

William C. Burns

Revival Without Boundaries



At seventeen, William was once found by his mother in a Glasgow alley, weeping in obvious agony. When asked if he was ill, he replied, "Oh, mother, mother, the thud of these Christless feet on the way to hell breaks my heart."

Later, as a young minister, he wept for hours in deep soul agony for a backslidden church and lost souls going to hell. His pulpit ministry was consistently marked by a divine urgency and intensity. And God chose to honor it in marvelous revival, first in the town of Kilsyth, then almost everywhere he preached throughout Britain in 1839-42.

He said of an occasion in Kilsyth, "The people listened with the most solemn attention. At last their feelings became too strong and broke forth in weeping and wailing, tears and groans, intermingled with shouts of glory and praise from some of the people of God. The appearance of a great part of the people gave me a vivid picture of the state of the ungodly in the day of Christ's coming to judgment. Some were screaming out in agony. Strong men fell to the ground as if they were dead. The whole town was moved. The ungodly raged, but the word of God grew mightily and prevailed."

Now remember, these were the "dour Scots." (Unemotional.)

The previous night a group of earnest believers had met to pray for the ungodly. It became a habit for Burns and others to travail in prayer through the night. At the height of God's blessing and Burns' fame, he turned his back on it all to become an unknown, impoverished missionary to China.

But even there he could not escape fame. He became a friend and mentor of the great missionary leader, Hudson Taylor. Another missionary, when asked if he knew Burns, replied, "Know him? All China knows him to be the holiest man alive."

Brokenheartedly, Burns wrote: "Many of God's children who come into the secret place enter it and leave just as they entered. Some get a little quickening but leave without seeking more. Oh, how can the Lord's people be so easily persuaded to go away empty instead of wrestling with God to pour out His Spirit?"

In this self-satisfied day, may our hearts be broken for the Christless, the carnal, and the uncaring.

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