



“The Old Fashioned Revival Hour”

As a teenager I used to listen to a local Detroit radio station that broadcast reruns of old time radio shows. I enjoyed the comedy of *Abbott and Costello* and *Fibber McGee and Molly*. Adventure and mystery shows like *the Shadow*, *the Lone Ranger*, and *the Green Hornet* were personal favorites. Today such “theatre of the mind” is almost unknown. Radio programming consists almost entirely of music, sports, and news talk.

While I did not note its absence at the time, the list of popular radio shows replayed by this Detroit station left out one of the most listened-to programs of the golden age of radio. Charles E. Fuller's *The Old Fashioned Revival Hour* was broadcast across the nation from 1937 to 1968. It was first carried on the Mutual Broadcast System and then later on the ABC Radio Network. At its peak it was carried by 650 stations and had higher ratings than *The Pepsodent Show* starring Bob Hope which was broadcast concurrently on NBC.

It is hard to imagine today more people tuning in to a religious broadcast than to America's most popular comedian. What took place on *The Old Fashioned Revival Hour* to attract such a listening audience? Originally, the program was recorded in a studio in Hollywood, California. From 1941 through 1957 it was broadcast live from the Long Beach Municipal Auditorium. In 1958 the program was once again produced in a studio. The hour-long broadcast consisted of music from a choir and from *The Old Fashioned Revival Hour Quartet*. The only musical instrumentation was an organ that accompanied the choir, and a piano played skillfully by Rudy Atwood. The style of music was very traditional. Following the musical presentation, letters of testimony sent in by listeners around the world would be read by Grace Fuller. Then Charles Fuller would preach. He would preach full-throated, fervent, Gospel-centered messages. The contemporary health and wealth gospel was never mentioned by Fuller. Subjects such as sin, Satan, and judgment, were addressed as well as grace, redemption,

and heaven. A pointed appeal and invitation to trust Christ concluded each broadcast.

Someone once asked Fuller about the success of his ministry. He responded, "All I know is that I preach the greatest message in the world. There may be greater orators, but nobody can preach a greater message because I preach from the world's greatest Book. It is the old Gospel, the simple Gospel that pulls."

There was a marvelous providence at work when Charles Fuller's ministry reached millions by radio. Today radio competes for our attention with television and the internet. As well, *The Old Fashioned Revival Hour* was not carried by Christian radio stations. Such stations were unknown. The radio networks which carried Fuller's program carried a variety of programming. They were much like modern television networks which broadcast a blend of sports, news, comedy, and drama. Because of this, many who tuned in to *The Old Fashioned Revival Hour* were not Christians. Fuller's ministry enjoyed a marvelous harvest of souls because he was able to reach literally millions with the Gospel who had never trusted Christ.

We can rejoice over what God did in a bygone day. We can also lament that such an opportunity to touch so many for Christ seems unavailable to us today. However, considering what God allowed Fuller (and others like him) to do in his day should inspire us to be faithful to the Gospel message that Fuller preached without compromise. He did not alter or edit the Gospel to reach people. Nor should we. And we should strive to be innovative and use such tools as God in His providence presents to us in the age in which we live. Fuller preached on the radio less than twenty years after the very first radio station began in 1920. Perhaps if Jesus tarries, a future generation of believers will lament that they lack the opportunities for the Gospel that we possess right now.