

Counterfeit And True Revival

by Peter Brandon

This sermon delves into the features of a counterfeit revival, using the story from 1 Samuel chapter 4 as a backdrop. It highlights the dangers of external religiosity without true repentance and the consequences of sin within the church. The speaker emphasizes the need for genuine revival marked by prevailing prayer and the absence of sin, contrasting it with emotional but short-lived movements. The message concludes with a call for repentance, cleansing, and a longing for the return of God's glory and power.

Scripture: 1 Samuel 4:10, 1 Samuel 4:17, 1 Samuel 4:21, Judges 21:25, Romans 6:23, James 5:16, 2 Chronicles 7:14, Revelation 2:4, Psalm 51:10, Acts 3:19

Topics: "Counterfeit Revival", "Genuine Repentance"

Description

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Transcript

Tonight we're going to look at the features of a counterfeit revival. The reading tonight is from Samuel, 1 Samuel and it's chapter 4, 1 Samuel chapter 4. And the word of Samuel came to all Israel. Now Israel went out against the Philistines to battle and pitched beside Ebenezer and the Philistines pitched in Aphek.

And the Philistines put themselves in array against Israel. When they were joined in battle, Israel was smitten before the Philistines and they slew of the army in the field about 4,000 men. And when the people were coming to the camp, the elders of Israel said, Wherefore hath the Lord smitten us today before the Philistines? Let us fetch the ark of the covenant of the Lord out of Shiloh unto us, that when it cometh among us, it may save us out of the hand of our enemies.

So the people sent to Shiloh that they might bring from thence the ark of the covenant of the Lord of hosts which dwelleth between the cherubim. And the two sons of Eli, Ophni and Phinehas were there with the ark of the covenant of God. And when the ark of the covenant of the Lord came into the camp, notice this, all Israel shouted with a great shout so that the earth rang again.

And when the Philistines heard the noise of the shout, they said, What meaneth the noise of this great shout in the camp of the Hebrews? And they understood that the ark of the Lord was coming to the camp. And the Philistines were afraid, for they said, God is coming to the camp. And they said, Woe unto us, for there hath not been such a thing heretofore.

Woe unto us, who shall deliver us out of the hand of these mighty gods. These are the gods that smote the Egyptians and all the plagues, with all the plagues in the wilderness. Be strong and quit yourselves like men, O ye Philistines, that ye be not servants unto the Hebrews as they have been to you.

Quit yourselves like men and fight. And the Philistines fought, and Israel was smitten. And they fled every man into his tent.

And there was a very great slaughter, for there fell of Israel thirty thousand footmen. And the ark of God was taken, and the two sons of Eli, Ophni, and Phinehas were slain. And there ran a man of Benjamin out of the army, and he came to Shiloh the same day with his clothes rent and with earth upon his head.

And when he came low, Eli sat upon the seat by the wayside watching, for his heart trembled for the ark of God. And when the man came into the city and told it, all the city cried out. And when Eli heard the noise of the crying, he said, What meaneth the noise of this tumult? And the man came in hastily and told Eli.

Now Eli was ninety and eight years old, and his eyes were dim that he could not see. And the man said unto Eli, I am he that came out of the army, and I fled today out of the army. And he said, What is there done, my son? And the messenger answered and said, Israel is fled before the Philistines, and there has been also a great slaughter among the people.

And thy two sons, Ophni and Phinehas, are dead, and the ark of God is taken. And it came to pass when he made mention of the ark of God that he fell from off his seat backward by the side of the gate, and his neck break, and he died. For he was an old man and heavy, and he had judged Israel forty years.

And his daughter-in-law, Phinehas' wife, was with child near to be delivered. And when she heard the tidings that the ark of God was taken, and that her father-in-law and her husband were dead, she bowed herself and travailed with her pain, and her pains came upon her. And about the time of her death, the women that stood by her said unto her, Fear not, for thou hast born a son.

But she answered not, neither did regard it. And she named the child Ichabod, saying, The glory is departed from Israel, because the ark of God was taken, and because of her father-in-law and her husband. And she said, The glory is departed from Israel, for the ark of God is taken.

Now you'll forgive the long reading. It's a sad portion, but there are deep truths in it. I shall not be able to go over some of the subjects that we've had because of the importance of this subject tonight.

