

Revivals And Church History :: Real Revival Or Ruin - John A. Cerrato, Jr.

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By John A. Cerrato, Jr.

Throughout the history of man the church has frequently experienced periods of spiritual decline. By God's undeserved mercy those dark intervals were periodically followed by times of powerful spiritual renewal. Again and again, God's church has shined forth as a brilliant light in a dark place. The church was never perfect, but the documented spiritual and moral transformative results of the presence and power of God stand unchallenged.

Historically when God has been pleased to send a supernatural visitation, the first effect was that the hearts and mind of His people found new life and delight in the beauty and perfections of Christ, then the saving love of God came with power upon the hearts of the lost. "The Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved" (Acts 2:47).

During the Great Awakening in New England in the 1730s, Jonathan Edwards wrote in A Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God:

"Those amongst us who had been formerly converted, were greatly enlivened, and renewed with fresh and extraordinary incomes of the Spirit of God."

"God's work has also appeared very extraordinary in the degrees of His influences; in the degrees both of awakening and conviction, and also saving light, love, and joy, that many have experienced. It has also been very extraordinary in the extent of it and its being so swiftly propagated from town to town."

"And the work of conversion was carried on in a most astonishing manner and increased more and more; souls did as it were come by flocks to Jesus Christ. From day to day, for many months together, might be seen evident instances of sinners brought out of darkness into marvelous light and delivered out of a horrible pit and set upon a rock, with a new song of praise in their mouths.

"When God in so remarkable a manner took the work into His own hands, there was so much done in a day or two as at ordinary times, with all endeavors that men can use, and with such a blessing as we commonly have, is done in a year."

"Remember the Years"

The accounts of the great revivals of the past should be a subject familiar to every follower of Christ. It is vital that believers inspire their hearts and minds with the written records of those times when God graciously responded to the heart-cries of His people and was pleased to "take His work into His own hands."

Historical documentation is clear, abundant and undeniable. The results were as real and spectacular as when Jesus walked this earth. In fact, it was nothing less than His blessed presence here again in the Spirit.

In 1900, when young Evan Roberts compared the church of his day, in Wales, to what he read in the New Testament, he could not stop thinking, "The church is a failure!" He began crying out to God for a supernatural awakening. Unknown to him, many others also were being moved to pour out their hearts in prayer for a fresh move of God in their beloved land. Soon Evan experienced an increasing, and nearly overwhelming, sense of the presence and power of God in his life.

After quitting Bible School and returning home, he felt led to hold meetings with local Young People's Groups. Suddenly in the fall of 1904, for no human reason, hundreds, and soon thousands, of people began filling the churches seeking and finding the Lord. Evan became the human instrument, igniting the hearts of God's people.

"In a matter of weeks a hundred-thousand converts were recorded. In some areas crime virtually disappeared. Magistrates ceremoniously handed white gloves to their successors to indicate there had been no convictions during the

in terms of service. Drunkenness, which had become a national scourge, with many social problems, became rare, and the economy of Wales soared. Wales became a healthy and joy-filled nation.

...I will remember the years of the right hand of the most High. I will remember the works of the Lord: surely I will remember Thy wonders of old. I will meditate also of all Thy work, and talk of Thy doings. Who is so great a God as our God? Thou art the God that doest wonders: Thou hast declared Thy strength among the people (Psa. 77:10-14).

The Judge Is at the Door
(Jas. 5:9)

During those dark times between these divine visitations, which were generally marked by a slow but steady spiritual decline, it appeared that without the recurrence of the Spirit's renewing presence, the light of the Gospel might be extinguished in the world. (For those with eyes to see, we are living in such a time.)

Also, for those who have experienced that light in their hearts, the inward assurance of the truth of the Word of Christ renders that impossible. I will build My church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it (Matt. 16:18).

On the basis of this, and many other Biblical statements, the ultimate victory of Christ's kingdom is certain. Meanwhile the word of God that should cause the church in America to tremble is this inescapable truth: Thou shalt also consider in thine heart, as a man chasteneth his son, so the Lord thy God chasteneth thee (Deut. 8:5); For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God? (1 Pet. 4:17).

