

EDDIE BUMPERS' CONVENTION MESSAGE**CONVENTION SERMON****Dr. Eddie Bumpers****2015 Southern Baptist Convention, Columbus, Ohio, June 17, 2015****THE FIRE OF REVIVAL****1 Kings 18:17-24**

The need for a great awakening is obvious; many of our churches are declining and dying. Many pastors and Christians leaders are discouraged and defeated in the work of God. We desperately need a time of refreshing from the presence of the Lord. There are some who think that a great awakening is not possible; that we have gone passed the point of no return in our churches, and in our nation. But I would remind us that every great awakening took place in a time of spiritual and moral decline.

In the pattern of great awakenings, the first thing you discover is that great awakenings are preceded by a time of spiritual depression, apathy and gross sin; the majority of Christians are no different than the culture around them and the churches are asleep. It was during those times that a small group of God's people became conscious of their sin and backslidden condition, forsook their sin and came back to God by calling out to Him in prayer for a revival. That is exactly what we need to do today! As we look around the world, we see God moving in great ways in many places, and we praise His name.

But when we look at the church in America, we see the need for a great awakening! A revival that would bring us to a new obedience to God and to a renewed commitment to the Great Commission and the great command of Jesus!

Martyn Lloyd-Jones the Pastor of Westminster Chapel who died in 1981 said, "I am profoundly convinced that the greatest need in the world today is revival in the church of God. Yet, the whole idea of revival seems to have become strange to so many good Christian people. There are some who even seem to resent the very idea, and actually speak and write against it. Such an attitude is due to both a serious misunderstanding of the scriptures and a woeful ignorance of the history of the church."

There has never been a time in the history of the church when a mighty move of the Spirit of God was needed more than today!!

But is a Great Awakening possible? Is God able to revive His people and impact this culture? Do we have any record in the Bible or church history of God awakening His people and impact a culture when it was as sinful as our culture?

Yes we do!! We are going back to the Old Testament to the Northern Kingdom of Israel during the reign of wicked King Ahab and his super-mean wife Jezebel. The Bible says that Ahab was more wicked than all the kings before him. Jezebel, his wife, was the daughter of the King of Zidon, a Baal worshipper; and she had led her weak husband to worship Baal. This dynamite duo of the Old Testament makes Bonnie and Clyde look like kindergartners!

This couple had led the people of God to forsake the true God Jehovah and worship the false gods Baal and Asherah. The Nation of Israel was in moral decline, many of the prophets of God had been killed by Jezebel, and the people of God were far away from God!

Enter Elijah the prophet of God, also known as the prophet of fire, who calls down fire on Mount Carmel and on the soldiers of Ahab's son, and is later caught up in a chariot of fire. He is the most mentioned prophet in the New Testament and shows up on the Mount of Transfiguration and in the book of Revelation.

God used Elijah to be his instrument to call down the fire of revival and see a great awakening come to Israel. Oh how we need the fire of God to fall in our lives and churches; not a literal fire, but a spiritual fire — the fire of the Holy Spirit. What is it that brings the fire of God on Mount Carmel and what brings the fire of God today?

There are three steps we must take if we are to experience the fire of revival:

Step #1 we must:

1. Aggressively Confront Sin! (vs. 17-18)

When Ahab saw Elijah, he blamed him for the trouble in Israel, and for the fact that there had not been any rain for three years. Elijah said it wasn't his fault, it was Ahab's fault; he had forsaken the commandment of God and had followed after false gods! Elijah tells Ahab that it is the sin of forsaking God that had led to the three year drought. This is not the first time, nor will it be the last time that Elijah confronts Ahab's sin. Elijah is like the prophet Nathan who points his finger at King David and said, "You are the man;" you are the man who has sinned! Elijah points his finger at Ahab and says, "You're the man that has abandoned the commandment of God and followed Baal."

Elijah tells him, "you have troubled Israel;" the word "troubled" is the same word used in Joshua 7:25 to describe the defeat that Israel suffered at Ai because Achan stole the treasure at Jericho that belonged to God. It is always the people who live in rebellion to God that bring the trouble of judgement against a nation.

