



Revivals And Church History :: Why Revival Tarries By Henry Blackaby

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There has been a deep burden created by God on my heart and mind for some time, as to God's perspective about the day in which we live. What does He say? How does He look on things? For the last ten months I've been asking God some things, observing some things, watching the Holy Spirit bring to my remembrance some things, watching Him teach me some things, and bringing it all to a point of reference that is very painful.

I have been watching with a great deal of interest and participating myself with millions who say they are praying for revival. I've seen many ministries that have arisen to enlist people to pray for revival. And yet revival tarries. What grieves me as much as anything is, I hardly ever hear any religious leader asking the question, "Why does revival tarry?"

At times it almost seems we have become like the prophets of Baal. We cry louder; we cut ourselves; and we feel that the more earnest we are, the more likely God is to hear our cry. But there has to be some very significantly placed leaders who are willing to stand in the presence of God and ask Him, "With all of this praying, why is revival tarrying? Why is revival being delayed?" We have been told by various sincere people that if millions of people beseech the Throne of God, He is bound to bring revival.

Please know, God is not bound to do anything. There has to be another whole approach, and that is, I think, we need to spend time in the presence of God and to ask Him why.

We are not without information about that. The Word of God is full of reasons why God does not respond. In the Book of Jeremiah, God comes and radically says, "It is too late for Jerusalem." He said, "If Moses and Samuel would stand before Me and plead for My people, I would not listen to them. It is too late. The die is cast." (See Jeremiah 15:1-2.)

In Luke 19:37-44, when all those around Jesus were praising as He rode into Jerusalem, He was weeping. I believe one of the reasons He was weeping was that He had just come from the Father, and the Father had said, "Son, it is too late for Jerusalem. I've passed judgment, and I will not relent, and I will not turn back. Jerusalem will be destroyed." So Jesus cried with the broken heart of the Father, "If you had known, even you, in this your day the things that make for your peace. But now..." the enemy is coming upon you.

If the Lord Jesus heard the Father say that, and all through the Scriptures others heard God saying that, we should ask, "Is anyone standing in the presence of God today to hear if God is saying that about America?" Or have we approached God with the sense, "That will never be said of America"? Many have said that with the nature and extent of the sin of God's people in America today, God would have to apologize to many other cities He has destroyed if He does not deal with us. And so I ask the question, "Why does revival tarry?"

I've even heard some people who, when they pray, almost accuse God. It goes something like this: "O God, You made some promises and You've not kept Your promises." Then they quote some Scriptures to God and say, "God, You said that if I did this... You'd do this... and You haven't done it." When I've been there and heard them pray that way, I want to fall on my face and say, "God, forgive this dear brother. He doesn't know what He's saying. You never do anything out of character; You never do anything out of timing; You never do anything without a reason."

Might this be a beginning of a personal relationship to God where if nobody else asks the question, you will. But you're going to ask it, not in an accusing way, but in a grief-stricken way, with a sense of trembling before Almighty God. Ask, "Lord, would You know whether I can handle what You will say next?" I believe the reason God withholds some of His information is that we couldn't take it if He told us. It would send some of us into Eternity. We could not

take that kind of a laying of the heart of God over our heart.

What I'd like to do is help us to at least begin some sincere, earnest, transparent pursuit of God to ask Him, "With all the praying that is being done among God's people, why is revival being delayed?" so that we might make some immediate, radical, and total adjustments to God.

God Speaks through Jeremiah

There are hundreds of Scriptures that we could go through and that I am going through for myself, but the one I want to read is from Jeremiah 2, and I think you'll catch the heart of God. In recent years I've heard many speakers say, "If there is something in Scripture that does not seem to be right to you, please understand that the problem is never with God." You need to settle that before you ever start searching. You need to go to a passage that speaks from the heart of God, and then to ask the question, "O God, is there anything in this passage that speaks to me? Is there anything that Your Spirit is translating into my setting, our nation, the people of God, the covenant people of God in our own day?"

So let us read from Jeremiah 2:

"Moreover the word of the Lord came to me, saying... The God of the universe is pleading...pleading..., as 2 Corinthians 5:20 says, "As though God were pleading through us..." "Go and cry in the hearing of Jerusalem, saying, 'Thus says the Lord: "You're going to hear something from God's perspective, hear it as God understands it."

