

THE BON AIR PULPIT

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Scripture: *Hosea 10:12; Joel 2:12*

Sermon: *A Call for Spiritual Awakening*

In the back of the Old Testament there is a collection of books known as the minor prophets. There are not called minor because they are unimportant but minor simply because the books are so short. Yet in them are some beautiful passages of scripture that reflect God's tender care in calling His people back to Himself.

There is one listed in your bulletin this morning, I will read another one in just a moment, but first let us read Hosea 10:12. *Sow for yourself righteousness, reap the fruit of unfailing love, break up your unplowed ground, like a piece of ground that has been hardened through the winter. Now plow it up so God can plant His seeds that He wants in your life for it is time to seek the Lord until He comes and showers righteousness upon you.* Now turn over a couple of pages to the book of Joel 2:12. *Even now declares the Lord. Return unto me with all your heart, with fasting, and weeping and mourning. Rend your hearts and not your garments, return to the Lord your God for He is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love and he relents from sending calamities.*

Last week I attended a nationwide assembly of men in the nation's capital. Over a million men gathered to confess their sins and to make fresh promises to God. It has been documented that it was the largest religious gathering in the history of the United States and some say the largest gathering of any sort of Americans in our history. Men were available from all fifty states, from about twenty foreign countries, and millions of other people watched in on television. Those of you who viewed it and listened to what was said recognize that what you heard was nothing more than what you would have heard in a renewal conference, or what you would have heard in many evangelical worship services.

We were on our bus going to the conference and I shared with some of the men the audacity of the day. The group who called the meeting has only been in existence for six years. I said, "Can you imagine that, although they have had conferences around the country, they would rent the whole Washington Mall? They would put big screens up from the capital beyond the Washington Monument?" While on the bus I said, "I always have a fear that, when I have a party, no one is going to come. "Suppose no one is there.

When I got within six blocks of the Washington mall, I realized lots of people were there. In fact we came into the mall at the Smithsonian Institute and had to turn left and walk. The only place I could find a place to stand was about a half a mile down the mall, standing in front of the Washington Monument. I realized I had no fear, lots of people were there. It took me forty-five minutes to weave myself through the crowd to walk about a half a mile.

You know God is one of the great nonconformists of the universe. He has picked a football coach to be the catalyst to call men to Himself. When the men gathered, they made some fresh commitments. They first made a commitment to God, recognizing that if you can't be right with God, you can't be right with anyone else. They made a fresh commitment to their family, in which the men pledged that they would go back home and be the spiritual leaders of their families. Let me just simply say that I believe that is biblical. The men of the church need to be aware that, as we approach Men's Day in our church in a couple of months, I am going to challenge the men of our church to again be the spiritual leaders in their families. They made commitments to other men. They made commitments to be people of integrity. They made commitments to care about the world in which they lived, to be not so concerned about their own congregation that they can not see the larger body of Christ, to take a stand against racism and to support one another in small groups.

All of us who were there were aware God was doing a dramatic work. I looked around with my natural curiosity and noticed the men who were there. I was aware God was touching all kinds of people. I looked at one fellow and it reminded me you should never judge a book by its cover. He looked like he just got off his Harley Davidson. He had the big beard, bald head, nothing on top but a lot around here. He stood there with his leather pants on, chains hanging down and then they started singing. I saw him lift his hands to God with tears running down his cheeks and I was aware God was using all kinds of folks. I saw a white man and a black man with their arms around each other praying. I saw old people, young people, men and women. I saw men who had their young boys by the hand as they wanted their children to experience what was going on.

It has been a long time since I have been in a worship experience for over seven hours and you had to move around a little bit. I had walked around to a place by the Washington Monument where you could go in and buy souvenirs. Since a lot of people were going in the grass all around was beaten down and it was just dust there. I realized at that moment they asked all the men to kneel down and pray and I saw a group of about twenty-five men kneel down in that dust and lift their hands to God. Then I saw a group of about twenty-five men literally prostrate themselves in that dust. If you have never been in the center of Washington, DC with a million men on their knees, or on their faces before God and not a sound, nothing, no horns blowing, nobody doing anything, you are aware that men were having a tremendous experience with God. I saw tears and commitments. I knew men who made a first time commitment of their life to Christ.

Since I have returned, people have asked me, "What did you think about the meeting?" Well, there is a far deeper question than that and that is what I wanted to talk about with you today. The question is, what did it mean? I wanted to share with you today that I think it means that it is one more sign of the activity of God. He is bringing about a spiritual renewal in our nation. Literally what He did was that He went to the most well-known place in America, the Washington Mall, gathered men from everywhere, put them on their faces before Him to give a vivid demonstration to the rest of us of what He is up to around the world. God is up to something.

There is on the part of many people a real heart hunger. A friend of mine who was there said, "I can't tell you all the junk that has been in my life. I filled it with all kinds of things, gave myself to all kinds of things. I can't tell you how much stuff was thrown out and how different I am because I have let Christ come in and take control."

There has been in the lives of many people a spiritual desperation. We have come to recognize in the culture in which we live that unless there is some how a turning back to God, we are in a mess deeper than we can dig ourselves out of. I was reminded of that when in part of the service, they asked all of the men to stand and pray the Lord's prayer. They said, "We want you to look at one of the buildings around you and we want you to lift your hands in a prayer of blessing. As you pray the Lord's prayer, here at the very seat of government, we can pray for our nation and our government." Without even thinking, I stood up and lifted my hands in a prayer of blessing. I started quoting the Lord's prayer and then all of a sudden I realized I was looking at the White House. Here I was with my hands raised and as I began to pray, looking at the White House, the words just rolled through my mind. "Thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory," with the recognition that the power of our nation is *not* at the White House, *not* at the capital, *not* in those buildings. *The power of our nation is in God. Thine is the kingdom.* We must come to recognize who He is and that He is in charge of everything. Many of us recognize that there is a great spiritual desperation in our mind, that we will come back to recognize that only as we turn to Him will we find any hope. When you come to a fresh realization of God, there is a sense of how much you have failed, so there is a time of prayer and a time of rededication of lives of men.