But before we look at this particular chapter, we must look at the background. First of all, the background to 1 Samuel is found in the last verse in the last chapter of the Judges. Everyone did that which was right in their own eyes, and there was no king in Israel.

In other words, nationally and morally, that Israel was in a state of total decay. When we throw away absolutes, whether they are the absolutes of the law or whether they are the absolutes of Christianity, we move into a permissive society. Everyone does that which is right in his own eyes, and that brings about corruption.

Then for corruption it brings violence, and from violence the judgment of God comes. And therefore, when we see a background like that, we begin to see the background of our own country, and we are bow our heads with shame, don't we? Secondly, I want you to look at the religious background. The two sons of Eli were bad men.

Three things are said about them. Number one, they were Levitical robbers. When the people brought their offerings, they invented a three-pronged hook, and they plunged it into a cauldron, and all that they took out belonged to them, including the fat of the offerings.

And that fat should have been the portion of God. And therefore, they were robbing God by this act of Levitical robbery. May I say quickly in closing, if a Christian is not laid upon the altar, he is robbing God, and that brings disgrace into the church of God.

Secondly, it was the practice of the women to come and watch the movements of the priest, and those movements were always movements that were delicate and Christ-like or God-like. But these men were sensual, and one day Samuel went out and he saw these men lying with the women, and there was immorality among the people of God. And so the priesthood was corrupt.

Beloved, that is happening in the evangelical church. I am so sorry to say this. There is immorality and serious immorality in the church of God.

And that is why we are not seeing a movement of the Spirit. You see, if young people have sex outside of marriage, they are bringing sin into the church. If people who are married are not loyal to their own particular partners, they are bringing sin into the church.

And quite frankly, I say this to you with sound authority. It is now recognised that there is moral sin in the evangelical church, and we shall never see the blessing. In a company like this, there would be a number who are sinning by immorality, and it is all covered up, and they are sitting around the Lord's table.

Now that is an awful fact. Thirdly, the light that was in the temple was going out. That light should have been served morning and evening.

But these two men were letting the light go out, and what does that mean? Instead of Israel being a light before God, and a light in the darkened world, even the light was going out to show that Israel ceased to be a landscape. And I am sure of this when we look at the church in our own country, the light is going out. And it is in that religious background that we begin to see counterfeit revival.

And then lastly, instead of Israel being the Lords, they were the servants. In fact, they were enslaved to the Philistines. Think of that.

And I believe it's true to say, if I may take a great step forward, that many of the Lord's people are being enslaved by the flesh, and they need liberation. And that is why we need to take up very carefully those chapters in Romans 5, 6, 7, and 8 to show to God's people that there is liberty. Now it's in that background that we see this counterfeit revival.

First of all, there is a presumption, and there is a presumptive offensive. We read here in the fourth chapter very, very clearly that the Philistines and Israelite was drawn together in battle, but notice the omission. When the Philistines came to fight with David, we read in the scripture, he inquired of the Lord, Shall I go up and fight the host of the Philistines? Wilt thou deliver them into my hand? And the Lord said,

Go up, for I will doubtless give the Philistines into thy hand.

Again, not many days afterwards, after a great defeat, the Philistines came again. You see, the enemy is persistent. And he inquires of the Lord, saying, Shall I go up and fight the host of the Philistines? And the Lord said, Thou shalt not go up, but come over against them by the mulberry trees.

And when you hear a sound of a going in the mulberry trees, then thou shalt be sure thyself, for the Lord thy God will go before them and smite the Philistines. Now, can you see the difference? With David, immediately he faced the force of the Philistines, and always remember, the Philistines were in the land, and they were the most formidable enemy. He inquires of the Lord, but there's no inquiry of the Lord here.

Beloved, when there is revival, there is among the people of God prevailing prayer. And where that prevailing prayer is missing, there is no revival. As simple as that.

And here we see no prevailing prayer. They're joined in battle. And quite frankly, the Philistines were greater fighters than the children of Israel.

And when they're joined in battle, strength against strength, they are totally defeated, and there are 4,000 men dead. Quite frankly, when we look at ourselves in the New Testament place, and when we look at ourselves carefully, there are thousands of backsliders among us. Do you know what is stated? That if all the people that made a profession of faith in the last 50 years were restored to the Lord, there wouldn't be enough churches to hold them.

