



Revivals And Church History :: What is Revival? - Martyn Lloyd-Jones

What is Revival? - Martyn Lloyd-Jones - posted by AbideinHim (), on: 2023/11/17 3:35

We can define it as a period of unusual blessing and activity in the life of the Christian Church. Revival means awakening, stimulating the life, bringing it to the surface again. It happens primarily in the Church of God, and amongst believing people, and it is only secondly something that affects those that are outside also. Now this is a most important point, because this definition helps us to differentiate, once and for all, between a revival and an evangelistic campaign.

An evangelistic campaign is the Church deciding to do something with respect to those who are outside. A revival is not the Church deciding to do something and doing it. It is something that is done to the Church, something that happens to the Church.

So then, what is it that happens? The best way of answering that question is to say that it is in a sense a repetition of the day of Pentecost. It is something happening to the Church, that inevitably and almost instinctively makes one look back and think again of what happened on the day of Pentecost as recorded in Acts 2.

The essence of a revival is that the Holy Spirit comes down upon a number of people together, upon a whole church, upon a number of churches, districts, or perhaps a whole country. That is what is meant by revival. It is, if you like, a visitation of the Holy Spirit, or another term that has often been used is this--an outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

What the people are conscious of is that it is as if something has suddenly come down upon them. The Spirit of God has descended into their midst, God has come down and is amongst them. A baptism, an outpouring, a visitation. And the effect of that is that they immediately become aware of His presence and of His power in a manner that they have never known before.

I am talking about Christian people, about church members gathered together as they have done so many times before. Suddenly they are aware of His presence, they are aware of the majesty and the awe of God. The Holy Spirit literally seems to be presiding over the meeting and taking charge of it, and manifesting His power and guiding them, and leading them, and directing them. That is the essence of revival.

And what does that mean? Well, there are general characteristics which you will find in every revival that you can ever read about. The immediate effect is that the people present begin to have an awareness of spiritual things such as they have never had before.

They have heard all these things before, they may have heard them a thousand times, but what they testify is this: "You know, the whole thing suddenly became clear to me. I was suddenly illuminated, things that I was so familiar with stood out in letters of gold, as it were. I understood. I saw it all in a way that I had never done in the whole of my life." The Holy Spirit enlightens the mind and the understanding. They begin not only to see these things clearly but to feel their power.

What are these things of which they become so aware? First and foremost, the glory and the holiness of God. Have you ever noticed, as you read your Bibles, the effect on these people as they suddenly realized the presence of God? Like Job, they put their hands on their mouths or like Isaiah they say, "Woe is unto me! For I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips." They have just had a realization of the holiness and of the majesty and the glory of God. That always happens in a revival.

There can be a lot of laughing and lightness, and obvious organization in evangelistic campaigns. Not so in a revival, but rather awe, reverence, holy fear, the consciousness of God in His majesty, His glory, His holiness, His utter purity.

And that, as we have seen, leads inevitably to a deep and terrible sense of sin, and an awful feeling of guilt. It leads men and women to feel that they are vile and unclean and utterly unworthy and, above all, it leads them to realize their utter helplessness face to face with such a God.

Or, like the publican depicted by our Lord in the parable, they are so conscious of all this that they cannot show their faces. They are far back near the door somewhere, beating their breasts and saying, "God, have mercy on me, a sinner."

The holiness of God, their own utter sinfulness and wretchedness, their own unworthiness; they realize they have never done anything good at all. Before, they thought they had done a great deal, now they see that it is nothing--useless. Like Paul they begin to talk about it as dung and filthy rags. In their utter helplessness and hopelessness, they prostrate themselves and cast themselves upon the love and mercy and compassion of God.

This is the convicting work of the Spirit who takes charge of the situation. People may be held in that state for some time--not only for hours but sometimes for days and weeks, and months. They may become almost desperate.

Then they are given a clear view of the love of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ and especially of His death upon the cross. At last they see it. Oh, they had always believed it theoretically, but it had never truly become real for them. They had honestly believed it, yes, but they had never felt its power, they had never known what it was to be melted by it, to be broken by it. They had never known what it was to weep with a sense of unworthiness and then of love and joy as they realized that "God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

Suddenly it all becomes real to them, and they are given to know that the Son of God has loved them and has given Himself for them. It becomes an individual and a personal matter: "He died for me, even my sins are forgiven," and peace comes into their hearts; joy enters into them and they are lost in love and in a sense of praise of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

This now becomes the one thing that absorbs them. If they meet anyone they talk about it at once; everybody is talking about it, it is the main topic of conversation, it is the thing that absorbs all their interest. They desire to be together now and to talk about these things and so they get together, and they hold meetings. They meet every night to talk about these things and to praise God and to sing hymns to His glory.

