

[Book Thesis: The Power of God Spreads the Gospel]

**Revival or Ruin?**

Thanks to a kind gift, I and the other pastors/wives will be in D.C. this week at a pastors' briefing called "Watchmen on the Wall" hosted by the Family Research Council. We'll have the opportunity to hear from both ministry and political leaders who care about the condition of our nation. No pastor will be in the office Monday afternoon or Tuesday, but as always, you can contact one of the other elders listed in your bulletin.

**PRAY.**

I'm looking forward to these days—especially on the heels of the National Day of Prayer this past Thursday. In the evening, Henry Blackaby spoke at Long's Park. It was less like preaching and more like the prophets of old blowing the trumpet. He believes that the fate of America will be decided this year and that we stand on the threshold of our nation's future. It was a prophetic summons—not to America in general—but to the American church: repent.

I've stewed on this a couple of days and yesterday morning began to sense God leading me to postpone my planned message, and sound a trumpet too; to call us to repent. Repent is to change my mind; to turn and go the opposite direction from my sin. Which way are you running? Is sin your enemy or your friend? Are you at war with it or have you signed a peace agreement?

When Blackaby asked, "Where are the watchmen on the wall?" God convicted me. A watchman stands on the wall keeping a sharp eye out for the enemy. When it appears, he blows the trumpet to warn the people. God said to Ezekiel, *I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; so hear the word I speak and give them warning from me. This is what you are to say: 'Our offenses and sins weigh us down, and we are wasting away because of them. How then can we live?'*

In Revelation 2, 3, Jesus evaluated 7 churches. Only Philadelphia and Smyrna were commended. To the rest he said things like, "Wake up!" and especially, "Repent!" Some Christians were teaching false doctrine. In one church a false prophetess was teaching immorality. Some believers had lost their first love and some were so lukewarm you could tell if there'd ever been any temperature at all. Repent, repent, repent.

I'm here to blow the trumpet today. I'm here to sound the alarm that the enemy has breached the walls. The city is in danger of being overrun. It is late in the attack but all is not hopeless. When Jesus urged the churches to repent, he made promises about restoration if they would. While the arrows fly and the enemy forces advance on us, victory is yet possible if we will confess our sin, humble ourselves, and pray.

The condition of America reflects to some degree the condition of the American Church. The anemia of the nation reveals the anemia of the nation's church. Dryrot is sapping the life and power from our efforts. Unless we deal with the sin causing the dryrot, the American church will *remain* listless, ineffective, powerless, and ultimately, judged. For judgment starts in the church, and then moves to unbelievers (1 Pet.4:17).

These days books on grace sell like hotcakes. Dr. Blackaby suggested that the Church has forgotten that Jesus' initial message was, "repent." Even *more* importantly, it

still was at the end. After His resurrection and shortly before his ascension, Jesus declared “...*repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in my name to all nations beginning in Jerusalem.*” (Lk.24:47) But where are the books on repentance?

God’s grace is a precious thing to me. But it is a substitute for our lack of *righteousness* not our lack of repentance. Grace is what God gives *when* we repent, not something we enjoy *despite* repenting. We have people today who know and believe just enough about grace to be dangerous; that it somehow grants a license to be immoral (Jude 1:4).

The personal consequences of an unrepentant life are bad enough. But we also harden the spiritual delinquency of our lost neighbors who are unimpressed by our undistinguished living. We inoculate them against our Jesus. *God’s name is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you.* (Rom.2:24) It is not that we *sometimes* sin, it is that our lives are *characterized* by sin. And particular ones; lust, bitterness and unforgiveness, slander and gossip, selfishness with our time, stinginess with our money, gluttony, lying and cheating, adultery and premarital sex, anger and wrath that frighten those who love us most, rebellion against authority, laziness, and the queen of sin, pride.

READ Jer.6:10-19. For every church that has succumbed to believe that homosexuality is ok, there is an evangelical church where the people despise each other. For every church that has abandoned the Scriptures, there is a church that lauds it while its people ignore it except for Sundays. For every church that has reduced prayer to a Sunday morning ceremony, there is an evangelical church lobbying for prayer in the schools; yet it holds no prayer meeting itself. For every church that now permits all manner of immoral sexual practices, there’s an evangelical church where pornography is an unseen plague. Sin stalks the church while we eat, drink and are merry. Augustine said: *Before God can deliver us we must undeceive ourselves.*

Are you deceived? Have you convinced yourself that your sin is no big deal? At least, not as bad as someone else’s sin? That you really don’t have the capacity to overcome it anyway? That you don’t want to give it up?

I am a man, just like you. Every pastor I know believes he’s just as tempted as any person in his congregation. Every pastor I know can almost *feel* Satan’s crosshairs on his back. You and I are cut from the same cloth. I may not know the particulars in your heart, but I know it’s general condition, because I know mine.

But my concern for us is not just for you and me as individuals; it’s for the church; it’s for the nation. For without holiness no one will see God. And without holiness the church will not endure; and without the church, the nation will not endure. not just for us individually: but for this church; and for this nation. What does the trend of 3 churches closing to every one opening, portend?

[PRAY] Oh God, help us. God, break us. God, sweep through us in conviction. I’m not talking about the people at Calvary Monument this morning, or at Paradise Mennonite, or at St. John’s Methodist, or at Leacock Presbyterian, or at Paradise Bible Fellowship, I’m talking about us at Keystone Evangelical Free Church. May we see our sin as you do. Silence our protest, our justifications; humble us, meet us; transform us. Amen.

Charles Simeon: *One of the most fundamental marks of true repentance is a disposition to see our sins as God seems them.*

## **Invitation.**