

The Why Of Revival: To Exalt And To Glorify God

By Stephen F. Olford

There may be many reasons why we need revival – but the one that matters most is that God be glorified in the land – that He be exalted as the holy, the true, and the living God.

Wilt Thou not revive us again, that Thy people may rejoice in Thee? "David was looking back to a time when God had been favorable to the land and had *brought back the captivity of Jacob*." Then he continues, *Thou didst forgive the iniquity of Thy people; Thou didst pardon all their sin. Thou didst withdraw all Thy wrath; Thou didst turn from Thy hot anger*" (Psa. 85:1-3). He is recalling the time when God delivered Israel from captivity, forgave the iniquity of the people and in sovereign grace restrained the fierceness of His anger.

In the verses that follow, the psalmist forecasts the possibility of a coming great national revival. Implicit in his words are the divine principles that underlie spiritual revival when God's people are ready to pay the price. In effect, David gives three reasons why God sends revival.

Revival Will Restrain the Righteous Anger of God

Restore us again, O God of our salvation, and put away Thy indignation toward us! Wilt Thou be angry with us for ever? Wilt Thou prolong Thy anger to all generations? Wilt Thou not revive us again, that Thy people may rejoice in Thee?" (Psa. 85:4-6).

It is clear from these words that God must visit His righteous anger against an unrevived people. Their state is vividly described to us in three words which significantly punctuate this psalm.

The first of these words is found in verse 2 – *the iniquity of Thy people*. "Iniquity denotes wickedness, and the tragedy is that such wickedness can be found even in the heart of a redeemed man or woman. Every Christian is possessed of two natures – the old and the new. If he is living in the fullness of the Holy Spirit then the new nature will be dominant and the old will be dormant. On the other hand, if he is living in an unrevived state, ruled by his old nature, then this wickedness will find expression in subtle forms of iniquity.

How true are the words of Jeremiah the prophet: *The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?*" (Jer. 17:9). Iniquity is that evil in our hearts which tries to explain away God's demands upon our lives in order that we may continue to sin.

The psalmist says, *If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me*" (Psa. 66:18). This means that if I look with approval upon anything which is out of adjustment to the will of God, I erect a barrier between myself and God so that He will not hear me. Surely this explains why so often our prayers are not answered, our lives are not blessed, and our service is not fruitful. We have explained away the divine commands and lowered the standards of God's expectation in our lives. This in turn leads to what the psalmist plainly calls "sin" in verse 2.

The Apostle John tells us in his epistle that *sin is the transgression of the law*, "or, as the Revised Standard Version puts it, *Sin is lawlessness*" (1 John 3:4). Wickedness always leads to lawlessness, or the arrogant violation of the will of God. Explain away the divine demands and it becomes all too easy to disobey them.

How prevalent this is in the church of Jesus Christ today! Think of the sin of nonattendance at church gatherings (Heb. 10:25), the sin of unreliability in Christian service (1 Cor. 4:2), the sin of unholiness in everyday life (1 Thes. 4:7). Every thoughtful Christian must be aware of the fact that we are living in a day of "double standards." A "philosophy of persuasion" is being used to introduce thousands of our young people

into ways of immorality, unchastity and easy divorce.

But the description does not end there. The psalmist goes on to say that wickedness produces lawlessness, and this in turn leads to carelessness. We read that God *will speak peace unto His people, and to His saints: but let them not turn again to folly*"(Psa. 85:8). How often we hear the expression, "I couldn't care less." Wickedness and lawlessness have produced an insensitivity to evil, leading to a cold, calculated carelessness.

When I look into the faces of Christian men and women who laugh and mock when God is speaking to them about their iniquity and sin and folly, I can understand why God's righteous anger is revealed from heaven. God cannot condemn sin in the sinner and condone it in the saint.

This is what Peter means when he says, *For the time has come for judgment to begin with the household of God*"(1 Pet. 4:17). We talk about the judgment of an evil world, but we forget that the risen Lord is Judge also of His own church. As He walks among the candlesticks His eyes burn as *a flame of fire*"at the sight of iniquity, sin and folly (Rev. 1:13-14).

God has a high standard of holiness for His church and His people, and we must not forget it. Consider for instance such utterances as:

Thy decrees are very sure; holiness befits Thy house, O Lord, for evermore"(Psa. 93:5).

It is written, 'You shall be holy, for I am holy'"(1 Pet. 1:16).

For God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness"(1 Thes. 4:7).

God's anger is revealed not only against an unrevived people, but also against an unrepentant people – *Restore us again, O God of our salvation, and put away Thy indignation toward us!*"It is one thing to be passively unrevived, but it is worse to be actively unrepentant.

For too long now we have thought of the message of repentance only in terms of the unregenerate sinner, but we must remember that God calls His own people to repentance. If you have any doubt about this, get down on your knees and read seriously Chapters 2 and 3 of the Book of the Revelation. Speaking to the church, Jesus says:

I will...remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent"(2:5).

Repent then. If not, I will come to you soon and war...with the sword of My mouth"(2:16).

Remember...what you received and heard; keep that, and repent"(3:3).

Be zealous and repent"(3:19).

Yes, revival is needed to restrain the righteous anger of God.

Revival Will Restore the Conscious Awareness of God

Wilt Thou not revive us again, that Thy people may rejoice in Thee? Show us Thy steadfast love, O Lord, and grant us Thy salvation. Let me hear what God the Lord will speak, for He will speak peace to His people, to His saints, to those who turn to Him in their hearts"(Psa. 85:6-8).

Somebody has described revival as "a person or a community saturated with the presence of God," and this is an accurate description; for when God breaks into a life or a community, nothing else matters save the person of Jesus, the glory of Jesus, the name of Jesus. Revival is not some emotion or worked-up excitement.