Then they begin to pray, and there they are, hour after hour, night after night, longing to finish work so they might get together with other people who have experienced this movement of the Spirit of God. And that, of course, in turn leads them to have a great concern about others who are outside and who do not know these things.

I am giving you a synopsis of what you read in the books. They begin to get a concern for the members of their own family--husband, wife, father, mother, children, brother, sister--who do not know that they are outside. They tell them about it; they feel they must. There is a constraint that is driving them. They talk about it to people, to friends and to everybody, and they begin to pray for them. Prayer is always a great feature of every revival, great prayer meetings, intercession hour after hour. They pray for these people by name and they plead, and they will not let God go, as it were. They are intent on this with a strange urgency.

And then, after a while, hearing of all this and seeing the change in those whom they have known for so long, these others who are outside begin to join the meetings and to say, "What is this?" So they come in, and they go through the same experience. And so it happens and thousands upon thousands are converted. Indeed, the whole neighborhood seems to be full of the Holy Spirit. He seems to be everywhere.

People are not only converted in meetings, some are converted as they are walking to the meetings, before they have even got there. Some are converted at their work, in a coal-mine, on top of a mountain. Some are awakened in the middle of the night. They went to bed feeling as usual, but they are awakened with an awful sense of sin, and they have to get up and pray and plead with God to have mercy. Nobody has spoken to them at that moment--it is the Spirit of God that is acting. He is dominating the whole area. He is filling the lives of all the people.

That is what happens in revival and thus you get this curious, strange mixture, as it were, of great conviction of sin and great joy, a great sense of the terror of the Lord, and great thanksgiving and praise.

Always in a revival there is what somebody once called a divine disorder. Some are groaning and agonizing under conviction, others praising God for the great salvation. And all this leads to crowded and prolonged meetings. Time seems to be forgotten. People seem to have entered into eternity.

A meeting may start at six thirty in the evening, and it may not end until daybreak the next morning with nobody aware of the passing of the hours. They did not have to provide coffee once or twice halfway through. When the Holy Ghost organizes things, time, the body, and the needs of the flesh are all forgotten.

A revival, then, really means days of heaven upon earth. Let me give you one of the greatest descriptions ever written of what is true of a town when there is such a revival or a visitation of the Spirit of God. It was written by the great and saintly Jonathan Edwards about the little town of Northampton in Massachusetts in 1735.

This work soon made a glorious alteration in the town. So that in the spring and summer following, the town seemed to be full of the presence of God. It never was so full of love nor so full of joy and yet so full of distress as it was then.

There were remarkable tokens of God's presence in almost every house. It was a time of joy in families on account of salvation being brought to them. Parents rejoicing over their children as newborn, husbands over their wives and wives over their husbands.

The doings of God were then seen in His sanctuary. God's day was a delight and the congregation was alive in God's service. Everyone earnestly intent on the public worship. Every hearer eager to drink in the words of the minister as they came from his mouth. The assembly in general were from time to time in tears while the Word was preached. Some weeping with sorrow and distress, others with joy and love, others with pity and concern for the souls of their neighbors.

This is God visiting His people. Days of heaven on earth, the presidency of the Holy Spirit in the Church, life abundantly given to God's people without measure.

A revival is a miracle. It is the hand of the Lord, and it is mighty. It can only be explained as the direct action and intervention of God. Men can produce evangelistic campaigns, but they cannot and never have produced a revival. A revival, by definition, is the mighty act of God and it is a sovereign act of God. It is as independent as that. Man can do nothing. God, and God alone, does it.

But not only can men not produce a revival, they cannot even explain it, and that again is most important. If you can explain what is happening in a church, apart from this sovereign act of God, it is not revival.

A revival is something which, when it happens, leads people to say, as the townspeople said in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost, "What is this? What is it?" It is something that comes like a tornado. It is almost like an overflowing tide; it is like a flood. Miraculous things happen, things that are beyond the explanation and the wit of men.

Finally, look at it as it is described in Acts 2. Here are the apostles meeting together for prayer in the upper room. They had been doing it for ten days. Suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing, mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. That is it. Not always the sound, but always the consciousness of the mighty wind of God. The Spirit of God descends upon preacher, prayers, praying people, those meeting in conference.

Do we know anything about that, my friends? Do we believe in God coming in and doing things that we not only can not do, but cannot even understand, nor control, nor explain. Yea, I ask you, do you long to know such things? To see such things happening again today? Are you praying for such a visitation? For, believe me, when God hears our prayers and does this thing again, it will be such a phenomenon that not only will the Church be astounded and amazed, but even those who are outside will be compelled to listen and to pay attention, in a way that they are not doing at the present time, and in a way that men left to themselves can never persuade them to do.

This is what God can do. This is what God has done. Let us together decide to beseech Him, to plead with Him to do this again. Not that we may have the experience or the excitement, but that His mighty hand may be known and His great name may be glorified and magnified among the people.