



## RECOGNIZING REVIVAL

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Good morning to you. It's good to be with you for our half-hour of bible study time and I'm delighted you've joined me to consider the word of God. You won't have any trouble finding a preacher or an elder or simply many Christians who will say "we need a revival." Such has been a persistent and common theme of the pulpit down through the stream of time. Some suggest the church throughout America needs revival. They might point to their own congregation and say that church is dead and in need of revival. Perhaps, you might say that of your own life or of the life of some nominal church member who seems unmotivated and unconcerned about the things of Christ and the work of the Kingdom. I think it's safe to say that we do need a revival in many places, in many things, and in many lives today. A revival is a wonderful thing in the eyes of God, and we should rejoice when we see one occur in our own life or in the lives of others. It's scriptural to pray that revival might take place.

In the verse I wish to read as our scripture text today, in Psalm 85:6, the writer prays: ***"Will You not revive us again, That Your people may rejoice in You?"*** Revival is not only bible theme, but also it is often needed and necessary. But just what is a revival? Would we know a true revival if one took place? I'm not concerned about the impression something leaves us with or merely the emotions an event may generate. We should be concerned with what God calls a revival and what a revival, according to the word of God looks like. So, today, I would like for us to consider the subject: Recognizing Revival.

The word 'revive' simply means to live or to bring back to life or a state of health. It can mean to awaken. That, of course, would imply that one needs a revival because they are either asleep, sick, or even dead. When a person drifts away from God and their relationship to Him grows distant and strained or even severed, he or she needs to be revived. I think any of us who have been Christians for very long have experienced times in our life when, for one reason or another, our faith needed reviving. We needed to be brought back. Jesus told the Ephesian church in Revelation 2 that they had left their first love and needed to repent and do "the first works". In other words, they needed a revival of their love and their zeal for Christ. Jesus warned that if such a revival did not take place, they would face His

judgment and their candlestick would be removed. Such a cycle has often repeated with God's people throughout time.

We read of several "revivals" in the word of God, particularly in the Old Testament, when faith was at a low ebb and the people had neglected the law of God and even turned to the worship of other gods. God would send some prophet to stir them up and call them back and oftentimes, his preaching would spark a revival, bringing about repentance, and at least for a time, reformation. Few people who profess to be Christians today would say they don't think there is a need for revival. I think most of us would agree that's the case. We certainly need an awakening to eternal and spiritual matters across the land today. We need a revival of respect for the word of God and a revival of obedience to God in the religious community today. Many a congregation needs a revival of commitment and zeal for the things of Christ and His kingdom. That's obvious by the empty pews and the struggling churches we see in nearly every community. We need to "strengthen the things that are ready to die", as Jesus admonished the church at Sardis to do in Revelation 3 as the fires of persecution and difficulty were closing in around them. And we hear many calls for revival and from time to time see claims that revivals are taking place. I rejoice when anybody begins to pay attention to matters of the soul and turns their attention toward God. But what does an actual revival consist of? What does it result in? What causes a true revival to take place? If we desire revival; if we pray for revival; if we hope for revival; I believe it's important that we know how to recognize a revival when it occurs. A revival is not an inexplicable and overwhelming experience. It is not something that mysteriously sweeps over people. A revival is more objectively described by the word of God than that. And we should know what leads to one taking place and what it looks like when it does.

There have been many times through the ages when there was a great need for people to be awakened or revived. We can read of several revivals in the Old Testament, and each time revival took place, it was needed because of one or more things. Unrepented of sin, of course, always calls for a revival of fidelity of God. There were times when the nation of Israel was lured into idolatry and all its accompanying sins and fleshly indulgences. And it became necessary for God to discipline them, and He would send His prophets to them to warn them of what was to come and to repent and return to Him. There were times when the people of God who were supposed to be separated and consecrated to the Lord became worldly and like the pagan nations around them. This too called for a revival of holiness and separation from the unbelieving world. Oft times it was ignorance of the law of God that led the people to such a condition that a revival was called for. And then, the people sometimes fell into a state of indifference and began to neglect the worship and service of God. They forsook His holy days and those observances that were commanded by God, and it was the priority of the prophets of God to awaken the people to their duty and bring about a revival of steadfast service. These are the kinds of revivals that were needed all throughout the Old Testament and that sometimes took place, and they're the kinds of revivals we need today, as well. Let's look at few examples of such revivals and see if we can learn what a revival consists of.

