

Prayer & Revival
Selected Scriptures

Introduction

I was asked to write an article for VOICE magazine, which is published by our church association, IFCA International, and though I have been working on it for several weeks, I found it difficult to get enough time to finish it. I was now approaching the deadline, so the only way I knew I could get it done was to finish the article and then use it as a foundation for a sermon. The result is my sermon today on the subject of Prayer and Revival. In God's providence this is a very fitting sermon for the Sunday before national elections.

I was blessed to be raised in a Christian home in which church was a central part of our lives. Sunday School and Sunday morning and evening worship services were just part of normal life. My parents were often teachers for some class. As I got older, there were also age appropriate ministries during the week. There were many special events in the church calendar such as holiday programs, fellowships, and a two week VBS. Also common were missions and prophecy conferences and a week long revival meeting. Praying for revival was a normal part of every church in which I have been a member. It has been a normal part of my own praying for the last half a century - but what does it mean to pray for revival?

Words for Revival

Our English word "revive" has a root meaning of "to live again" and it is used in both physical and metaphorical senses. The Hebrew word (חַיָּה /chayah) translated as revive is used in the same way. It can refer to restoration of life such as 2 Kings 13:21 which describes a man being buried, but when "they saw a marauding band; and they cast the man into the grave of Elisha. And when the man touched the bones of Elisha he revived and stood up on his feet." The term is also used to describe the return of physical strength as in Judges 15:19 in which Samson drank the water that God brought forth from a hollow place in Lehi and "his strength returned and he revived." In Genesis 45:27, חַיָּה /chayah is used to describe the renewal of spirit Jacob had from his depression when he saw the wagons Joseph had sent to carry him to Egypt. In Psalm 119:93 it is used to describe regaining motivation from reading God's word. The last two uses (renew spirit, regain motivation) are common pleas in the Psalms.

In the New Testament, these same ideas are conveyed by several different Greek words. ζῴω / zaō is used in Romans 14:9 to describe Christ living again. Its cognate, ἀναζῴω / Anazaō, is used in Luke 15:24 metaphorically by the prodigal son's father saying, "this son of mine was dead and has come to life again." Philippians 4:10 uses ἀναθάλλω / anathallō to describe the Philippians concern for Paul being restored to an active state. 1 Corinthians 16:18 uses ἀναπαύω / anatauō to describe the coming of Stephanas, Fortunatus and Achaicus as refreshing his spirit. Paul uses ἀναψύχω / anapsychō in a similar way in 2 Timothy 1:16 in describing the refreshment of spirit he received when Onesiphorus visited. συζωοποιέω / syzōpoieō is used in Ephesians 2:5 to describe those who were dead in their transgressions being "made alive together with Christ."

Revivals of Moral Resurgence

Corresponding to the wide range of usage and meanings of these Hebrew and Greek words, there has also been a corresponding wide range of ideas about revival and reasons to seek it.

In the years of my youth and even in the decades that I have been in ministry, a common motivation for praying for revival has been related to the moral decline of society and the suffering that comes as a natural consequence to widespread sin and God's chastening. The intensity of praying for revival has always been directly related to how bad things had become in society, for lets be honest, when

everything is going well there is a tendency to be lax in being dependent on God and therefore petitioning Him. The book of Judges gives us a good Biblical example of this.

Judges presents what happened in Israel before there was a king and people did what was *“right in their own eyes”* (Judges 17:6; 21:25). It is a book that explains why God brought about the establishment of a king to give direction to what had been a theocracy. That should also serve as a warning to those who lean to the political positions of libertarianism. A theocracy will work wonderfully if the people will actually follow God, but since people are sinful and therefore bent on doing what they want, there needs to be an authority structure that will uphold law and order that will keep the people within the bounds of moral decency. A huge problem in our own nation at the present time are the Governors, mayors, judges and other magistrates that are not upholding law an order and letting injustice and riots run rampant.

