

Revivals And Church History :: The Revival We Need -king

The Revival We Need -king - posted by sermonindex (), on: 2006/10/23 0:43

The Revival We Need

by Louis L. King

"Oh Lord, revive Thy work in the midst of the years, in the midst of the years make known; in wrath remember mercy" (Habakkuk 3:2).

The term revival points to a kind of recurrent activity.

In Old Testament times after a period of spiritual declension as in the days of the judges there would come a season of religious quickening. There were such awakenings also in Judaism under David, Solomon, Asa, Jehoshaphat, Hezekiah, Josiah and Ezra.

Similarly in this age of grace there have been periods of spiritual declension and seasons of religious awakening. These revivals have occurred among persons and communities professedly Christian. They are movements of the Holy Spirit that sweep over whole peoples and produce the most extraordinary results. They return Christians to fervent devotion and loyalty to Christ.

Quite generally these revivals have also developed a strong evangelistic emphasis, with multitudes being saved. This was true under John Wesley and George Whitefield and especially of the worldwide Great Awakening in 1858-59.

Actually the terms revival and evangelism belong together. Andrew W. Blackwood, Sr., contended, "At times they are as closely related as identical twins."

Another authority on revivals states: "While the word revive strictly speaking means "to bring to life again," the word in its religious application has been used to include the awakening of those who are dead and the quickening of those already awakened."

In the book *Revivals, Their Laws and Leaders*, James Burns delineates five laws that operate in all revivals. Two of them are worthy of particular attention, as well as one stated by Dr. Blackwood.

The law of progress. "Revivals (are) part of the divine method of operation in human history," Burns says. "In no sphere whatsoever is progress uniform and unbrokenly continuous. Progress in the world is affected, not by a steady, onward march like the march of an army, but by an oscillating movement like that of an incoming tide.

"Each wave is a revival; it rushes forward with impetuous haste and with exultant joy; it carries everything before it and then, having spent its strength, recedes only to be succeeded by another wave, and yet another."

The law of spiritual growth. "Revivals," Burns continues, "are used of God for the quickening of man's spiritual life and for the effecting of his spiritual education and progress.

"Progress is never effected along the whole line in unbroken sequence; the pressure of the Holy Spirit upon the life of the individual and upon the church is never uniform. And the reason for this is not difficult to discover.

"The divine method is justified by human experience. A pressure which is uniform and continuous becomes a mere condition of our existence, and we accommodate ourselves to it without its attracting any attention; whereas a pressure that is occasional and variable at once claims our attention!

"Hence the Holy Spirit shows His interest in us by His influence at certain seasons, for it is by adopting this method that the conscience is reached and aroused, and the heart won for Christ."

The law of doctrine. "In the divine economy," Blackwood states, "a revival comes through stress on doctrines known a

s evangelical, especially the saving power of Christ's death.

"In the history of revival every leader worthy of note has held to the revealed truths of Holy Writ and has relied on these truths of God as the superatomic power of the Almighty in setting free from sin and in making them strong to serve...

"In the history of the church, men and groups that have not held this 'faith of the father,' or else have held it lightly, have not excelled in promotion of revivals."

Common Characteristics

The background, onset and progress of all revivals have certain common characteristics. We do well to know them.

Preceding each revival there is a general spiritual decline among Christians. Invariably faith waxes dim and a dull and heavy lethargy settles upon the spiritual life of the church. The zeal of the people becomes more devoted to financial and commercial prosperity than to Christ.

It is a time when church members become skeptical of the Bible's authority and are on the alert to explain away those parts of the Bible that speak against the faulty ethics of the day. And not a few, losing interest in faithful church attendance, are absorbed in self-interests, comforts and pleasures.

Some engage in things which, though not wrong in themselves, tend to dull the fine edge of their spiritual life. Others, little by little, permit practices which are an exact copy of the world. They conform to the world's ways and the world's standards. Heavenly joys are bartered for earthly things. Although the outward duties of religion are still performed, there is an ever-decreasing sincerity.

The work of the Spirit of God is not sensibly present in worship assemblies. A broken and contrite heart is supplanted by spiritual indifference. Only infrequently are lost persons saved. Baptisms are few and in some places not at all. Spiritual warmth has departed. The inner fire has ceased to glow. The joy of the Lord is gone.

To a greater or lesser degree this is the unsatisfactory spiritual condition of the Christian community before any revival.

Alongside the many who have thus defected, however, are those in the church who all along have remained consistently loyal to Christ. These mourn the church's loss of spiritual power and never cease to pray earnestly for a revival of its spiritual life.