It is rather an invasion from heaven which brings to man a conscious awareness of God.

David Brainerd records the beginning of a wonderful movement among the American Indians in 1745. It all started when the community was gripped with an overwhelming sense of God. He writes:

"The power of God seemed to descend upon the assembly *'like a rushing, mighty wind'* and with an astonishing energy bore down on all before it. I stood amazed at the influence that seized the audience almost universally and could compare it to nothing more aptly than the irresistible force of a mighty torrent...Almost all persons of all ages were bowed down with concern together, and scarce one was able to withstand the shock of this surprising operation."

This conscious awareness of God is implied by the psalmist. *Wilt Thou not revive us again?*"The psalmist could also pray, *Make Thy face...shine upon Thy servant*"(Psa. 31:16). When Absalom was in disgrace we are told that he *dwelt two full years in Jerusalem, and saw not the king's face*"(2 Sam. 14:28).

In Hebrew thinking, the *turning away of God's face*'was recognized as a metaphor for His displeasure. On the other hand, when God responded to a repentant and restored people the picture in their minds was that of a smiling deity.

This is the significance of the threefold blessing pronounced by the priests upon the children of Israel: *The Lord bless thee and keep thee: The Lord make His face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: The Lord lift up His countenance upon thee, and give thee peace*"(Num. 6:24-26).

Oh, that God would show us His face once again in the person of His beloved Son! Surely this is His purpose in revealing Himself initially and continually to the human soul – for *the God who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness'...has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ*"(2 Cor. 4:6).

Then there is also the showing of His grace – *Show us Thy steadfast love, O Lord, and grant us Thy salvation.*"The conscious awareness of God in the believer's life is the guarantee of the grace of victory – *For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace*"(Rom. 6:14). Living in grace! That is the divine intention for each believing heart, but do we know this divine mercy and delivering grace day by day?

And if we have an awareness of God we will also know the sounding of His voice – *Let me hear what God the Lord will speak, for He will speak peace to His people, to His saints, to those who turn to Him in their hearts.*"Every revival in history has been accompanied by a new recognition of the voice of God. The Bible lives and speaks again. Audiences are hushed under the sound of authoritative, Spirit-empowered preaching.

I remember hearing the Rev. Duncan Campbell tell how preacher and listeners were hushed again and again in the presence of God during the Hebrides Revival. It was just as if God had broken into the situation with the words, *Be still, and know that I am God*"(Psa. 46:10).

Revival, then, will restore the conscious awareness of God among His people.

Revival Will Reveal the Gracious Activities of God

Surely His salvation is at hand for those who fear Him, that glory may dwell in our land. Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet; righteousness and peace will kiss each other. Faithfulness will spring up from the ground, and righteousness will look down from the sky. Yea, the Lord will give what is good, and our land will yield its increase. Righteousness will go before Him, and make His footsteps a way"(Psa. 85:9-13).

Since the fall of man in the Garden of Eden there has never been a moment in time when God has not been

active. Jesus indicated this when He said, *My Father is working still, and I am working*"(John 5:17). He is active all over the world at this very hour.

At a missionary conference some years ago I was impressed with the distinct note of victory by speaker after speaker – in spite of enemy advances in practically every field of the world. When revival comes it is as if a veil is lifted and we see God in a flood-tide of action in areas where before we had seen nothing but darkness and defeat.

The activity of God in the world today is twofold. First, there is His saving activity – *Surely His salvation is at hand for those who fear Him, that glory may dwell in our land*"(v. 9). God is saving men and women all over the world, even though it may seem like a trickle in the great riverbed of human need.

But if revival were to visit us the tens would become the hundreds, and the hundreds the thousands, and the thousands the millions. You have only to read the story of the great movements of the Spirit over one hundred years ago in Great Britain and the United States to see what God did in a matter of months. Oh, for another such visitation!

Secondly, there is His sanctifying activity. This is demonstrated in personal life – *Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet; righteousness and peace will kiss each other.*"What a delightful portrayal of a sanctified life! Those glorious qualities were gathered up in the nature and personality of our Lord Jesus. When He dwells in us in revival fullness all flesh can see the glory of God.

Oswald Chambers used to say, "Sanctification is allowing the perfections of the Lord Jesus to express themselves in human personality." God wants men and women in whom are married steadfast love, faithfulness, righteousness and peace. *For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit*"(Rom. 14:17).

And so the psalmist concludes with the words: *Righteousness will go before Him, and make His footsteps a way*"(v. 13). When the Lord our God moves through a land in revival blessing He lays out a pathway for His people to walk in and inevitably the nation follows, for *righteousness exalts a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people*"(Prov. 14:34). Conversely, where there is no vision the people throw off all moral restraint (Prov. 29:18).

We set out to answer the question, "Why revival?" The answer is simple, but more than that, it is vital. Revival restrains the righteous anger of God, restores the conscious awareness of God, and reveals the gracious activity of God. In the light of these facts we are driven to pray again, *Wilt Thou not revive us again, that Thy people may rejoice in Thee?*"

In 1890 James Gilmour of Mongolia wrote to an old college friend: "You say you want reviving, go direct to Jesus and ask it straight-out...This revived state is not a thing you need to work yourself up into, or need others to help you rise into, or need to come to England to have operated upon you; Jesus can effect it anywhere and does effect it everywhere whenever a man or woman, or men and women, ask it."

Ask, and you will receive"(John 16:24).

Are you prepared to ask for revival? Are you prepared to look for revival? Are you prepared in repentance, faith and obedience to meet the divine conditions for revival? If so, pray with the psalmist, *Wilt Thou not revive us again?*"

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