We must know that all efforts made to deliver our culture from its death-slide will be in vain unless God performs a radical change in the hearts of individuals, beginning with those called by His name. This change is effected by the one thing needful, the basic causal factor in all genuine historical revivals and awakenings is the felt presence of God. This begins and is carried on by the effectual, fervent, intercessory prayer of God's holy remnant and spread to God's people by the Holy Spirit.

For I will pour water on him who is thirsty, and floods on the dry ground; I will pour My Spirit on your descendants, and My blessing on your offspring (Isa. 44:3).

I have set watchmen on your walls, O Jerusalem; they shall never hold their peace day or night. You who make mention of the Lord, do not keep silent, and give Him no rest till He establishes and till He makes Jerusalem a praise in the earth (Isa. 62:6-7).

Remember and Realize

The attested record of God's presence and power unleashed in the great revivals of the past, when His people paid the price of prevailing prayer, challenges and condemns us. Have we forgotten the God of the apostles, the Church Fathers and martyrs, the true saints of the Middle Ages, the Reformers, Moravians, Wesleys, Whitefield, Edwards, Finney, Spurgeon, Moody and the countless thousands in between and since who in the holy name of Christ pulled down strongholds, threw back the forces of evil, and brought spiritual transformation to millions of lives and entire cultures?

Not one of them would have dared make any claim to personal greatness or individual heroics but were fully aware that it was: Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, says the Lord of hosts (Zech. 4:6). Do we realize that their God is our God, if we will have Him, and allow Him to have us?

It Can Happen Again

When we read God's Word we see that in His program, problem-solving begins with prayer-power. No matter how pathetic and powerless the church has become or how insane and chaotic the world around us, God is working out His eternal purpose and seeks those who will pay the price for power in prayer. Whether national, local, or personal, the release of the original power of Pentecost is always preceded by persevering prayer.

If we truly desire to see the glory of God poured out upon His church, we have the ability and the responsibility, to beg

in by asking God for the Spirit of prayer (see Zechariah 12:10; Luke 11:13; Acts 4:23-31; Romans 8:26-27). What could God do today if His people cried to Him to begin a work in their hearts to settle for nothing less than a consuming desire for Him to do again what He did in Wales in 1904 and 1905 and in the Awakenings in America?

Every true child of God has the potential, and if willing may begin immediately, to become an intercessor, and join that holy, (and in most cases, hidden) fellowship of spiritual warriors who have contributed more to the survival and salvation of civilization than most preachers, politicians and diplomats together. In this hour of divine judgment, it is the critical need.

Prayer Power

The ministry of intercessory prayer is a pivotal element in man's God-given dominion over this world. It is a key part of his responsibility and an inestimable privilege to become one of those whom God uses to pray down the life-giving, sin-destroying presence and power of His Spirit.

The believer's willingness is the basic qualification for becoming a prayer warrior. Intellect, education, gifts and talents, length of time as a Christian, are all inconsequential. It is strictly a matter of the heart's desire for full surrender to God's highest calling. The times are too tragic, God's sorrow is too great, man's night is too dark, the Cross is too glorious for us to live as we have lived, in anything short of holy obedience (Thomas Kelly).

Christians are described as priests five times in the New Testament (1 Pet. 2:5, 9; Rev. 1:6, 5:10, 20:6). The chief function of the priest is to represent man to God, and to intervene for God's mercy to sinful man. When the Israelites rebelled against God's just judgment on Korah and his followers, and the Lord threatened to destroy the congregation, Moses and Aaron fell on their faces to intercede for God's mercy. Then Aaron the priest was told to take the burning censor, representing the prayers of intercession, and stand between the dead and the living, and the plague was stayed (see Numbers 16:46-48).

Today God delivers individuals from eternal death by revealing Himself through the regenerating power of His Spirit. God has ordained that this power is released through persistent, prevailing, intercessory prayer. Any and every true follower of Christ is called to pray for the lost. What greater ministry can there be in light of eternity?

...What greater joy than to experience undeniable, direct answers to prayer, and what greater blessing than to see a widespread outpouring of God's miraculous regenerating power flowing into the hearts of precious souls all around us? It has happened in great revivals throughout history and it is occurring in some parts of the non-Western world today. Do we realize what is happening, and not happening, or what could be happening, among us, through us, and around us, here and now, if we would beseech the Lord of harvest to grant us His Spirit of prevailing prayer?

Taken from "Herald of His Coming"