They possess a profound dissatisfaction with things as they are. Their prayers grow in urgency and importunity. Gradually the number with such a burden increases until longing for better things becomes a widespread desire.

As time passes without any improvement, more and more people gather in companies to pray. They implore God day and night, often with tears, to visit with His divine power the souls of men. As the number of the burdened widens, so also does the desire for a renewal of spiritual life multiply until with utmost urgency there is a storming of the very gates of heaven.

An instance of this kind of prayer preparation began seven years before the worldwide awakening of 1858. It began in Great Britain when believers of one denomination after another devoted the first Monday evening of every month to pray for a revival of religion. Soon churches in the United States adopted the British plan for a general concert of prayer for revival.

Then the first week of October, 1857, some businessmen in lower Manhattan decided to hold daily noon prayer meetings for the purpose of imploring God to pour into their empty cisterns the mighty flood of His life. Within six months not less than 8,000 to 10,000 New York businessmen were gathering daily for prayer.

The noonday prayer meetings overflowed into weeknight prayer services with many thousands packing the city's churches. Is it any wonder the overpowering awakening that came in 1858 was called the "prayer meeting revival"?

The immediate prelude to the 1859 revival in Ireland was the pattern of daily prayer meetings held at all hours of the day, and all evangelical churches were open every evening for services of prayer.

In his book *The Fervent Prayer*, J. Edwin Orr writes, "The measure of prayer that prepared the way for the 1859 awakening in Scotland is indicated in the official report of the United Presbyterian Church that one in every four of its 162,305 communicants was attending its regular prayer meetings, an average of some 40,549 at prayer in 1,205 regular meetings, with 129 new prayer meetings and 16,362 new attenders in 1859."

It is clear from the promise of renewal in Second Chronicles 7:14 that the humbling of the people of God, their diligence in intercession, their turning from recognized sin and their hunger and longing for God's outpoured favor are the factors that bring about in God's good time an answer to their prayers and a great season of refreshing.

Both the Bible and the record of history reveal there has never been such a thing as a prayerless revival.

Spiritual Contagion

When revival does come, it normally bursts out all at once and sweeps across the church like a prairie fire. Every revival has been characterized by the extraordinary swiftness with which it spreads.

When once God has visited a place with revival and the news is out, the awakening radiates like a contagion. People are moved, not in small numbers, but in multitudes.

In the Franciscan revival of the thirteenth century within four years many thousands were swept by radiant joy. The revival spread through parts of southern Europe with the rush of a whirlwind as Francis of Assisi and his twelve companions moved out to call the people to repentance and new life in Christ.

On October 31, 1517, when Martin Luther nailed his ninety-five theses to the church door at Wittenberg, Germany, a revival of evangelical faith and practice began that, in an exceedingly short time, turned most of the people of central and northern Europe Godward.

Revival came to Hawaii in 1835, and in one church alone on one Sunday 1,705 persons were baptized.

When the revival of 1858 broke out in the United States a good authority reported that 50,000 New Yorkers had been converted to God between March and May. During that single year the number of reported conversions reached a total of 50,000 a week throughout the United States.

For a period of two years there were 10,000 additions to church membership weekly. By actual count a little more than 1,000,000 persons had been added to the American churches in this brief period.

By 1904 the country of Wales had drifted far from God. The spiritual conditions were low indeed. Church attendance was poor. Sin abounded.

Then suddenly, like an unexpected tornado, the Spirit of God swept over the land. Churches were crowded. In most places three definite services were held every day.

The results were far-reaching and lasting. Infidels, drunkards, deceivers, extortioners, thieves, gamblers, prostitutes and the indifferent were saved. Debts were paid. It was reported that the mules in the coal mines refused to work, being unused to kindness. Within five weeks 20,000 persons joined the churches.

All revivals I have studied have moved with this same blazing, awesome, sweeping and spiritually successful swiftness.

Sense Of Sin

Another outstanding feature of every revival is the deep sense of sin produced in indifferent, worldly-minded believers and unbelievers alike. The sin and guilt of the awakened soul sometimes stand out in a terrifying way. The convicted see themselves as God sees them. The Holy Spirit lays bare their sins in all their hideousness.

Seeing themselves as in a mirror, people are confronted with every fault, every unfaithful act and attitude, every deviation from the truth, every act of self-interest, of betrayal, of hypocrisy. They feel very deeply their rebellion against God, I

ukewarmness, failure in glorifying Christ, worldly practices and criminal indifference to the spiritual needs of those around them.

They see their sins dragging them to judgment. They know lostness. An awful terror seizes them. The conviction of sin burns them like fire.