First, I want us to look at a period of revival that took place in ancient Judah during her dying days. The glory days of the Davidic and Solomonic empire are long past, the nation has long since been divided into the northern and southern kingdoms and a series of wicked kings in Israel had led to the rejection and destruction of the northern tribes. Only Judah in the south remained to carry out God's purposes. But Judah went through a troubling and destructive cycle of wicked kings as well. Now, Hezekiah was a good king and followed the Lord and accomplished a great deal of good for Judah but all of that was undone by his wicked son Manasseh, who took the throne when Hezekiah died. Manasseh worshipped numerous idols and led Judah down the path of ultimate destruction. God sent several anonymous

prophets to warn them of God's wrath, but Manasseh continued to do evil in the sight of God. It wasn't until late in his reign that Manasseh was carried away captive by the Assyrians that he had a change of heart and repented of his sins and tried to clean up the mess he had made. But the damage was done.

Shortly thereafter, Manasseh's son Amon became king, and the bible says that Amon forsook the God of his fathers, and he started worshipping the gods of the nations around him. Now, he only reigned for two years and then Josiah became king. Now, Josiah was a good man. He was very young when he became king, as was sometimes the case in those days, but Josiah wanted to be a godly king and he wanted to set Judah's course aright and he set out to reform the nation and a period of revival took place under his watch. We read about it beginning in 2 Kings chapter 22. In the eighth year of his reign, he began to seek after God, and he launched a revival that quickly gained momentum and resulted in Judah being spared judgment for a little while. What led to that revival and what did it look like when it happened? Well, for one thing, Josiah realized the temple of God was in a state of disrepair and he wanted it restored. He appointed a committee who gathered the money and made sure the much-needed work commenced. So, there was already an awakening to the need for revival.

But something remarkable happened that led to a great change in the nation. In 2 Kings 22:8-13 we read that some workers were repairing the temple when in one of the rooms Hilkiah found a strange scroll. It was a scroll containing the Law of Moses. It was perhaps, the "book of the law" that Moses had commanded be kept by the Ark of the Covenant long before, but regardless, it contained the law they were supposed to be worshipping and living by. Hilkiah handed it over to a scribe named Shaphan and he read enough of it to know that it was important and valuable and so he took it to King Josiah and read it to him. What Josiah heard the law read, he was overcome by what he heard. He realized how far the people had drifted away from the word of God and he tore his garments as a sign of his sorrow, and he ordered his people to go through the scroll and to decipher and discern the message within it. When they did, they found they were guilty of breaking the commandments of God and that they were neglecting the rightful observance of the law of God. In verse 13, Josiah orders them: "Go, inquire of the LORD for me, for the people and for all Judah, concerning the words of this book that has been found; for great is the wrath of the LORD that is aroused against us, because our fathers have not obeyed the words of this book, to do according to all that is written concerning us." Well, they learned that the fires of God's judgment were smoldering against them but Josiah would be spared the judgment that would eventually come because of what God said to Him in verses 19-20: "because your heart was tender, and you humbled yourself before the LORD when you heard what I spoke against this place and against its inhabitants, that they would become a desolation and a curse, and you tore your clothes and wept before Me, I also have heard you," says the LORD. Surely, therefore, I will gather you to your fathers, and you shall be gathered to your grave in peace; and your eyes shall not see all the calamity which I will bring on this place..."

Now, this was more than just King Josiah being emotionally moved by the scroll. This was much deeper than a fleeting and momentary awakening of Josiah's conscience. Starting in chapter 23, we read of all the reforms that Josiah enacted. He called a national assembly and renewed the covenant that they had so grossly sinned against. He ordered the temple to be cleansed of any trace of paganism and false worship. He removed the pagan priests who had found their way into the temple during the dark days of Manasseh. He cleaned up the immorality that was being practiced around the temple. The ark of the covenant was restored to its rightful place in the temple. They began to observe the Passover again which they had long since neglected. You see, this revival centered on the discovery and reading of God's word and a resolve to obey it. And it resulted in change in the behavior and the worship of Josiah and the people. Now, unfortunately, Josiah's revival didn't last very long. God's judgment was later

meted out but because Josiah's heart was pricked by the reading of the word of God and he repented and changed his ways, God spared him and kept him from seeing judgment.