The book of Judges begins with a presentation of the three problems that led to spiritual decline and anarchy. They were incomplete obedience to God’s commands concerning conquering the land (1:1 - 2:5), the rise of idolatry among the people (2:6-3:4), and intermarriage with the heathen (3:5-6). I believe a case can be easily made that something similar has led to the decline of our own nation. The strength of American has always been in its churches so that the nation has declined as its churches have declined. The descent begins when the primary purposes of the church are neglected or even supplanted by other things. Proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ becomes the task of just a few or paid professions. Teaching people the Lord’s commands and discipling them on how to walk with Him is toned down in order to avoid offending people and making it easy to be considered a good Christian. God centered worship is modified to be more attractive to people. The second step down is the rise of idolatry within and without the church. The gospel of Jesus Christ is replaced by the social gospel, political awakening and community service. The Lord’s commands are replaced by man’s musings, and discipleship in walking with the Lord is replaced by training in cultural standards and political correctness. Worship becomes man centered or given to other gods. The third step down is the destruction of marriage as an institution which reflects Christ and the church and in which each spouse helps the other become a better person. Sexual attraction instead of character becomes the motivation for marriage or just shacking up or having transitory relationships.

The cycles of decline and revival in Judges would start as the people forsook the Lord to do what was right in their own eyes. The Lord would then bring about the curses which He had forewarned them about. As the oppression increased, the people would cry out to God in repentance and the Lord would provide a deliverer who would bring peace back to the land. After that judge would die, the cycle would start again when the people would begin to forsake the Lord.

Sometimes the nation would remain on course for a generation or two. After God cursed the generation that died in the wilderness wanderings, *“the people served the Lord all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders who survived Joshua, who had seen all the great work of the Lord which He had done for Israel”* (Judges 2:7). At other times, the moral collapse would occur quickly with a change in the national leadership. Joash in 2 Chronicles 24 is an example of this. He and the nation did well as long as Jehoiada the High Priest was alive, but after Jehoiada died, Joash and the nation turned away from the Lord and back to idolatry.

I do not believe I am any different from any other believer whose soul is vexed by the spiritual and moral decline of our own nation over the last sixty years. There is very little resemblance of our nation now compared to when I was born in 1958. It is radically different from what it was when my children were born in the 1990's. As society has turned its back on God to worship other things, God has exhibited His wrath *against ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness* by turning society over to its own desires. The sexual revolution of the 1960's-1970's matches Romans 1:24 in which God gave them over to the lust of their hearts to impurity. Romans 1:26-27 matches the homosexual revolution of 1990's -2000's in which God gave them over to degrading

passions. Romans 1:28-32 matches the insanity of recent times in which God has given them over to depraved minds to do those things which are not proper. What is good is now called evil and what is evil is called good. Even logic has become irrelevant as the majority of lawyers on the U.S. Supreme Court could not even distinguish the biological reality that men are men and women are women and that is not interchangeable, so they forced an employer to abide by and affirm the mental illness of one of his employees.

This decline has occurred regardless of any movements to the contrary. I was grateful for the rise of the Moral Majority and the brief political reprieve in the 1980's, but society continued to decline even then because it was turning its back on God. The moral collapse of society has continued at an increasing pace as secularism and false religions replace Biblical Christianity in our land. That moral collapse in society corresponds to the theological collapse in churches. Too many churches that were at one time in the evangelical camp have been blown off course by the many winds of theological heresy over the last century. They are blowing strong again as the gospel of Christ is traded in for the gospel of marxist ideas of justice and equality even within churches that are supposed to be conservative.

I pray for our nation much the same way Abraham prayed for God's mercy on Sodom for the sake of the few remaining righteous that might be here. I fully recognize that this nation is doomed unless there is revival, even if only in the sense of a deliverer that would protect against evil oppressors. I do not know what will happen at the conclusion of next week's elections. I do know that based on the platform of the Democrat party, the only word that can properly describe it is evil. That is a not a political statement. It is a statement of moral judgment comparing what they state that is in absolute contradiction to what God states is righteous. If the Democrats gain control of the nation, we will be past the tipping point and there will not be a recovery. We can expect that Bible believing Christians will be one of their targets for oppression, and our evangelistic and missions efforts will become greatly hindered. For those reasons we pray for God's mercy to grant a deliverer.

