

NCF 28th August 2016

Revival: Taking and Passing on the Baton, Conclusion

Why do revivals stop?

1 Welsh Revival – talk about what it is like now back home.

2 Josiah's Revival – talk through Josiah's story & his sons/Habakkuk & Zephaniah's reality.

Experiences vs. life

Do revivals stop because they seem to be an experience rather than a lifestyle? The stories all tell of big experiences in which people are caught up in. Whether it is the large, Spirit filled meetings, the sudden changes in behaviour, the outward reforms, building bigger buildings to accommodate, the miraculous etc. – these are all genuine experiences, people are caught up in them and meet Jesus and are forever changed.

Yet these heights never last long, Josiah's great revival didn't survive his death, the Welsh revival was only a year. Normal life gradually takes over and begins to overwhelm the experiences. The big "events" don't become a part of lifestyles – they change everything but then fade. This is true on both the individual level and the corporate – we have our own personal revivals, we go to a conference or big meeting and have a life changing experience, or something dramatic happens in our lives that brings us suddenly close to God and all the rest fades away. These experiences change us, fire us up, make us look at everything in new ways, our relationship with God and those around us is transformed. And then, slowly but surely life begins to grab our attention. Normal life distracts us, pulls us back "down to earth"

We may be genuinely a different person after these events, but not as radically as we thought we would be. And it is amazing how quickly we forget...

I think if this teaches us anything it is that in the long run lifestyle will always beat the big experiences. So, perhaps the key in sustaining the heart of revival is not to try and keep the experiences going, but to instead make the truths of the experiences become a part of normal life. A revived lifestyle rather than a revival.

If lifestyle is more powerful and longer lasting, then it is more likely to be passed on to generations to come. Taking up the baton would mean beginning to make the truths of revival an everyday part of our normal life and routine, you could almost say you have to make the exciting experience become mundane, every day, habitual, normal. And if these lifestyles work, if they continue to change us and influence the world around us – then passing on the baton becomes easier. We don't have to pass on the big meetings, the miracles, the experiences – but we pass on a life that is filled with what those experiences taught us. This might not be big, exciting, but it will last and in the end have a greater impact. Because if a revived lifestyle makes for

lasting change in our own lives, then it becomes something that others would want as part of their normal lives too.

What truths have we learnt as we have looked at revivals, what has God been showing us?

We've looked at Scripture and the examples in the Old and New Testaments, how God has used people in the past to revive Israel & the Church – and from those examples we have seen the truth of Scripture can be applied to our own life.

Truths such as the importance of Prayer for example:

Prayer seems to be at the heart of every revival story, tales of all night prayer meetings, or groups praying every day for a town or nation until something big happened. So the simple truth that can become part of everyday normal lives, is that prayer works, it changes things. If we want a revived lifestyle, then we need to pray. Prayer needs to become as ordinary as cooking meals, doing the laundry, driving the car – i.e. everyday activities that we do without thinking, that are a part of life, of our routine. We don't wait until we are passing out with hunger before we go into the kitchen and make a meal, we just eat breakfast, lunch, dinner every day. So should it be with prayer, not waiting until we really need it.

And also we've also looked at the power of Unity.

The focus on the Holy Spirit.

The call to Holiness.

The importance of Repentance.

The knowledge that God is with us.

The Life of Paul – big experiences and normal life

I want us to look a little at the life of Paul, as I think he is a dramatic example of someone who went through big experiences with God but rather than normal life dragging him back, he made his normal life full of Jesus, made the truths he learned a part of him. And he also passed them on, he was never shy of saying to people "learn from me and my life, follow my example"

Paul's normal Christian life began in a very dramatic way – he had the original Damascus Road experience! Jesus speaking directly to him, blinding him, healing him – his life was completely turned around. And it was these big experiences that introduced him to Jesus, made him realise who Jesus was, and that rather than persecuting his followers he needed to serve him, his King.

And then the story stops for a while. Paul doesn't have these big life-changing experiences and then charge out and change the world. Instead he disappears from

the story, and we learn from Acts and Galatians that about 14 years passed between his dramatic conversion and the beginning of his missionary journeys. 14 years... No one is quite sure what he was doing, or where he was (Arabia?) during those years. But the Paul that emerges and travels to Cypress and Galatia, is a man who has made Jesus a part of his normal, everyday life. He met his King on the way to Damascus, and then he spent 14 years learning how to be a subject of his new King (probably spent a lot of time unlearning things!)

The man we see in Acts, and in his letters is not someone who has a Damascus experience everyday (though we certainly see the miraculous in his life and ministry), but someone whose life and words reflect Jesus. People are drawn to him because he lives it. We read in his letters of how he considers everything else (including his Jewish heritage) as nothing compared to knowing Christ. His identity is in Jesus, and his gift is being able to explain it to others (especially Gentiles). He lives to reveal the great mystery – how all nations are a part of God’s family in Christ.

