

`Sermon 3rd July 2016

Revival

What do we mean by revival?

Duncan Campbell of the Lewis revival asked this question: " Revival is not the church filled with people it is the church filled with God"

What did he mean?

Is revival filling our churches full of people by whatever means we can, be it special meetings, "big name " preachers, high profile worship bands etc. or is it, as Duncan Campbell and I believe it is, getting onto our knees and seeking God to bring a fresh outpouring of His power and authority not only over our church but also those around us as well.

When you look into the history of revivals over the years two things in particular strike me about each and every one of them:

Firstly every one of them started with prayer. Not necessarily massive prayer meetings but rather a small group of Christians who believed that God had called them to pray for a fresh outpouring of His might and power from heaven upon his people. Not as a one off "special " prayer meeting but persistent prayer over a period, determined by God not man, and to keep praying until God answers the cry of our hearts. Some of these intercessors for revival prayed for weeks, some for months and some for many years before God answered their appeals. We have no right to demand that God brings revival to us at a particular time but we are promised in

2 Chronicles 7:14 that:

"If my people who are called by my name shall humble themselves and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and heal their land"

Note this is talking about us, Christians, called by God's name, not the world outside; so the first thing we need to acknowledge is where we are in our relationship with God and address any issues we may have with God and with each other because as we are told in Psalm 133v1 &3b

"How good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity! For there the Lord bestows His blessing, even life forevermore."

Secondly we need to humble ourselves, not before men but before God, we need to restore the fear of God which has to a large extent disappeared from the modern church, such that we take seriously who God is and what He expects of us rather than doing just enough in the hope that it will satisfy Him.

Note also that we are required to humble ourselves before we pray and seek His face. The implication here seems to be that we need to be in as pure a state as we can be before we pray for revival and seek God's face with no or as few as possible barriers between us and God.

Psalm 24 is acknowledged as both a call for revival and an instruction manual on how we can play our part in seeking God to bring it about and is worth repeating here:

"The earth is the Lord's and everything in it, the world and all who live in it; for He founded it upon the seas and established it upon the waters.

{establishing God's credentials as the Creator of all things}

Who may ascend the hill of the Lord? Who may stand in His holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift his soul to an idol or swear by what is false. He will receive blessing from the Lord and vindication from God his Saviour

{ note the similarities to 2 Chronicles 7:14}

Such is the generation of those who seek Him, who seek Your face O God of Jacob.

Lift up your heads, O you gates; be lifted up you ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in. Who is this King of Glory? The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle. Lift up your heads, O you gates; lift them up , you ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in. Who is He, this King of glory? The Lord Almighty - He is the King of Glory.

{ Matthew Henry comments: The splendid entry here described refers to the solemn bringing in of the Ark into the tent David pitched for it, or the Temple Solomon built for it. We may also apply it to the ascension of Christ into heaven, and the welcome given him there. We may apply it also to Christ's entrance into the souls of men by His word and Spirit that they may be His temples. Behold He stands at the door and knocks, Rev 3:20. The gates and the doors of the heart are to be opened to Him, as possession is delivered to the rightful owner.}

In other words the psalmist is appealing to God to return in glory and take His rightful place in the hearts of men. Something we should be doing if we are serious about wanting revival. Note appealing to, not demanding!

God's final requirement is that we turn from our wicked ways. There are countless examples of God's people turning away from Him in the Bible and going their own ways contrary to His will and having to come back in repentance before God can work with them or through them.

We cannot expect non-believers to see any reason to turn to Christ as their Saviour if they see us living our lives in exactly the same way as them.

Revival first and foremost is for the glory of God and the honour of His name. It is then for the church, the body of Christ and its individual members, so that they can be revived and brought back into a true and correct relationship with God and each other. Thirdly and as a result of the first two it is for those who are outside the Church, for the unsaved, that they come under deep and abiding conviction of sin and that they call upon the name of the Lord who saves them as the Spirit of God descends upon the land.