At the same time, if the Democrats do not win, we can only count on a short reprieve unless God grants a different type of revival. Love of country and a strong desire to live in a moral society is emotionally motivating to pray for God to extend His mercy and grace to this nation, however, my quest must be much more radical than just a moral resurgence that would make life more pleasant. I am to pray for a true revival which would glorify God, and only such a spiritual revival would change the character of the people.

True Revival

I have already pointed out that there is wide range of ideas that have been described as a revival, so what do I mean when I speak of a true revival that would glorify God? Citations in Ian Murray's book *"Revival and Revivalism"* explains. In 1712 Solomon Stoddard described revival as *"some special seasons wherein God doth in a remarkable manner revive religion among His people."* Jonathan Edwards later described the Great Awakening as a *"surprising work of God."* Abel Stevens commented in 1867 in his history of American Methodism that its success was due to *"power from on high,"* an *"unction from the Holy One."* In short, revivals came unexpectedly as God moved powerfully upon His people resulting in them living in greater holiness and service of His kingdom, and in the Holy Spirit convicting sinners to repent and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.

We see several clear examples of this in Acts beginning with the Day of Pentecost in which about three thousand were saved and baptized (Acts 2:41). It continued as *"the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved"* (Acts 2:47). A short time later about five thousand believe after Peter's second sermon (Acts 4:4). Acts 5:14 comments after God's judgment of Ananias and Sapphira that *"and all the more believers in the Lord, multitudes of men and women, were constantly added to their number."* The apostles are imprisoned, flogged and released in Acts 5, and a problem with the distribution of food had to be resolved in the beginning of Acts 6, but this did not slow

things down with verse 7 stating, “*and the word of God kept on spreading; and the number of the disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem.*” The persecution that broke out in Acts 8 subsides when Paul became a Christian in Acts 9 with verse 31 noting that the church continued to increase, except now it was also in Judea, Galilee and Samaria. In Acts 11:19-26 a largely Gentile church in Antioch is established when “*a large number who believed turned to the Lord.*” The rest of Acts records Paul’s missionary journeys and the result of churches being established nearly everywhere that he went. Acts 19:18-20 even records the Ephesian believers burning their books of witchcraft which had a high monetary value.

There have been many such true revivals throughout history which vary in scope and time. Some may be limited to a city or region and continue for a relatively short time in which churches in that area grow to new plateaus, but then level off. Many missions efforts in the 20th Century witnessed nearly everyone in the tribe turning to Christ. New Tribes Mission, now ethnos360.org, has recorded many such stories such as that the Mouk and Menya peoples of Papua New Guinea. But even such limited revivals do not remain contained because those who have a new understanding and walk with Christ will go other places and preach the gospel with effect, though the results are not as dramatic as where the revival had taken place.

Other revivals start small and then spread rapidly. The Great Awakening began in 1734 in Northampton, MA and was spreading throughout New England by 1735. It had spread to the Southern colonies in the 1740's. The revival that began in Logan County, Kentucky in 1800 spread to the neighboring states and throughout the frontier region of that time. Revivals that broke out in other areas, such as Yale in 1802, give this period of time the title of the Second Great Awakening. Another revival period began in New York City in 1857 with a prayer meeting of just six people. It rapidly built from there spreading up the Hudson, along the Mohawk and beyond. It also crossed the Atlantic to the British Isles, South Africa and India. It had an effect for 40 years.

All of these were surprising works of God that began with the faithfulness of a few in preaching, teaching and praying during time periods when spiritual indolence was widespread. They were all marked by genuine conviction of sin and repentance leading to lives marked by holiness. They occurred due to the work of the Holy Spirit and not manipulation by men, and so were also focused on the glory of God and not the reputation of people.