And this shows there are scores of slain people. Don't misunderstand me. If a man has been truly born again, he will never go to hell.

Never. But he can be rendered spiritually dead, useless. And there are many, many backsliders, we have to confess.

Then I want you to note that there is not only obvious defeat because of sin in the camp, and not only obvious defeat because there are 4,000 men slain, I want you to note the wrong diagnosis. First of all, the elders come together and they declare, why has the Lord smitten us before the enemy? And that observation was right. They realise that in this battle it was a sign of the disapproval of God.

Now may I say this quickly because my time is going. When we see many people backsliding, when we see our numbers dwindling, it's not a sign that we're in the last days. I know we are in the last days, but it's a sign of the disapproval of the Lord, and we must face it.

But then with their diagnosis, they were totally wrong. And this is what they were saying, let's get all the externals right. Let's have the priest here, let's have the ark here, and it will save us out of the hand of the enemy.

Now thank God for symbols, never throw them away. It's a wonderful thing for us to sit at the Lord's table and take the bread and take the wine in memory of his death. But it's possible to take those symbols and not see his death.

It's a wonderful thing to be baptised and go into the water and out of the water. But it's possible to go into the water and out of the water and not live a baptised life. Dead to sins, dead to the world, dead to self, and dead to the law, and alive unto God.

It's a lovely thing to be in an assembly and to see the men all bareheaded, and to see the ladies covered. A beautiful symbol. But it's possible for the lady to be covered and she is the head.

In fact, I was staying in one home where a lady wore the biggest hat I've ever seen. And when she gave the orders in the home, two of us shook. She had a voice like a sergeant major.

And as we were walking to the meeting, I could see my friend Billy was shaking with fear. And I said to him quietly, I think we should be wearing the hat. He says, I agree.

But can you see the point? It's possible for a man to be bareheaded, but is he reflecting the glory of God? And the glory of Christ? It's possible for a woman to be covered, but is she in submission to a husband of love? Can you see the point? Getting externals right, just externals, never bring revival. If we live them out, it would. So can you see, they were saying, get the externals right and we'll see blessing.

But my dear friends, we've got to live out those symbols and then we'll see the blessing. So I want you to watch this very carefully. The two sons of Eli are bearing the ark.

I want you to look at their dress. Pure white bonnets, pure white garments, pure white trousers. No flesh would be seen apart from the flesh on their faces.

They're holding on their shoulders probably with the help of the Levites, the holy ark. And in that ark, there are ten commandments on two stones. Think of it.

And one of those commandments says this, thou shalt not commit adultery. One of those commandments says, thou shalt not steal. One of those commandments says, thou shalt have no other gods beside me.

And look at the gods they have. But externally, it looked great, looked wonderful. There's the Levites with the priests.

There's the ark all shining with gold on the shoulders of these two priests with their immaculate white garments. But what was happening? Deep in their hearts, there was immorality. They were spiritual robbers.

They had let the light almost go out. Now I must be careful, I am now before the Lord. Is there a sister here that's covering immorality? Is there a young brother that's lost his purity? Is there a husband that has another affair at the office? Is there a businessman here? And you're not honest in business.

Is there sin among us? My dear friends, we can have all the explosion of emotion, but if there is sin among us, no matter what the symbolism might be and what the externals might be, we shall never see revival. Never. So they bring the ark into the camp.

And when all the soldiers and when all the people see it, there's an explosion of emotion. And it's so great, it seems so glorious, that the writer says, note this, the earthquake. And quite frankly, it was so convincing that when the Philistines heard the noise of this great shout, they said, woe unto us! God is coming to the camp.

Notice that. They knew once God was among Israel, once his power was in the dwelling place of God, they hadn't got a dog's chance. They knew that.

And there was this great explosion of emotion and it looked like a mighty revival, but it was covering up sin. You can deceive your greatest enemy, but you can't deceive God. Brothers, I'm not going to throw stones at the Charismatics.

I'm not going to throw stones at other brethren who are in the Lord's work. But I've seen that emotion in my ministry. And I've been before the Lord.

I remember going to one city and the mission started in depression. And then God seemed to work. And the main hall was filling up and then it filled to such an overflowing extent that they had to use another neutral hall and that filled up and then there was another hall used until I was told there was a long queue of people waiting to go in and it all looked like revival.