I want to tell you that when I say it is a sign of the movement of God in our midst, I am aware that many of you are sitting there saying, "I don't see much of that." Let me take a moment with you. You never will. The news media, the newspaper, the magazines, the evening news - all of the ways in which you hear of what is going on around the nation - are not going to tell you about the revival going on in America. It is very important for you to understand that if you only listen to everything outside from only these sources, the devil is going to win a victory in your life and he is going to win a victory because you think everybody is going to the dogs. You are going to feel like there is no hope. You are going to be filled with pessimism. But, if you understand that beneath everything that is going on, God is at work, people's lives are being changed and things are happening in your life, then you will be aware that while there is a great deal of evil in the world, God is also at work. God is doing a lot of things and we can rejoice in what He is doing.

Let me tell you about some of those. There is a church in the panhandle of Florida. On Wednesday nights, the people in church said we want to do more tonight than just pray for the people who are sick. We want to pray that God will move in our church and God will bless our lives. So that night they began to pray and they prayed for about thirty minutes. The next week some of them heard about it and the next week some other people in the church gathered together and they prayed again. That group prayed for two years.

One Sunday the minister of the church stood up to preach. He gave the invitation and he said it seemed like the recounting of what had happened in the Old Testament when they dedicated the temple. The power of God came in a cloud and it seemed almost like a cloud came into the congregation. The service was not over until after two o'clock. It was not that the service was not over, they could not get the people to leave. Everybody wanted to stay. They have been having services at the church, listen, every night since. They don't advertise, they just simply open the doors and people show up. People have come from all fifty states. People have come from many parts of the world. It has been documented in that church that over seventy thousand people in the last year have walked down the aisle and said, "I want Christ as my Savior."

A young couple graduated from seminary and felt lead of God to start a church in the Los Angeles area. They put all of their things in a U-haul trailer and drove to Los Angeles. They didn't know where to live so they went to a realtor and said, "We want to rent an apartment." He said, "What brought you here?" They said, "God brought us here to start a church." He said, "What kind of church do you want to start?" They sat down and talked to him. He said, "Great, I will join." In the last years, it has become one of

the largest churches in America. Some of our men were there last Easter. They have four different services and twenty thousand people showed up for the services.

A man who is helping us in our financial campaign was in our service this morning and he was telling me of another church. Four or five people began to meet two years ago and now thirteen hundred people meet together every Sunday. What I am sharing with you is happening all over America. What men and women are saying in churches is this: "Dear God, do something in our life, in our church. We want to be an example of what God can do in all kinds of churches. We pray God that you will do it here so others will have a heart hunger for it to be done there." When I have heard that, I have said, "God, I can pray that for our church. I pray that you will so work in our congregation that people will say, 'My goodness, we want God to work like that.'"

All over this nation people's lives are being changed, people are turning back to God. I wanted to come and ask you a question this morning. The question is, do you want to be in on what God is up to? Now to do that means you are going to have to confess your sins. You never thought you would end up the way you are and you are aware there are a lot of decisions you have made in your life that were the wrong ones. You need to come before God and confess them. You recognize that there has to be a holy desperation in your life, that you are going to have to turn your life over to Him. It may be in your life that, within this kind of culture, there is a desire to see that the name of God is exalted and you want to praise Him.

All of us recognize that where there is greater evil there needs to be greater good. Those of you who have done any readings of the French Revolution remember that the mobs of Paris broke into the Versailles and brought King Louie out and took him down to the Place...and beheaded him. One of the historians who wrote of that event said that King Louie would have been a good king in normal times but then these are not normal times.

You might have been a pretty good Christian back in the fifties, but with all the violence, evil, meanness in our world today it is going to take some better breed of Christians. You want to say, "Dear God, I want to be part of that." You recognize that it is going to take a greater boldness, it is not going to be a survivor mentality in which you just try to make it through. You are going to come and take your stand in what God is up to. You need to recognize in your life that you need a God-sized work. There are some things other people can do for you. Sometimes people come to me and say, "Pastor, I have a problem," and I am able to help them but I am not talking about that this morning.

You recognize that you need something that only God can do. You need a God-sized work. Only God can forgive sins, only God can change lives, only God can help us to live right, only God can give us the courage to stand. You recognize that you need a God-sized work.

I was going to be audacious this morning. My audacity is I was going to ask you if you wanted to be in on what God is up to, that you would let it be known. If you want a God-sized work in your life, then you want to make that fresh commitment to God. I recognized this week as I was praying that my audacity may get me in trouble. I maybe the only one who comes forward and I told God that. "Suppose I ask those who want to be in on what you are up to and to let you do a God-sized work in their life. Suppose I am the only one who stands up there." He said, "That is okay. I need to work in your life." If you say, "Dear God, more than anything, I sense you at work in my world and I want to be a part of that. I want you to do a God-sized work inside of me. I want to give my life to you. I want to say, 'Dear God, take Bon Air Church and do such a work in it that it will reverberate so that other people will have a hunger for you as they see what is going on in our lives.'"