While we would be grateful if God would in mercy to our nation grant a deliverer by which there would be a moral resurgence, the true desire is to see God bring about another revival. That is a prayer that continues regardless of the outcome of the elections in any year.

Revivalism

At this point I need to make a distinction between true revival and its counterfeit known as revivalism which developed in the later part of the 1800's. John Kent describes it as “*a method of obtaining (at least in appearance) the external signs of conviction, repentance and rebirth.*” Seasons of genuine revival gave way to “revival meetings” run by a revivalist. These methods could generate a lot of religious excitement, and certainly there would be changes in the lives of some because of the preaching of God’s word, but far too often the responses were those of emotions which died down instead of the genuine heart change that comes when the Holy Spirit convicts and fills. Charles Finney (1792-1875) was a promoter of revivalism which ended up leaving large areas as “*burned over ground*” in which people who had been initially emotionally affected then turned against the gospel and became hardened to Christianity.

This distinction must be made because if we are going to pray for revival, we should know for what we are actually praying. A restoration by God of the nation back to a moral character it once had is not enough. Seeing bored church pew sitters get excited to do something in the Lord’s service for a while is not enough. Having sinners make professions of faith that will be questionable within a year is not

enough. We do not pray for revival for some short term gain. We pray for revival for permanent transformation in the lives of individuals. Praying for revival is beseeching God to do His radical work of making the dead alive in Christ (Eph. 2:4-10) and animating the spiritually dull to live as lights in the world for the glory of Christ (Eph. 5:7-10). How would you know any of that is true if what we think are the outward signs of the Spirit's working are actually the manipulation of people's emotions by religious promoters.

Praying for Revival

Praying for revival requires a radically different purpose and manner of prayer than what is all too common among too many professing Christians who pray to consume it upon their own lust as we are warned against in James 4:3 instead of Jesus' pattern for prayer in Matthew 6:9-10. Our praise, prayers and petitions are to be to our Father who is in heaven for the purpose that His name would be hallowed with longing for His kingdom to come and yearning to see His will done on earth as it is in heaven. Such prayer requires having your own desires transformed to match those of the Lord. It demands a humility that places the focus on God's glory so that your own is irrelevant. It means petitioning God for the benefit of others instead of yourself.

Here are some of the characteristics that would mark praying for genuine revival.

* Humble confession of known sin is first because if you regard iniquity in your heart, the Lord will not hear you (Psalm 66:18). Confession puts you back into a proper relationship with Him (1 John 1:9).

*Pray Psalm 139:23-24, ²³ *“Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me and know my anxious thoughts; ²⁴ And see if there be any hurtful way in me, And lead me in the everlasting way.”* Revival will demand that those seeking it walk in a manner worthy of their calling by Christ. This will bring out any sin of which you were unaware so that it can also be confessed and you can pursue personal holiness. If you become aware that you have wronged someone else, go make it right with them if at all possible (Matt. 5:23-24). We seek to be at peace with all men so far as it depends on us (Romans 12:18). That is part of the proper response to sin that becomes known to you.

*Praise God for His various characteristics, attributes and His work that enables sinners to be reconciled to Him and become His children. Such praise is due to Him and it gives confidence to come before Him in prayer - Hebrews 4:14-16; 10:19.

*Ask God to give you a greater understanding of Himself and draw you ever closer to Him. The quest is to know the Lord. Revival arises in answer to that quest.

*Pray for the Lord's name to be magnified in all that you do without concern that anyone even knows your name. If God knows your name, that is enough, and the rewards that you should desire are those that will be received when you reach heaven (1 Cor. 3:12-15; 1 Peter 5:4). Be humble and leave any exaltation in God's hands as He determines what is best as stated in 1 Peter 5:6. Revival is about God's fame, not your name.