"I remember you, the kindness of your youth, the love of your betrothal, when you went after Me in the wilderness, in a land that was not sown. Israel was holiness to the Lord; and the firstfruits of His increase: all that devour him shall offend; disaster shall come upon them," says the Lord. Hear ye the Word of the Lord, O house of Jacob, and all the families of the house of Israel."

How many would be included in "all the families"? Does that include yours? Does that include your whole family or just you? When God talks this way, you need to make sure that "all your family" hears a word from the Lord. You are to take it to every one of them. Some of you may say, "I have a rebellious child, and he will not hear." That has nothing to do with what you ought to do. Whether they will hear or whether they won't, you'd better take the word from the Lord to them. My wife and I have fourteen grandchildren. Of the oldest two boys, the older has already preached his first sermon, and the second oldest grandson told us last week, "I think the Lord wants me to be a pastor." Someone said, "You don't expect all fourteen to respond, do you?" and I said, "I do." And I will give every ounce of my being to take whatever God says to me and make sure that all fourteen of our grandchildren hear a word from the Lord.

"Thus says the Lord, 'What injustice have your fathers found in Me, that they have gone far from Me, and have followed idols, and have become idolaters? Neither did they say, "Where is the Lord, who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, Who led us through the wilderness, through a land of deserts and pits, through a land of drought and the shadow of death, through a land that no one crossed and where no one dwelt?"

"I brought you into a bountiful country, to eat its fruit and its goodness. But when you entered, you defiled My land and made My heritage an abomination. The priests did not say, "Where is the Lord?" And those who handle the law did not know Me; The rulers also transgressed against Me; The prophets prophesied by Baal, and walked after things that did not profit. Therefore I will yet bring charges against you," says the Lord, "And against your children's children I will bring charges. For pass beyond the coasts of Cyprus and see, send to Kedar and consider diligently, and see if there has been such a thing. Has a nation changed its gods, which are not gods? But My people have changed their glory for what does not profit. Be astonished, O heavens, at this, and be horribly afraid; be very desolate," says the Lord."

One thing God often does when He is bringing an indictment or charge: He calls all the created universe to be His witness. And He says here that all the heavens and all the earth was a witness when He made a covenant. Now He says to them, "I want you to be a witness when I stand and make a charge against My people."

"For My people..." To whom is God talking? God's people. He is not talking to Hollywood, nor to the homosexuals, nor to the feminists, nor to Washington. He is talking to "My people." Revival is always what God does with His people. America is a reflection of the condition of God's people. I'm one along with Bill Bright who concluded that 9/11 was God's warning to God's people that He was beginning to remove the hedge of protection from the

nation because of the sin of God's people – not the sin of the nation, because the sin of the nation is a reflection that the salt has lost its saltiness, and the light no longer disperses the darkness.

God's people are clearly responsible for the condition of America. When I say that, I get an indictment in every possible direction. The only reason why I do is that people don't want to be responsible. This whole generation says that no matter what happens, it is not their problem. That doesn't surprise me. But from God's people it surprises me, because all I do is quote Scripture, and they don't even want Scripture, especially if it is not the Scripture they want to hear.

"My people have committed two evils:" This following phrase you are going to see twice more. The heartbeat of this chapter is a simple phrase: "My people have forsaken Me." God says, "My people have committed two evils: They have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters," – the artesian well – "and they have hewn themselves cisterns – broken cisterns that can hold no water.

"Is Israel a servant? Is he a homeborn slave? Why is he plundered? The young lions roared at him, and growled; they made his land waste; His cities are burned, without inhabitant. Also the people of Noph and Tahpanhes have broken the crown of your head. Have you not brought this on yourself in that you have forsaken the Lord your God when He led you in the way? And now why take the road to Egypt?"

I ask here, "Why do pastors of mega churches make a trek to Disney World to find out the latest methods of marketing?" "Why do you go down to Egypt?... Why take the road to Assyria?" "Why do you not come before Me?" God is asking. God's people are forbidden to go anywhere else except to God, no matter how you justify it. We are a generation that believes that the end justifies the use of any means. That is almost blasphemy. The means that God uses must be kingdom means. You cannot do kingdom business with the world's methods. You have to do kingdom work with kingdom methods.