One amazing aspect of this comes up in 2 Corinthians 12, when he talks about two experiences in his life – one a dramatic miraculous visions of heaven that he experienced, the other an everyday pain and trial (his thorn in the flesh) that he prayed to be healed of but God did not miraculously heal. Big experience and normal life, the man whose Christian life began with healing asked for healing every day, and every day God said no. But that didn’t stop his life changing those around him. God may not have healed him, but he used him to heal others. Everywhere this man went his Jesus focused lifestyle made an impact, sometimes in dramatic ways (riots, beatings, trials...) but mostly in normal everyday ways (speaking in synagogues and people’s homes, writing letters...). And everywhere he went, Churches sprang up – communities of people who wanted the same as him. To know the Jesus he showed them, and to follow his example of living like Christ.

He had taken up the baton on the road to Damascus – but then he spent time to make it a part of him. Made the truth he had experienced a part of his everyday lifestyle. And it was this lifestyle that others saw and wanted for themselves. He passed on the baton by being an example of what people could be like if they too followed Jesus.

People like Timothy. This young man saw in Paul who he could be. Timothy followed Paul’s example, learnt from him. So much so that in Philippians Paul says that he has no one like Timothy – who genuinely seeks Jesus’ interests not his own. Timothy is held up as Paul’s greatest example of someone who followed his example of living like Jesus.

One of the most moving glimpses of this relationship is the book of 2 Timothy. Paul’s last letter that he writes in prison awaiting execution, his last letter to the man he thinks of as his son and heir. In it Paul writes of how he was ready to go, how he had run the race, fought the good fight and was ready to now be with Christ. But he also speaks a lot to Timothy, urging him to carry on in the life he had learned from Paul.

To keep following his example when he was gone – to take the baton from Paul and run with it.

Paul loved writing lists – his letters are full of them – and here in 2 Timothy 3:10-4:5 we have another. A list urging Timothy to continue in a lifestyle he learned from Paul.

10 You, however, have followed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness, my persecutions and sufferings that happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, and at Lystra-which persecutions I endured; yet from them all the Lord rescued me. Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, while evil people and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.

But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths. As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry. - 2 Timothy 3:10—4:5

It was through men like Paul and Timothy, through the lives of the 12 Apostles and those who followed them that the “revival” begun by Jesus and continued by the 12 & Paul etc. did not die or fade away. The big experiences of the Gospels and Acts became a way of living. The truth that Jesus taught, the teaching and lives of his followers, the Gospel message became an everyday part of people’s lives in the Early Church. The Gospel became normal life and so it did not fade, but lasted and was passed on. Timothy’s generation continued that life, lived it and then passed it on to the next and so on...

But of course, even the incredible truth of the Gospel can get a bit too normal, too much taken for granted. And so, from time to time God has revived his Church. He has drawn their attention once again to the incredible truth in the normal Christian life. And as you look at all the revivals, awakenings, reformations throughout Church History – they all seem to be God reminding the Church of who they are. Bringing them back to something about themselves that they have forgotten.

So revivals focus on prayer – reminding the Church that they are in a relationship with God they need to talk to him, to hear his voice, to follow his lead.

Revivals that focus on Scripture – bringing the Church back to the Word of God, the truth of God’s covenants with Humanity, who he is, who we are, the message of the Gospel, God’s ways that we are to follow – and above all the revelation & witness of Jesus, our King.

Revivals that focus on the Holy Spirit – reminding the Church that God lives within us, that the Holy Spirit guides us, strengthens us, leads us closer to Jesus. That through him we can bring God’s presence to this world.

Revivals that focus on unity – reminding the Church that they are one in Christ, that Jesus came to unite the world in one family – not to divide it.

Revivals that focus on Holiness – to remind the Church that they may part of this world but they are not of it. They are called to be different and God is different – to be set apart, to live lives according to God’s standards not the worlds.

Revivals that focus on repentance – to remind the Church of the seriousness of sin, the power of repentance and the greatness of God’s forgiveness – so that the Church can truly share a message of forgiveness as they know it themselves.

So, in the end, are revivals just God getting our attention so he can remind us who we are?

So that we can live like Christ.

So that we can continue his work.

So that we can bring God’s presence to a needy world?

The experience of revival teaches us great truths, but even greater is when that truth becomes a part of our lives. Revived lives – lives empowered by the Holy Spirit, based on God’s word, lives of prayer, in unity with our Christian brothers & sisters, lives of holiness, of repentance, lives full of the presence of God.