*Thank God for whatever gifts, ministry and abilities that you have since all of them come from Him, and then also thank Him for what He has given to other people. All of these come from God as He decides for the common good and maturity of the whole body (Eph. 4:11-16; 1 Cor. 12:4-11). A mark of revival is churches functioning in the unity of the spirit with the people working in harmony with one another. Such churches will mature and fulfill God's purpose. Jealousy is contrary revival because it is in opposition to ministry of the Holy Spirit and it will quickly destroy a church. Revival is the display of God at work through His people, so thank Him for whatever part He gives you within the body.

*Praise God whenever you hear of the growth of sound gospel preaching and Bible teaching churches even when you are in one that is struggling or even shrinking. The Spirit moves as He desires (John 3:8) and Christ builds His church (Matt. 16:18), so it is up to the Lord when and where He works. History demonstrates that it has been common for God to bring revival to one area while others remain static or in decline such as the area here in New York. I long to hear of other local churches doing well and I am greatly encouraged by news of the out pouring of God's Spirit even when it is in distant places. Revival is about God's kingdom, not my own, so He is to be praised for whatever work He is doing wherever He is doing it. It is one reason for giving you missions updates - reminding you to pray for our missionaries and praise God for what He is doing through them.

*Pray for others the same way Paul did for those he ministered to as recorded in Ephesians 1:15-19, Philippians 1:9-11, Colossians 1:9-12 and 2 Thessalonians 1:11-12. Too often our prayers are focused on the surface issues of the temporal troubles people face instead of the underlying issues that would bring peace to those troubles. Pray that God would grant that the people would know the fulness of Christ, what He has done and has promised. Pray they would be filled with spiritual understanding and wisdom necessary to walk in a manner pleasing to the Lord and bearing spiritual fruit in keeping with such a walk and that He would strengthen them to do so. Pray they would live in such a way that Jesus would be glorified in them. A mark of revival is God's people living in a manner that reflects the truth of that relationship.

*Plead with the Lord for the salvation of souls as the Holy Spirit does His ministry of convicting the world of sin, righteousness and judgment (John 16:8-11) and quickens the souls of those dead in transgressions and sin to believe (Eph. 2:5). And as much as we desire for the Lord to return quickly, we regard the patience of our Lord in each day that He tarries to be salvation for it gives time for yet another sinner to repent (2 Peter 3:15). Revival expands as sinners become saints.

Praying for revival is radical because true revival is radical. It encompasses Christians who have become discouraged or complacent to be renewed to spiritual vibrancy and those spiritually dead being awakened to life. While both of these are common in normal Christian experience, revival is an outpouring of God's spirit in a surprising manner for a special season. May we be careful to praise the Lord when we hear of such seasons of His grace being poured out in other areas, and May He be gracious to grant such a season in our own midst as well for His own glory.

Sermon Notes - 11/1/2020
Prayer & Revival - Selected Scriptures

Introduction

Words for Revival

“Revive” - root meaning: “to live again”

חַיָּה /chayah: Restore life - 2 Kings 13:21. Return of physical strength - Judges 15:19.

Renewal of spirit - Genesis 45:27. Regaining motivation - Psalm 119:93

ζάω / zaō: restore life - Romans 14:9. ἀναζάω / Anazaō: metaphorical restore life - Luke 15:24

ἀναθάλλω / anathallō: Restore to active state, Phil. 4:10. ἀναπαύω / anatauō: Refresh spirit, 1 Cor. 16:18

ἀναψύχω / anapsychō: Refresh spirit, 2 Tim. 1:16. συζωοποιέω / syzōpoieō: make alive together, Eph 2:5

Revivals of Moral Resurgence

Societal moral decline and suffering motivates _____ for a return

Judges - what happens when men do “what is right in their own eyes”

Decline due to _____ obedience (1:1-2:5); rise of idolatry (2:6-3:4), intermarriage with heathen (3:5-6)

America declined as _____ declined in obedience to God, taught false doctrine, catered to man’s desires