Forty people professed conversion and then six months after all that emotion, the earth ringing, people went back to the normal prayer meeting and there was just a handful. Just a handful. One day my wife and I were in serious prayer and we got up from our knees and she said, You know, Peter, a lot of our work is just three weeks of excitement and then it's over.

You see, it's the earth ringing. And as I confess this to you, I confess it with bitter tears. I don't want to see again the earth ringing.

I want to hear the thunder of heaven. Don't you? Don't you long to see a genuine movement of God? You wouldn't be here otherwise. And we've got to be honest about a lot of our work.

I have used all kinds of gimmicks. I say this with shame and it looks as though there is revival but it's very artificial. It doesn't last.

It boils down to nothing. And I think we have seen that for over 50 years. Well, after all the fuss and all the thunder, they're joined together in battle.

The Philistines were quaking because if this really was the manifestation of God, therefore if the true house of God was there, God was in the midst. And they wouldn't stand a chance. And therefore they appealed to all their natural strengths and they were saying, be strong and quit yourselves like men and fight.

And when they fought with the Israelites, there was mass slaughter. I want you to look at this inevitable tragedy and defeat. I want you to come with me now figuratively.

Let's take our shoes off and let's walk across that battlefield. 33,000 circumcised young men dead, slaughtered, because of counterfeit revival. As we look at some of those young men we say, what are their wives doing? Poor thing.

What about the parents? 33,000 of them dead. There are thousands of backsliders in the country. Now here it is.

Some of you mums and dads are heartbroken because of your children. We've had lots of explosions but they haven't been of the spirit. And lots of us are heartbroken.

Many are seemingly slain. Then all of a sudden we come across these two men, Ophni and Phineha, all in their white garments, slain of the law, dead. Are you all dressed up as a preacher? Are you all dressed up in white? But there's sin in your life.

Come now, here's the judgment. And I know this didn't happen but we must see it in our imagination. We come across old Eli, 98, and we look at him and we talk to him.

Eli, why didn't you correct your son? Why did you put the children before the Lord? All this tragedy would have stopped. But we've lost everything but more. Two weeks later, we're weeping over the carnage.

We're broken in heart. And then we hear that a baby is born. And then we linger in Israel for a time.

We've been there for six years. And then all of a sudden the little boy comes into the room. Nice laddie.

What's your name, sonny? Ichabod. The glory has departed. What does it mean? There are three generations.

One generation marked by Eli. The other marked by Ophni and Phinehas. And then the son of the fallen father who turns to us and says, the glory has departed.

Beloved, I believe that has happened. I believe the reason you're here because you've got a fear that it's happening. And you're beginning to hear that phrase being repeated.

Revival or removal. And there's one generation telling another generation, the glory has departed. And that's why every night there are so many young people here.

They want to see something different. They want to see the power of God again. They want to see the presidency of the Lord.

They want to see the moving of the rushing mighty wind. They're hungry. And some of us older ones, we're responsible for the death.

And we hear that haunting cry tonight. And it mocks us. The glory has departed.

But can it come back? Hallelujah, yes. It took many years. But then in Israel, there were people lamenting after the Lord.

Beloved, I can't let you go home depressed. I want to speak tomorrow night. Of the glory of the Lord returning.

Let's pray we won't talk about it. We begin to see it. And then we'll see the mighty blessing of God.

And then we can say, the Spirit and the bride say, come, we're ready for the rapture. Let's pray. Lord, this has been a sad night.

But we're in thy presence. We believe thou hast spoken. We would ask thee, O God, to forgive us for those things that we have covered.

And may there be a cleansing that comes to us through the washing of the water by the Word. That glorious washing of regeneration. Grant it, we pray.

We pray that thou will take from us all this ugly thing called pride. Help us to hit the dust and cry out to thee, O God, that we have failed. And we have, Lord.

Help us to see that from our local churches where once the power of God was known, lampstands are being removed. The power is going. Instill into our hearts a desire to see the glory of the Lord and his power returning again.

These dear young people who are hungering to see God at work, raise some of them up, especially among the young men that they may become true servants of God that will seek the Lord and become a Samuel in our midst. And here in beloved Belfast, may we see the glory of the Lord returning. And may this place become a centre where the fires of revival will begin to burn again and then spread.

Grant this in the name of the Lord Jesus. Amen.

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