

Prepare The Way Of The Lord • Isaiah 40:3-5

I. INTRODUCTION

A. *Evan Roberts*

1. His name was Evan Roberts
 - a. he was a young man from Wales who was in Bible school
 - b. while in prayer one day he felt strongly impressed by the Holy Spirit to return to his village and speak to the people of his home church
 - c. he asked permission from the dean for a short leave from his studies, and why he felt so impressed to go home
 - d. the dean granted him permission and Roberts packed his things and left
2. Arriving in town, he went to his pastor and asked to speak to the people
3. The pastor thought it was rather forward of Roberts to ask such a thing, but consented to let him speak to the people after their Monday evening prayer service
4. When the service was over, the pastor dismissed the group by saying that if anyone wanted to stay a little longer, young Mr. Roberts had something he wanted to say
5. Seventeen people stayed, and Roberts addressed them
 - a. he told them that he was impressed to challenge them to *confess any known sin*,
 - b. to immediately *put away any doubtful habit* and *restore any broken relationship*
 - c. he said that he would be waiting and invited any who wanted to, to meet him back there at the church in one hour.
6. The people left, and almost all returned an hour later
7. As soon as they gathered, something happened among them
 - a. the presence of God was so tangible they began to worship and pray with such fervency and power that news of what was happening quickly spread through town
 - b. dozens more came and filled the church
 - c. they didn't break up till early the next morning
 - d. and then just a few hours later, they returned and began again
8. It was mostly a prayer meeting - but every so often someone would stand and give an exhortation or would call the people to direct their prayers to a specific topic
9. Then something truly amazing started happening - people that hadn't been to church in years began to come
10. People who had NEVER been to church turned out - and as they entered the church, they would break down in tears and plead for salvation
11. Hardened sinners melted like wax before a fire
12. Within a couple days, the other churches in town were filled as well, and then neighboring villages and towns began to catch on
13. It spread to the cities and within a couple weeks, it was difficult to find a

church in Wales that wasn't full of people praying and worshipping night and day.

14. The rest of England soon caught fire with revival - it jumped the channel into Europe and the Atlantic to the United States
15. But the Welsh Revival wasn't a movement that just filled churches - it had a dramatic impact on society!
 - a. crime dropped so dramatically there was little for the police to do,
 - b. so they formed choral groups and quartets and went around to churches and public places to sing
 - c. the jails emptied because the criminals were converted and turned into law-abiding, productive citizens
 - d. interestingly, there were a number of business failures that were attributed to the revival
 - 1) saloons and bars closed down
 - 2) gambling houses had to shut their doors
 - 3) and production in the coal mines slowed dramatically for a while
 - a) why would the mines suffer?
 - b) we can understand why bars and casinos would fold, but coal mines?
 - c) here's what happened - the miners were a hard working and hard living sort of men who were well known for their colorful speech
 - d) in the mines, the way they got the mules to pull the coal carts to the surface, was by yelling and cursing at them -
 - e) the profanity in the mines was as thick and black as the coal they mined
 - f) but during the revival, so many of the miners got saved, that the mules could no longer understand them -
 - g) they refused to swear and the mules, conditioned as they were to years of profanity didn't know what to do

B. Revival

1. Friends - that's revival!
2. Real revival is a sovereign work of God that doesn't just fill churches, it changes the moral and spiritual landscape
3. You can't limit revival to one week a year or to Tuesday and Thursday evening from 7 to 9.
4. When genuine revival comes, it sweeps away the fake and pretend and reveals the glory of God
 - a. it takes the church schedule of events and tosses it right out the window
 - b. revival has no regard for calendars or clocks
 - c. it is not a cute little stream that flows neatly within well managed and manicured banks
 - d. it is a flood that washes over God's people and forever changes them

C. Prepare

1. Though revival is a sovereign work of God's Spirit that cannot be manufactured by man,

2. There is something we *can* do to *prepare* for revival
3. And it seems from both scripture and history, when God's people sincerely prepare, the Spirit does come!
4. In fact, the Word tells us we *are* to prepare . . .

II. TEXT

A. Vs. 3-5

3 The voice of one crying in the wilderness: "Prepare the way of the LORD; Make straight in the desert A highway for our God.

4 Every valley shall be exalted And every mountain and hill brought low; The crooked places shall be made straight And the rough places smooth;

5 The glory of the LORD shall be revealed, And all flesh shall see it together; For the mouth of the LORD has spoken."

1. If this sounds familiar, it's because we read these same words in the Gospels of the ministry of John the Baptist
2. He was the forerunner of Christ who came to prepare Israel for His ministry
3. But we must *first* understand these words in their historical context in Isaiah
4. Chapter 39 ends with Isaiah foretelling the destruction of Jerusalem at the hands of the Babylonians
 - a. they will destroy the city and the temple
 - b. and will carry the Jews away into exile
5. Here in Chapter 40, Isaiah goes on to foretell their future *restoration* to their home
 - a. they will *return* and *rebuild* the city and temple
 - b. the walls of Jerusalem will be restored and their blessing will increase
 - c. God's judgment of their rebellion will be a thing of the past
6. These verses speak of the returning exiles who will make the trip through the wilderness from Babylon back to their home
7. The *physical* journey will be but an *outward* expression of their *spiritual* return to God, and His return to them
8. So Isaiah issues a call to the returning exiles to be as diligent in their *spiritual preparation* as they would be in packing their things to go home

9. Whenever a king would visit a city or region, the people of that region would make sure that the roads the king would be coming on were in good repair
 - a. they would fill potholes
 - b. and widen the road where it was too narrow
 - c. sometimes, as they would find a section of the road to be too *humble* for someone as important as a king to travel on, they would build a *new* road
10. That's the imagery Isaiah is using here . . .
 - a. God would come again to Jerusalem
 - b. once more His glory would be manifest there as it had been in previous days
 - c. so the people needed to prepare, to make a way for the Lord's return
 - d. they would do this by straightening the crooked things, by bringing equality, and setting right what was wrong