Under such an agony of conviction men openly confess their sins. They hide nothing. Poignantly bitter though the list is, it is not uncommon for them to go through the long catalog of their sins. It is as if the day of judgment is upon them and they see and feel their uncleanness in God's sight.

They cry out for mercy and then receive an almost unbelievable assurance of sins forgiven. Their heart is made joyful by spiritual things and they also receive an intense zeal to be right toward God.

Common to every revival is its wonderful outburst of joy. There is no earthly joy that can compare with the ineffable gladness welling up in the hearts of forgiven and restored people. When the agony of conviction, the awful sense of being abandoned, the grief and terror of sin are replaced with the blessed peace of forgiveness it is hard to find a worthy way of expressing it.

To those persons caught up in a revival all the world seems altered. Their hearts are lifted up. Their faces are radiant. They are like those of the early church--they "did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart" (Acts 2:46).

And this joy is not confined to restored sinning believers or to the newly converted. It especially fills the hearts of those believers who all along had mourned and sighed and sought God for the arrival of this day.

Newborn gladness suffuses the atmosphere of the church service. The worship service throbs and glows with spiritual fervor. It is especially evident in the joyous singing of hymns and spiritual songs, for this is the renewed man's best way of showing his feelings. Most of the church's choicest hymns and lyrics have their origin in the great awakenings.

Evangelistic Concern

The next characteristic effect common to every revival is a new and profound concern for people of the immediate community who are outside the fold of Christ. When the church is purified and revived it has an intense concern for the spiritual needs of those around it.

If, however, there is an effort to conserve and perpetuate the emotional aspects of the revival by manipulation, the revival movement has gone awry. Only when a large company of persons are converted, drunkards made sober, adulterers made morally faithful, juvenile delinquents set on the right path and the morally good but unconverted saved, is it a genuine revival.

In the history of each revival Paul's description of the Corinthians has been applicable. They are described as former fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, effeminate, abusers of themselves with mankind, thieves, covetous, drunkards, revilers, extortioners, who now have been "washed,...sanctified,...justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God".

The record of the missionary enterprise and the pages of missionary biography conclusively prove that the Great Awakening of 1858 was the generating force of missionary activity such as the church had never experienced before. Thousands of revived Christians caught up in the exhilarating enjoyment of their own salvation were impelled by the Holy Spirit to go where Christ was not known, where multitudes perished for lack of salvation.

Church history attests that a new burden and passion for missions comes as part and parcel of heaven-sent awakenings, and soon streams of dedicated youths are on their way to those dark areas of earth where little of the gospel light has penetrated.

Many of today's great missionary bodies are the product of the 1858 awakening--The Christian and Missionary Alliance included. Fervent, unselfish missionary endeavors are begotten in revivals.

Preaching Power

Revivals And Church History :: The Revival We Need -king

All awakenings I have studied have been marked by a revival of preaching power. It is clear and pungent preaching directed sometimes to awakened souls, sometimes to backsliders, sometimes to the impenitent, sometimes to persons seeking salvation.

The great central truths are luminously set forth: personal guilt, redemption, the claims of the Savior, the necessity of immediate repentance and immediate acceptance of Christ, and the joy and power of a useful Christian life.

The consciences of sinners are bombarded with a prodigious broadside of pulpit doctrine, absolutely devoid of any hedging or modifying explanations and apologies for the gospel way of salvation, for Christ as being the only Savior.

Revival sermons especially push to the front such deep and mighty themes as the attributes of God, the deity of Jesus Christ, the nature and penalty of sin, the atonement, regeneration, resurrection, judgment, heaven and hell as tremendous realities. They bear down on the heinousness and desert of sin as a great argument for repentance and acceptance of Christ.

Sermons preached in times of spiritual revival are unlike a large portion of pulpit sermons today that are addressed to professing Christians alone or to nobody in particular. Ministers caught up in a revival employ a directness, simplicity, clarity and sympathy that is astounding.

Their manner of preaching is pointed, intense and solemn with a white-heat earnestness. With fervor of soul the spokesmen for God look at their hearers as bound for the judgment seat, realizing that the wrath of God is momentarily withheld.

Then with great tenderness they make the people feel their souls are worth saving and Jesus Christ is worth serving and heaven is worth securing. Revival preaching thus is soul-stirring and inspiring.

Such are some of the outstanding characteristics of revival, and just such is the revival we need!

Re: The Revival We Need -king - posted by kdbutton, on: 2006/10/23 6:25

This article is great because it gives us more clear and specific things to pray toward.