's glory to be manifested than this present hour? Will His promises be any stronger then than now? Alas for us if the languor of our soul is proof that we have not prayed with a scriptural urgency for revival. Perhaps, instead of truly praying, we have fainted.

3. Arguments from the covenant (vv. 49-52). The psalmist concludes his prayer with a question: "Lord, where are thy former lovingkindnesses, which thou swarest unto David in thy truth?" (v. 49). From this, we learn that God's lovingkindnesses to His people are not purely voluntary--they are indeed gracious, but not voluntary. God's mercies to worldly men are voluntary. He is laid under no obligations to do them good. But it has pleased God to lay Himself under obligation to us in Christ to do us good and to bless us. Such

mercy, though gracious, is, in a proper sense, a matter of necessity. For if He has sworn to do us good for Christ's sake, then He is bound by the terms of His own infallible word to make good His covenanted promises. Yes, it becomes us to lay Him under the constraint of His own promises and to give Him no rest till He has done that which He has sworn to do for us.

It is our exquisite privilege as His children in this world to plead boldly with God to vindicate His own truthfulness by blessing His people according to the terms of His own covenant promises. This is all the more true when, as at present, He is giving us to experience His breach of promise. However, in the concluding doxology, we are reminded that God's glory is above our comfort and that it is our duty always to believe He is good, for His mercy endures forever (v. 52).

Conclusion

Only when we are deeply influenced by the power of Scripture will we care for God's cause to a biblical degree. Likewise, only as we feel the glory of God to be impugned in the church's declensions will we be burdened to pray for God's honor. The message of Scripture is that God's honor is bound up in the welfare of His people on earth: "If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning. If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth; if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy" (Ps. 137:5-6).

It is to our shame that we have imbibed too much of this world's materialism and unbelief. What do we need more than to meditate on the precious covenant promises of Holy Scripture until our souls have drunk deeply into the spirit of a biblical supernaturalism? What could be more profitable than to eat and drink of heaven's biblical nourishment till our souls become vibrant with the age-old prayer for revival, and till we find grace to plead our suit acceptably at the throne of grace?

The Lord has encouraged us to hope in Him still. O that He would teach us to give Him no rest day or night till He rain righteousness upon us!

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