But there is a whole generation that believes you can use all the methods of the world. If the world is successful in their work, why can't we be successful with those methods in the kingdom work? God won't make you successful using the world's methods. You may get a crowd, but you may not have a church that Jesus built. You can get a crowd, but please do not equate getting a larger gathering with the blessing of God. The two are not connected. You have to understand the blessing of God from the heart of God and the ways of God, and so He says, "Why take the road to Egypt, to drink the waters of Shihor? Or why take the road to Assyria, to drink the waters of the River?"

Notice what He had said before this: "I am to you a fountain of living water." In other words, "I am to you an artesian well of water. Why do you go anywhere else for water?" But God's people forsook the living water so they could find water in Egypt and Assyria. God says in the beginning of Isaiah, chapters 30 and 31, "I am going to make sure that all the help you seek from Egypt and Assyria fails you."

Have you ever heard someone say that they used a particular program and it didn't work for them? But they did not ask why God did not choose to cause it to work. They did not go to Him, but went to a program that someone else used. They went to success instead of to Him, and He shut it down. The testimony from across the nation from many a spiritual leader is, "Well, we tried that and it didn't work." "It" never works. "He" works. They shifted from the living water to the waters that cannot profit.

God goes on to say, "Your own wickedness will correct you, and your backslidings will rebuke you. Know therefore and see that it is an evil and bitter thing that you have forsaken the Lord your God, and the fear of Me is not in you," says the Lord God of hosts.

Certainly one characteristic of this generation is that we have lost the fear of God. There are those who try to teach people that they don't need to fear God anymore. You have to cancel Acts 2:43 where He says, "The fear came over every soul." Do you think that had anything to do with what happened next, when they turned the Roman Empire upside down? (Acts 17:6). In that early church on several occasions it says, "The fear of the Lord came over all the people." One of them is when Ananias and Sapphira died. "All they did was cheat on their income tax and tell a little 'white lie'" someone says. There is no such thing as a "white lie." What did God do after their lie? He took their lives. The Scripture says, "Great fear came upon all the Church and upon all who heard these things" (Acts 5:11). Oh, that such a fear of God would return to the people of God!

If you are praying for revival, you are praying that God will return in all of His fullness to the people of God. Do you wa

not to know what it looks like? It looks like Acts 2 and following: "And fear came upon everybody." To be in the presence of the fullness of God is a radical experience, and it is not a pleasant one. J. Edwin Orr, that godly man of revival, in his last sermon preached at Ridgecrest before he died, said: "Revival is like judgment day." Is that the way we describe it? If I would use the first part of that sentence and say, "Revival is like..." many of us would say, "praise and thanksgiving and joy and salvation!"

But Dr. Orr was right. Revival is what God does when He comes in utter judgment on His people. Because as goes the people of God, so goes the redemption of the rest of the world. If God can't get our attention, then His whole purpose and plan to redeem a world comes to a halt. Where He does get our attention there is no limit to what He can do next.

Remember Our First Love

God is often asking us to "remember." In Revelation 2 when He is talking to the church at Ephesus about repentance, He said, "Repent and do the first works" — but probably the most significant part is, "Remember the height from which you have fallen." If you do not remember the height from which you have fallen, your repentance will be inadequate. You will not repent in such a way that God can bring His mighty presence.

So what does God say to the people here in Jeremiah? He says, "I remember your first love." Isn't that amazing, that the God of the universe would say, "I remember your first love"? "I remember how you responded when I delivered you out of bondage." And some of the most graphic descriptions of what His people were like when God found them are found in the prophets. And He said, "I remember how you responded."

There is never a way under heaven by which I could forget my wedding day. One of the joys of our marriage, coming up now to forty-four years, is to remember the first love. My wife will say, "Henry, I remember my first love — the joy, the excitement, the thrill of my first love." Folks, I can't betray that love. I don't want to depart from that.