God in grace confronts King Ahab and tells him that it is his sin that is the cause of his problems and the reason for the condition in the nation. Elijah mentions both the sin of omission, and the sin of commission:

- Omission- You have not done what you were supposed to do - follow God!
- Commission- You have done what you were not supposed to do - follow Baal.

At the heart of the problem was sin; God's commands had been broken and He had been replaced by false gods.

Today the heart of the problem is sin; it is sin that causes the trouble today! **We must confront sin personally, corporately and nationally!**

Sin is transgression of the law; he that knows to do good and does not do it, it is sin. God's ear is not heavy that He cannot hear, neither is his hand short that He cannot save, but **our sin** has separated us from God. He that covers his sin shall not prosper, but whoever confesses and forsakes his sin will find mercy! We are told to be holy because God is Holy!

Ahab was blaming Elijah for the trouble he had caused; Ahab was Ahab's problem and if I am honest, Eddie is Eddie's greatest problem! It is not my wife, kids, mother-in-law, the deacons, or anybody else! "It's not my mother, not my father, not my sister, not my brother, but it's me oh God, standing in the need of prayer."

It is my sin, selfishness, materialism, gossip, jealousy, and unforgiveness that is the trouble in my life! And as long as I am blaming someone else, I will never experience forgiveness, revival, and help from God!

Elijah would go on to confront the sin of the people of God and the nation; they had turned their backs on God and were worshipping the gods Baal and Asherah as well as the false gods of materialism and immorality. God is jealous over his people because He loves them and wants their undivided love and loyalty. I know this is God's chosen people Israel, but blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord! Sin is a reproach to any people; and when a nation forsakes the commandments of God and follows after the gods of materialism and immorality, that nation will end up just like the other nations in history that have done the same thing! Rotten meat in the trash can of history!!

It is our responsibility as preachers, teachers, and believers to speak the truth in a culture that does not want to hear it; we speak it in love, grace, and wisdom, but we must speak truth!!

Paul in writing to Timothy told him to speak the truth, "Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables. But watch you in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry." (2 Timothy 4:2-5)

Elijah was called of God to confront sin, and so must we; first in our own lives and in our churches, and then in our nation! Friends the "trouble" in America is not economics, education, or environment, it is SIN! I know that is not what we will hear from the White House or statehouse, but surely we should hear it from the church house!!

Isaiah 58:1 - "Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and shew **my people** their transgression, and the **house of Jacob** their sins."

Throughout the Bible you find corporate calls to repentance; there were times when they had holy convocations and solemn assemblies to call their hearts back to God.

Joel 1:14 - "Sanctify ye a fast, call a solemn assembly, gather the elders and all the inhabitants of the land into the house of the LORD your God, and cry unto the LORD."

You say "that's the Old Testament, you got anything from the New Testament?" I am glad you asked! Jesus wrote the seven letters in the book of Revelation to churches; He rebuked and reproved His churches. He called for the churches to repent and return to the work He had called them to do.

We need to confront the sin in our lives and in our churches:

- Lack of desperate prayer.
- Lack of evangelistic passion.
- Lack of sacrificial giving.
- Lack of biblical preaching.

We need to confess our sin, forsake our sin, and turn to God! The first step toward personal revival is to aggressively confront sin in our own lives, to preach the truth of the Word of God about sin, and to call God's people to brokenness and repentance!

Sadly Ahab never accepted responsibility for his sin and what it caused, and because he refused to repent, more trouble would follow. King David did just the opposite; when the prophet Nathan confronted him with his sin, he repented and God blessed him. Today we have a choice!

Step #2 we must:

2. **Boldly Challenge God's People!** (vs. 21, 24)

What a scene this must have been on the top of Mount Carmel. Elijah the Prophet of God, facing 450 prophets of Baal, throws down the challenge to God's people. He looks at them and asks, "How long halt you between two opinions? If the LORD be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him. And the people answered him not a word." (vs. 21) Elijah says, "how long are you going to keep limping, tottering back-and-forth between Baal and God? You are fence-straddlers; you are uncommitted to Baal and you are uncommitted to God, you need to get off the fence and follow God!!" But the people just look at him, shrug their shoulders and don't say a word; they don't move a muscle and they just sit there!