Well, the people were eventually carried away to Babylon and the temple and the city of Jerusalem were overrun and destroyed. But after their long exile, God allowed His people to return. And it's then we read of another revival taking place. This time, it involved Nehemiah and the scribe Ezra. Nehemiah prayed for the restoration of his people and God answered his prayers. If you read his prayers in the first chapters of the Book of Nehemiah, one thing Nehemiah did when he approached God was confess his sins. He included himself when He confessed to the Lord that the people had broken His commandments and had done evil. He wanted to repent and for there to be a restoration of Jerusalem. God heard his prayers and Nehemiah led the charge to rebuild the broken-down and burned walls of Jerusalem. He withstood the opposition from without and within and organized and led the work.

When the work of rebuilding the walls was complete, I want us to see what happened according to Nehemiah chapter 8. Now, this was a true revival that swept over the land, and I want you to see what caused it and what it led to. The bible says they gathered all the people together in front of the Water Gate on the east side of the city, they constructed a pulpit of wood, and they requested the priest and scribe Ezra to stand up and read the law of God to them. That's interesting because we haven't heard anything out of Ezra for many years. They had rejected Ezra and his narrow preaching many years before. But now, they want to hear from him. Notice, they wanted to hear the ancient law of the Lord read to them.

Now, friend, anytime a revival takes place today, people are going to want to hear the ancient word of God just like they did. You see, revival implies a bringing back and a restoration. Now listen to what happened in Nehemiah 8, beginning in verse 2. It says "So Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly of men and women and all who could hear with understanding on the first day of the seventh month. Then he read from it in the open square that was in front of the Water Gate from morning until midday, before the men and women and those who could understand; and the ears of all the people were attentive to the Book of the Law." And verse 8 says: "So they read distinctly from the book, in the Law of God; and they gave the sense and helped them to understand the reading." What took place that day caused them to confess and forsake their sins and to renew their resolve to keep their covenant with God.

You see, my friend, a revival is not an event or meeting (although revival can certainly be sparked by something that is said or done in a meeting). Meetings can be wonderful, but they don't mean a revival has taken place. A revival is not a rush of emotion (though repentance and renewal of our relationship with God is something to be overjoyed about). Revival runs much deeper than excitement (though the result of revival will include a zeal for the things of God). And friend, revival is not something we wait around for the Holy Spirit to bring. Yes, the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of life and revival comes from the Spirit of God, but the Spirit of God brings that revival through the Word of God which He inspired and gave us. The Word of God is His instrument of revival. The preaching of that word is what causes revival. And obedience to that word is the result of that revival.

You see, when we look at revivals in the bible (and there are many others we could cite if we had the time today) they have some things in common. 1) A revival begins and ends with the preaching of the Word of God. The Word is what convicts a person (not an abstract and indescribable move of the Holy Spirit but the Word the Spirit has given). And that conviction brought by the Word leads to a commitment to OBEY that Word. 2) A true revival always involves a frank and honest confession of our

sins. 3) A true revival always results in repentance or a turning from sin which results in a change in our conduct. And 4) Revival always results in a return to the Word of God and a restoration of the divine order. That's the kind of revival we need today. That kind of revival needs to sweep across our hearts and across our churches and across the land today.

The problem we oftentimes encounter though is that some get caught up in an emotionally soaked experience or perhaps meeting and conclude that revival has taken place. But we don't test the word of God by experiences; we test experiences by the word of God. Some even equate a biblically based religion as cold and dead. Yes, some treat the bible that way. And seeking bible knowledge just for the sake of knowledge can even be a dangerous thing! But friend, you get into and devote yourself to the Word of God with a sincere, seeking, repenting, submitting spirit, and this book will transform your life. Hebrews 4:12 says this book "is living and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword..." Get back into the word of God and it will spark a revival of your faith and it will cause you to return to the true worship of God and a life of steadfast and growing faith, and obedience to the will of God.

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