Every once in a while I will tell my eldest son, whom I preached with in Memphis this past week, "Son, you have no idea of my love when I first held you, my first born, and I held you as a gift of God. I remember saying, 'O God, help me to live before this little one, in such a way, that he would choose to want to serve the God he saw his dad serve.'" And I can remember when my son came forward and made that choice, and now I preach with him. There are not many days go by but that I pray, "God, keep my first love for my oldest son in place."

What God is saying in Jeremiah 2:20 is, "I remember the first love. I remember the kindness of your youth and the love of your betrothal, when we went to the wilderness together..." Our Lord sometimes brings to our remembrance the first love, that first response to Him, when He showed us His hands and His side and His feet and how it overwhelmed us. I've never gotten over that first love when I first understood how much He loved me. I can't betray that first love. I can't depart from it. And it is an astonishment to God that He would need to say, "You have forsaken Me." He didn't say, "You've gone after programs." He said, "You have forsaken Me."

Our problem is that we get so caught up in activities and so caught up in doing things for God that we forget that He is looking for the relationship. "You're doing all of this but you're moving farther and farther from Me. You're getting so caught up in activities and administration, and you're presenting it all to Me for My glory and none of it gives Me glory. I don't accept second-hand glory. What you're doing for Me is second-hand glory. The first-hand glory is when you let Me do what I want to do through you. Then I get first-hand glory." He says when you give second-hand glory, "You forsake Me, the fountain of living waters." Is it any wonder why so many of God's people seem to be spiritually thirsty? If you leave the fountain of living waters, you're going to get thirsty.

Someone said to me once, "Henry, do you ever have dry spells in your walk with God?" I said, "I can not remember ever having any dry spells." He said, "That's amazing."

I said, "No, it isn't. The Lord tells me that inside me is a fountain of living water and out from me will come rivers of living water (John 4:14; 7:37). How can you have a dry spell when that is going on? If you have a dry spell, you have departed from Him. Admit it."

You say, "Oh, no. I still love Him; I haven't departed from Him. I'm just having a dry spell."

He is the fountain of living waters, and if you're having a dry spell, you have departed from Him.

So God says first, "I remember the first love" (Jer. 2:2). And He comes back to ask, "Do you remember?"

You Have Forsaken Me

Then second comes this statement with which I am astounded. "You have forsaken Me." It's not activity we forsake. It's Him. I believe the one thing that causes revival to tarry is our separating from Him. We turn aside. The intimacy of the relationship is absolutely crucial for revival. Dr. Richard Owen Roberts worked for years and years for a definition of revival, and he brought it down to one word — "Revival is God!" That's right. That's what it is. It is God in all of His fullness. And when God in all of His fullness is present, then all that He is and all that He has and all that is on His heart has absolute freedom to be expressed through that solitary life. I'm convinced that if God withholds His manifest activity and presence, it is because He knows that we have departed from Him. Every time God said to His people, "You have forsaken Me," it was at the height of their religious activity, the height of their success; the golden age of Israel. But they had forsaken Him in the midst of all of their religious activity. They no longer sought Him.

Many wonderful books have been written on the disciplines of the Christian life, the disciplines of the devotional life. I have one personal response to that. Love is the discipline. If you have to have discipline to love God, you are out of fellowship with Him. Nobody has to tell me how to be disciplined to spend time in God's Word. Love is the discipline. I love Him, and I spend unhurried time in His Word. I read books on how to be disciplined in your time in the Scriptures, and I almost want to say, "You're going to have people disciplining themselves, and they don't realize that their problem is they have lost their first love." If you lose your first love, then you have to be disciplined to maintain your devotional life. Nobody has to tell me to be disciplined to love my wife. If she saw me doing that, she would get after me. She wants the spontaneous love relationship.

Do you know why I pray? I love God, and love is the discipline for praying. If somehow prayer becomes a drudgery, I need to go to the root cause. The root cause is not that I am not disciplined in my prayer life. I am not disciplined in my prayer life because the root cause is that I have moved from Him who is perfect life.

I may move away from the spontaneous desire for the people of God. Christ loved the Church and laid down His life for them. If I love Him, I'll love the people of God. We need to get over criticism of one another. My criticism may be justified, but you don't criticize what God loves. You say, "Lord, would You return me to the first love that You had for me, and then let me love Your people with that same kind of love?" Love itself is the discipline.