You feel like say as you read this, "hey, hey, say something, do something, don't just sit there!" Elijah is talking about God being God, about following God with your whole life; and yet they say nothing! They are complacent, apathetic, indifferent, and afraid. They do not know where to place their ultimate allegiance, which god they trusted, or which god they wanted to follow. They knew the Torah and couldn't bring themselves to deny the existence of the Lord God of Israel, but they also were attracted to Baal. They wanted a little bit of Baal and Jehovah, so they took a "let's wait-and-see how this thing turns out" attitude!

God does not want His people tottering back and forth — He wants us to be all in! You cannot walk with God if you have one foot on the path of obedience and one foot in the ditch of bondage to pluralism!

Elijah challenges God's people and says "you can't have two gods, The Great I Am will not accept a divided heart." Jesus said we cannot serve God and the world; and "he that is not with me is against me;" there is no neutral ground.

We must be people who follow God, believe in God, believe the Word of God, and believe that Jesus is not just one way to heaven because Jesus is the only way to heaven!!

We live in a culture that is okay with sitting on the fence and believing nothing and everything at the same time, but we as God's people must not sit on the fence of non-commitment to God and His truth!!

Dr. Vance Havner once said, "We're so wired up with our own devices that if the fire doesn't fall from heaven, we flip the switch and produce some fire of our own...no sound of a mighty rushing wind, we have the furnace all set up to blow hot air instead; God save us from a synthetic Pentecost!"

What we need today, the government can't provide, the SBC can't provide, and the church can't provide. We need what only God can provide; therefore we need to be talking to Him about what we need!!

2 Chronicles 7:14 - "If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.

The third Great Awakening started when Jeremiah Lamphier, a 48 year old businessman, hung a sign in the window of his shop on Fulton Street in New York announcing a noon prayer meeting. Within six months, 10,000 people were gathering daily for prayer and revival had broken out!!

What our nation needs to see is the power of God in the lives of Christians and in the church!

There were two great questions in Acts 2 on the day of Pentecost; the second question being asked after Peter had preached the gospel. "What shall we do?" Peter answered, "believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved." That question will never be asked, however, until the first question is asked, "what does this mean?" meaning "what has happened to these people?" Here's the answer: the fire of the Holy Spirit has fallen on them!! My prayer for myself, my family, church, and for our great denomination is the fire of revival to fall!

Good news! We don't have to have a committee, motion, or resolution. We don't have to have permission from anyone. We simply have to stand before God and say, "God, I am that man. I will lead my people to share the gospel. I will die in that field for the sake of what is so precious to You. Here I am, send me."

Pastor, YOU CAN DO THIS! Jesus Christ said you can! Jesus Himself promised the power of the Holy Spirit indwelling in us for the specific and narrow focus of being witnesses for the gospel of Jesus Christ!

I want to close this message by asking you to join me in a time of prayer. This is one of the last times we have together as a Convention as this afternoon we go home. Call out to God for intervention. It's powerful. It's changing us. We're asking you to do that today. Will you come now to join me in prayer? Will you join our immediate past President Dr. Luter, and new President Dr. Floyd as we pray? We NEED intervention. We NEED men and women of God to step up and change the game. Come!

— from the office of Dr. Eddie Bumpers

The movie star, Marilyn Monroe was once asked if she believed in God, she answered, "I believe in everything - a little bit." The "Monroe doctrine" has become the basic religious belief of America; people do not want to be intolerant so they believe in everything a little bit.

But we as God's people believe God is God and we will follow Him! We are not to go limping through life, but walking steadily with Christ!

Elijah challenged the people of God to make up their minds about who God is! If He is really God, then follow Him; if not, then quit Him!! This is the same thing Moses said to the people of God when He saw them worshipping the golden calf. Exodus 32:26 - "Who is on the Lord's side, get over here!" Joshua said, "Choose you this day who you will serve, but as for me and my house we will serve the Lord."

We must not straddle the fence; we cannot take a "wait-and-see" attitude about following God! The God of Elijah is exclusive, he allows no rivals and He will not share His glory with another! You cannot serve two masters!

To believe God is to follow Him with our whole lives, and we cannot do that sitting on the fence! If the Lord is God, then we are to follow Him with all of our heart, mind, soul, and strength. He is to be first in every area of our lives!