B. John The Baptist

1. These verses are quoted of the ministry of John the Baptist in both Matthew and John
2. John left the cities of Israel and went out into the Judean wilderness
3. He stood near the main north-south road that led from Jerusalem to Galilee and as people passed by, he quoted these words
4. He told them that the long awaited Messiah was about to appear and they needed to prepare for Him
5. And that preparation would take what form? What was John's message?
6. REPENT because the Kingdom of God is about to come
7. The key word was REPENT!
8. That's what making a way for the Lord is all about
 - a. repentance is making our crooked *attitudes* straight
 - b. it's leveling out the affairs of our lives so that they are marked by *justice and equity*
 - c. it's repairing the *moral* potholes
9. Please be assured that I am NOT saying salvation is obtained by doing good works
 - a. we are saved by faith in Christ alone
 - b. repentance doesn't save us - Christ saves us
10. But it's imperative that we note *who* John preached to and who Isaiah first gave this message to
 - a. this was a message directed at God's people
 - b. the preparation of repentance was something for the people of God to do so that He might come in His glory and power to bestow on them the *fullness* of His blessing and love
11. In other words, repentance isn't something we do just one time when we first come to Christ
12. Repentance is a mark and trait of the one who *is* saved who is seeking the glory and power of God in his or her life
13. We see this in the message and ministry of John the Baptist . . .
14. While the common people received and responded to his message by the hundreds, it just plain *irritated* the self-righteous and smug religious leaders
 - a. they thought repentance was something only rank *pagans* did
 - b. they felt themselves *above* repentance!
15. So while the common people were walking out into the waters of the Jordan river to be baptized as a *testimony* to their repentance, the self-righteous stood on the shore and demanded to know where John got his authority to do what he did
16. John the Baptist's ministry gives us a perfect picture of the two responses the message of repentance gets
 - a. for those who genuinely desire more of God, it is gladly received and responded to
 - b. for those who are self-satisfied and content in their own goodness, the call to repentance only angers them because to repent, they must first admit they are not as good as they would like to believe

c. the proud do not repent!

C. Five of Seven

1. Jesus composed 7 letters to 7 different churches in Asia
2. We find these letters in the 2nd and 3rd chapters of Revelation
3. Now, bear in mind that these were *churches*, congregations of His people
4. But to 5 of the 7 He tells them to *repent!*
5. He doesn't need to tell the other two to repent because they *already were!*
6. You see, as often as the Spirit of God speaks to us about some area of our lives that He wants to work in, we need to repent and yield that to Him
7. And as long as we are in these bodies, there will be something the Holy Spirit is seeking to change
8. That's why to all 7 churches Jesus said - "Whoever has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit is saying to the Churches"

III. CONCLUSION

A. The Spirit Is Speaking

1. What the Spirit inspired Isaiah to prophesy and what He prompted John to preach -
2. Is the same thing the same Spirit is saying through this text to *all of us today*
3. Jesus is coming again! The Kingdom of God is at hand!
4. ***Therefore, prepare the way of the Lord***
5. How do we do that? By repentance
 - a. by turning away from selfish, smug superiority
 - b. by responding to the voice of the Spirit who calls to us to turn from our own self-directed way and points His direction for our lives

B. The Need For Revival

1. I don't know about you, but I'm hungry and thirsty for more of God, not just in my own life but in my church
2. I'm not ambitious to just have my church in Oxnard crowded with people for three or four services on Sunday mornings
3. I want to see *every* church in the county filled with people praying and worshiping
4. I want to see the lost of this city SAVED!
5. I want to read in the newspaper that the police don't have anything to do because crime is virtually non-existent, so we invited one of their quartets to come and sing one Sunday morning
6. I want to see that the Spearmint Rhino has been turned into a Christian coffeehouse and bookstore
7. I want to see the Adult cable channels replaced with the golf and fishing channels and that the Howard Stern show has been taken off the air
8. While I ache and pray for that kind of revival, I have to ask myself if I've been consistent to *prepare* for it
9. Am I listening to the Spirit and then responding promptly when He calls me to

- repent?
10. Like most of you, I fiddle with some sins
 - a. I should repent
 - b. but instead, I try to remain neutral
 11. Now - having said that - don't try to figure out which sins I'm talking about
 12. I am being purposefully vague because if I were to be more specific, it would only serve to distract you from what the Holy Spirit is saying to you!
 13. Just as God is speaking to me about what I need to do to prepare for the coming of the Lord, so He's speaking to *you* about what *you* need to do to prepare
 - a. What crooked attitude do you need to repent of and make straight?
 - b. What area of your life is marked by injustice and inequity?
 - c. What moral pothole needs to be filled with righteousness?
 - d. What broken relationship needs to be mended?
 14. If the Spirit is speaking to you about something - do it now, today!
 15. God wants to come in His glory - He wants to rebuild His Church which has been torn down by materialism and greed
 16. Therefore, prepare the way of the Lord.

C. Only A Handful

1. While revival is a sovereign move of God that cannot be manufactured by man, it can be *prepared* for
2. In fact, revival won't come unless it IS prepared for
3. There is an old saying that goes: Pray as though everything depends on God, and then live as though everything depends on you.
4. The Welsh Revival began with only a handful of people who heard a simple call to repentance and who set about to do so without excuse or delay.
5. There are more than a handful here this morning - but will even a few of us do what they did?
6. Friend, don't wait for revival to come and then hope to be swept up in it - get ready for revival now!
7. Ask the Holy Spirit to show you what He wills to show you and then respond - without delay