But God says, "You've forsaken Me." Another phrase He uses is, "You have gone far from Me" (v. 5). We are seeing things from God's perspective. Don't protest that you haven't gone far from Him. You were in worship last Sunday. I have been in many worship times when the whole service was far from Him. It was self-centered to the letter. Everybody got a clap as if we were giving God praise. We weren't. We were clapping for the woman who just sang. We have worship that is entertainment.

Not only that, but we have departed from the message of God. I think of two things that have been abominations to the churches. One is the church growth movement. We forgot that Jesus said that He would build the Church (Matt. 16:18). We've said, "Lord, we've got the best methods in the world, and we are already doing it. Thank You." He said, "You're getting a crowd, but you're not building My Church." The Church remains full of sin.

Now we are doing a second thing. We are "seeker-friendly." God deliver us from that! When you're "seeker-friendly" you'll never preach on hell, because it is not seeker-friendly. I went on a revival heritage tour last summer, and I listened to the preaching, representative of the preaching in past times of revival. What kind of preaching was done all over Wales and England and Northern Ireland and Scotland that brought tens of thousands of people on their faces in the rain and in the mud, crying out to God all night long? I found something in common. The people who heard the preaching came under an awesome sense of eternity. They cried out to God, "I'm one breath away from eternity, and I'm not certain where I will go!" and they would cry out all night long. Pastors wore themselves out going from person to person. Thirty thousand gathered in Belfast all night long. Five hundred came through in a commitment to Jesus Christ. The preaching had brought them face to face with eternity.

I came back to our large church in the Atlanta area, and I asked pastors and staff and people: "When was the last time you heard a message on hell?" Nobody could remember. I could ask you: "When was the last time you heard a message on hell?" That's not seeker-friendly. Not only that, but your deacons will not like that. What's happening is that we

're shaping God into the shape we want Him to be. That is evangelical idolatry! Then the God we now serve doesn't look like the God we see in the Scriptures. So we don't preach repentance to God's people. If you pick up on the problem of divorce, you're going to get the Chairman of the deacons mad at you because he has already approved his daughter for divorce. So you don't preach on divorce even though God says, "I hate divorce" (Mal. 2:16). What God hates, we better hate.

Why does revival tarry? Because God's people are full of idolatry. We're shaping God into the God we want Him to be, and if there was any mention of repentance, some dear soul will pray under her breath, "O God, I pray that if there is some lost soul here who needs to repent..." God is saying, "It's you, sister. You need to repent." But God's people are not facing the incredible need for us to repent.

And yet we cry out, "O Lord, bring revival!" God could say, "Why should I? There is nothing in you which matches what I require to come to My people in great presence."

And so revival tarries. The heart of God is broken that we have forsaken Him. We've run after everything under the sun except Him. We don't pray like He told us to, so in that sense we have forsaken Him. We don't trust Him. We trust our money and other things, but we don't trust Him, so we have forsaken Him.

When you forsake the people of God, you forsake Him, because He said that how you respond to those He sends you, you are responding to Him. I always treat every child of God He brings across my life with joy and stewardship. I say, "Lord, You love him, and what You love I love. Don't ever let me depart from You or I'll depart from my brother." I can't do that!

Let Us Pray

Father, we read carefully, slowly, as You spoke to Your servant Jeremiah. Our hearts were condemned. Something within us cried out, "Lord, not me!" And Your Spirit said, "Yes, you." I sorrowed before You to realize some of the things that You said You saw that I didn't see, are now real to me. I'm asking You what You see in me that causes You to delay revival. God, forgive us if we have departed from the very first love we once knew. How could we? Return, O God, and if You'll help us, we'll love You once again with our first love. May all of us go back to our first love, which was the deepest and most profound and the simplest of them all. But may it be transparent, open and honest. Remove from us what is keeping us from that. And if we have been attracted by the gods of this world, O God, convict us, and we repent of it. We turn to You and to You alone. May You be pleased then to do a mighty work to hearts that love You and You alone. We ask it in Your name. Amen.