Forsake the Lord → oppression → repentance → _____ → peace → repeat

Generational - Judges 2:7. Leadership based - 2 Chronicles 24

American decline & Romans 1 - God’s increasing wrath yield people to their lusts

1:24 - 1960's & sexual impurity. 1:26-27 - 1990's & degrading passions. 1:28-32 - 2010's & depraved minds

Moral collapse in society corresponds to the _____ collapse in churches

America is _____ unless God mercifully grants a deliverer - which will give a short term reprieve

True Revival

A special season of _____ moving powerfully resulting in repentance, increased holiness & salvations

Revivals in Acts: Jerusalem (2-8). Judea / Galilee / Samaria (9). Antioch (11). Gentile Missions (13-21)

History records both small and limited as well as widespread and enduring revivals

The Great Awakening (1734), The Second Great Awakening (1800), NY City (1857)

Surprising works of God that started with a _____ few & spread bringing repentance, holiness & salvation

Revivalism

Developed in the later part of 1800's as a method of obtaining _____ signs - revival meetings & revivalists

Promoted by Charles Finney (1792-1875) resulting in “burned over ground”

We are praying for more than a _____ moral resurgence and religious emotionalism

We beseech God to make the dead _____ in Christ & the spiritually dull into bright lights to His glory

Praying for Revival

We pray for God's name to be _____, His kingdom to come and His will to be done (Matt. 6:9-10)

Humble _____ - Psalm 66:18, 1 John 1:9

For God to _____ sin - Psalm 139:23-24. To be reconciled with others (Romans 12:18)

_____ God for His attributes and work - which gives confidence in prayer (Heb. 4:14-16; 10:19)

To gain greater understanding of God and walk close to Him. Revival is about _____ the Lord

For the Lord's name to be magnified - Revival is about God's _____, not your name

_____ for the gifts, ministry and abilities God gives to you - and to others, so the whole body matures

Praise for reports of God's working anywhere - revival is about God's _____, not your own

Praying for _____ as did Paul (Eph. 1:15-19; Phil. 1:9-11; Col. 1:9-12; 2 Thess. 1:11-12)

Plead with the Lord for the _____ of others - conviction of sin (Jn 16:8-11), quickening of souls (Eph 2:5)

Conclusions

Revival is an outpouring of God's spirit in a _____ manner for a special season

_____ Him when you hear about it happening

_____ for it to be granted

KIDS KORNER

Young Children - draw a picture about something you hear during the sermon. Explain your picture(s) to your parents at lunch. **Older Children** - Do one or more of the following: 1) Count how many times the word "revival" is said. 2) Discuss with your parents the characteristics of a true revival - pray with them for it.

THINK ABOUT IT. Questions to consider in contemplating the sermon or discussing it with others. Discuss the meaning of the word "revival" - English, Hebrew, Greek. Why does moral decline in a society cause an increased motivation to pray for revival? What is the purpose of the book of Judges? How is that book a caution to those with Libertarian views? What were the three main causes for the failure of the theocracy (Judges 1-3:6)? What has been the relationship between the strength of America and the health of its churches? How does the decline in America (and its churches) parallel the failures in the theocracy? What were the repeating elements in the cycles in Judges? What factors might explain whether the nation would stay true to the Lord for generations or only a short time? The decline in American society demonstrate God's wrath as detailed in Romans 1:18-32. Can you draw parallels in each step of decline in Romans with a time period / cultural change in American society? What is the evidence we are now in the final stage - depravity of mind? Why hasn't victory of conservative politicians been able to stop the moral decline? What is the cause of the moral decline? What do you think will happen if the Democrats win the national elections in 2020? Why? What is a true revival and what are its major characteristics? What true revivals are recorded in the book of Acts? What are some true revivals you are aware of in history? Why are some revivals small and limited in scope and others grow to be widespread and enduring? What is revivalism? How does it differ from true revival? Consider the points made above about praying for revival - and then spend time praying in that manner.