Duncan Campbell speaks of this when the Lewis revival took place in Scotland where many fell to their knees in the street under God's conviction and crime almost entirely disappeared but I'm sure John will speak more on that when he talks about British revivals. I had the privilege of

speaking to a pastor in Scotland while we were there who had spoken first hand to a lady who had come to the Lord in the Lewis revival. His question to her was not unnaturally,

" what was it like when the presence of God came down?"

Apparently the lady tried five times, with tears of joy streaming down her face, to put into words what she had experienced but was unable to find any words to describe the joy and peace she had felt. I don't think there will be any doubt if God chooses to bring revival to Nuneaton!

J. Edwin Orr, a twentieth century evangelist, revivalist and world renowned revival historian said, " In times of evangelism , the evangelist seeks the sinner, in times of revival the sinners come chasing after the Lord."

Selwyn Hughes also wrote," Evangelism is the expression of the church; revival is an experience of the Church. Evangelism is the work we do for God; revival is the work God does for us."

So over the coming weeks we shall be looking at the how, why and practicalities of revival but today I want to look at a few Old Testament revival incidents and explore them a little:

Firstly I want to look at 1 Samuel 7: 1-15.

The ark has been returned by the Philistines to the Jewish nation because wherever they took it , having captured it from the Jews, the place they left it underwent severe problems so in the end the Philistines returned it realising that the God of Jacob did not want them to possess it.

It was placed in a place called Kiriath Jearim and stayed there for twenty years. The Jews at this time as we read had drifted away from God and were worshipping false idols. During the twenty years the people of Israel "mourned and sought after the Lord"

Samuel gave them sound advice speaking prophetically and again we can see the similarity to what is said in 2 Chron7:14; he said,

"If you are returning to the Lord with all your hearts, then rid yourselves of the foreign gods and the Ashtoreth and commit yourselves to the Lord and serve Him only, and He will deliver you out of the hands of the Philistines"

So the Israelites put away their Baals and Ashtoreths and served the Lord only.

Samuel then brought them together and put them to prayer confessing their sins against God. As they were praying the Philistines gathered to attack them but Samuel continued to cry to the Lord and He heard and defeated the Philistines. The people then continued to worship God alone during Samuel's lifetime.

Note it took twenty years for God to bring revival to them. God is not in a hurry!

Let's look now at Elijah found in 1 Kings 18. We see here that praying for revival is not an undertaking to be taken lightly. It requires passion, persistence and patience and an ability to continue to trust God whatever is brought against us. Elijah firstly had to prophesy to King Ahab

that there would be drought in the land for some years until he, Elijah said so. He then had to trust God for the provision of food and drink which we read in Chapter 17 God did firstly by the brook at the Kerith Ravine for water and God also sent ravens to feed him both morning and evening. He then went to the widow at Zarephath where God replenished their supplies daily and Elijah raised her son from the dead such that she knew he was a man of God.

God after three years tells Elijah to go to Ahab and despite knowing that Jezebel through Ahab wants Elijah dead he trusts God and having met Ahab meets with the prophets of Baal at Mount Carmel having told Ahab that it is he and his family who have brought trouble on Israel by abandoning God's statutes and commands, he addresses the people and asks them to make their minds up either to follow Baal or God not try and serve two masters.

There then follows the well known story of the sacrifice of the bulls where the prophets of Baal illicit no response to their efforts but when Elijah prays to the Lord God He brings down fire and consumes everything that is there so ferocious is the fire.

On seeing this the people fell prostrate and declared that The Lord He is God! And they killed the prophets of Baal and the rain fell and they returned to worshipping God who had shown His awesome power to them.

There are I'm told another twelve examples in the Old Testament but I think these two are sufficient to show that God acts in God's way to bring revival in His time whether that be weeks, months or years. That those who are called to pray for revival need passion, persistence and patience combined with a total trust in God.

Revival is God's will for the church and He will deliver it as He desires not as we demand.

AMEN.

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