Let me tell you one of the ways you know you are on the fence: you are silent when you should be vocal; remember the people, when asked about God, didn't say a word. The tottering, fence-straddling Christian is silent about what God has said. Luke-warm, backslidden Christians are not bold for the Lord! When a Christian is asked about spiritual things, he or she should be able to say what God says! We need to be able to give a clear, loving, informed answer when asked the important questions that are being asked today.

The people are silent when Elijah throws down the challenge in vs. 23-24 as the prophets of Baal are about to offer a sacrifice and call on Baal to answer by fire.

Then Elijah says, "I will build an altar and offer a sacrifice to Jehovah, and call on Him to answer by fire. **The God who answers by fire, He is God!**"

Elijah lets the prophets of Baal go first and gives them every advantage, as it is Baal's home turf. They chose their bull to sacrifice and begin praying to Baal to answer by fire, but nothing happens. Verse 26 - "There was no voice; nor any that answered."

They call on Baal from the morning until noon and nothing happens. Elijah mocks them, "Cry louder! Maybe Baal is talking, gone walking, or is sleeping. Maybe he is in a meeting or gone to the men's room." Elijah is cutting Baal down to show the people that Baal is no god; he doesn't see, hear or know, he doesn't exist, he is not worthy of your allegiance. He is a false god. He is not the god of thunder and lightning, he can't start a fire under this bull, and he is a fake! Elijah exposes Baal as a fake, just like Dorothy and her friends exposed the wizard of Oz as a fake. Behind the curtain was a little old man with a megaphone and they discovered that the wizard was a fake and a cheat. Baal was a fake and a cheat, he was no god!!

Elijah was showing the people that God has no rivals! He alone is God. He is alive and active, he sees and hears and cares. He is all ways available and accessible. Our God never slumbers or sleeps!

The reminder to us today is that the idols or gods of this world are unworthy of our love and loyalty. They cannot help us in the real situations of life and death because they cannot see, hear, save or help us! In contrast to the idols of this world, God is real; He is Creator and Sustainer; He is Powerful, Holy, Gracious and Loving! His eye is on the sparrow and I know He watches me!! We can trust Him to watch over us and care for us in every difficult situation we face; He is always living and active and able to save!!

Get off the fence and follow God, sell out to God!

There is a third step we must take if we are to experience the fire of revival; we must:
3. Earnestly Cry out to God! (vs. 36-39)

Every Great Awakening in history was preceded by earnest prayer!

It is Elijah's turn to pray; his prayer is not complicated or long, it is only 63 words in English.

James 5:16-18 - "Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much. Elijah was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain; and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit."

The power and blessings on Elijah's ministry is connected to his prayer life!

Earlier he prayed and it didn't rain for three years; here he prayed and fire came down from heaven; later he prayed and it rained. He prayed fervently - with urgency and passion. The burden of his prayer was that God be glorified, recognized, and worshipped and followed wholeheartedly by His people. Look at vs. 36 - "let it be made known that YOU are God..." and vs. 37 - "that this people may know that You are the LORD God..."

That must be the motive of our prayer. God, let Your power and fire fall on us that it might be known that you alone are God! The right motive for revival is important so why do we need a revival? **That God might be magnified, Jesus glorified, the church mobilized, and the gospel publicized.**

We need to earnestly cry out to God and ask Him to make His presence known, to manifest His power that people may see Him and feel His warmth and fire in their lives and churches. Far too long we have been satisfied to operate in the coldness of our programs and plans; we need the fire and power of God. We need a revival where God is recognized and Jesus glorified!!

Ninety percent of what we do in our Baptist churches could be done by atheist; an atheist can sing, learn to teach a lesson, or take up the offering. And so what we need to experience is the supernatural fire of God!!

Elijah prayed and in vs. 38-39, "then the fire of the Lord fell, and consumed the burnt sacrifice... the people saw it, and fell on their faces and said, 'The Lord He is the God: the Lord He is the God.'" He is no longer just one of the gods; He is THE God and there is NO other!!

This was not man-made pyrotechnics! This wasn't a fire that Elijah started; it was a prayed-down fire from Heaven!!