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REVIVAL: WHEN GOD VISITS HIS PEOPLE

I. Introduction - Misconceptions of revival

- A. A series of scheduled meetings
- B. A season of fruitful evangelism
- C. A period of heightened experience of spiritual gifts and other phenomena
- D. A moral shift in the surrounding society
- E. An historic event

II. What is Revival?

- A. The noun “revival” does not appear in the Bible. The verb “revive” does appear along with other terms that convey a similar idea. (e.g. “restore”, “renew”, “return”)

“Will you not revive us again, that your people may rejoice in you?” Psalm 85:6

“For thus says the One who is high and lifted up, who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: ‘I dwell in the high and holy place, and also with him who is of a contrite and lowly spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly, and to revive the heart of the contrite.’” Isaiah 57:15

“Your righteousness, O God, reaches the high heavens. You who have done great things, O God, who is like you? You who have made me see many troubles and calamities will revive me again; from the depths of the earth you will bring me up again.” Psalm 71:19-20

- B. Conceptually, the idea of revival is found throughout the Scripture.

A longing for revival emerges prominently in the prayers of the Bible. Jonathan Edwards notes, “...if we look through the whole Bible, and observe all the examples of prayer that we find there recorded, we shall not find so many prayers for any other mercy, as for the deliverance, restoration, and prosperity of the church, and the advancement of God’s glory and kingdom of grace in the world...the greatest part of the book of Psalms is made up of prayers for this

mercy, prophecies of it, and prophetic praises for it." (Jonathan Edwards, The Works of Jonathan Edwards, Volume 2, p. 291)

C. Definitions of revival

"Revival is a season in the life of the church when God causes the normal ministry of the gospel to surge forward with extraordinary spiritual power. Revival is seasonal, not perennial. God causes it; we do not." (Ray Ortlund, When God Comes to Church, p. 9)

"Gospel renewal or revival is an intensification of the normal operations of the Spirit (conviction of sin, regeneration and sanctification, assurance of grace) through the ordinary means of grace (preaching the Word, prayer, and the sacraments)." (Tim Keller, Center Church, Kindle Locations 1254-1256)

"What is revival? 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." (Martyn Lloyd-Jones, Revival, p. 99)

"A revival is an outpouring of the Holy Spirit, brought about the intercession of Christ, resulting in a new degree of life in the churches and a widespread movement of grace among the unconverted. It is an extraordinary communication of the Spirit of God, a superabundance of the Spirit's operations, and enlargement of his manifest power." (Iain Murray, Pentecost Today?, pp. 23-24)

"...I would describe revival as a sovereign work of God's Holy Spirit that produces an unusual awakening of spiritual life among God's people, resulting in an awesome awareness of God, a sincere repentance for sin, a deep longing for God and holiness, and an effective passion to reach the unsaved. It is generally accompanied by a significant number of the lost coming to true faith in Christ." (Brian H. Edwards, Can We Pray for Revival?, p. 29)

Revival is an awakening work of God among his people that brings extraordinary fruitfulness to the ordinary means of gospel ministry.

III. When is Revival Needed?

A. When God's people forget the gospel.

God's people have cyclically moved through periods of greater and lesser remembrance of his work for them. Revival will always involve a renewed focus on the gospel.

“And when the LORD your God brings you into the land that he swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give you—with great and good cities that you did not build, and houses full of all good things that you did not fill, and cisterns that you did not dig, and vineyards and olive trees that you did not plant—and when you eat and are full, then take care lest you forget the LORD, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. (Deut. 6:10-12)

B. When God's people look like the world.

“Your holy people held possession for a little while; our adversaries have trampled down your sanctuary. We have become like those over whom you have never ruled, like those who are not called by your name. Oh that you would rend the heavens and come down, that the mountains might quake at your presence.” Isaiah 63:18- 64:1

We are familiar with “Oh that you would rend the heavens...”, but we may not be familiar with the context- God's people have become indistinguishable from the surrounding culture.

Here revival has to do with returning to God, repentance, restoration to where they were, becoming a light in the darkness.

“Revival is needed, not because of the state of the world, but because of the state of the church.” (Brian Edwards, Revival, p. 38)

C. When God's people fail to look to him and pray.

“There is no one who calls upon your name, who rouses himself to take hold of you; for you have hidden your face from us, and have made us melt in the hand of our iniquities.” (Isaiah 64:7)

“When is revival necessary? When prayer has lost its power (‘no one calls on your name’ - Is. 64:7) and other ways of coping seem more helpful, when sleepy Christians go through the motions without rousing themselves to lay hold of God, revival is necessary.” (Ray Ortlund, When God Comes to Church, p. 35)

D. When God's people attempt the work of God in the power of the flesh.

The Church at Laodicea- “For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked. I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire, so that you may be rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself and the shame of your nakedness may not be seen, and salve to anoint your eyes, so that you may see. Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent. Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me.” (Revelation 3:17-20)

"The real problem is this: the church of the Lord Jesus Christ, individually or corporately, tending to do the Lord's work in the power of the flesh rather than of the Spirit. The central problem is always in the midst of the people of God, not in the circumstances surrounding them." (Francis Schaeffer, "The Lord's Work in the Lord's Way"- a sermon in the collection: No Little People, p. 66)

E. When God's people have lost their hope.

"Then he said to me, 'Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. Behold, they say, 'Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are indeed cut off.' Therefore prophesy, and say to them, Thus says the Lord God: Behold, I will open your graves and raise you from your graves, O my people. And I will bring you into the land of Israel... And I will put my Spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land. Then you shall know that I am the LORD; I have spoken, and I will do it, declares the LORD.'" (Ezekiel 37:11-12,14)

IV. What are the Marks of Revival?

A. Renewed love and esteem for Jesus and his work.

"So that if the spirit that is at work among a people is plainly observed to work so as to convince them of Christ and lead them to him- to confirm their minds in the belief of the history of Christ as he appeared in the flesh- and that he is the Son of God, and was sent of God to save sinners; that he is the only Saviour, and that they stand in great need of him; and if he seems to beget in them higher and more honourable thoughts of him than they used to have, and to incline their affections more to him; it is a sure sign that it is the true and right Spirit..." (Jonathan Edwards, "The Marks of a Work of the Spirit of God", The Works of Jonathan Edwards, Volume 2, p.266)

"You will find that in every period of revival, without exception, there has been a tremendous emphasis on the blood of Christ." (Martyn Lloyd-Jones, Revival , pp. 47-48)

B. Elevated regard for Scripture and a fresh appreciation of central biblical doctrines.

"The spirit that operates in such a manner, as to cause in men a greater regard to the Holy Scriptures, and establishes them more in their truth and divinity, is certainly the Spirit of God." (Jonathan Edwards, "The Marks of a Work of the Spirit of God", The Works of Jonathan Edwards, Volume 2, p.266)

Doctrines that are often underscored during seasons of revival:

Holiness of God
Sovereignty of God
Sin- hopelessness and helplessness of man in sin
The atonement
Regeneration
Justification by faith

C. Repentance

When God pours out his Spirit, repentance always results.

“When the true seriousness of sin comes home to the conscience, it is not necessary to plead for repentance (Acts 2:37-38).” (Richard Owen Roberts, Revival, p. 97)

A biblical account contrasting superficial and authentic repentance:
1 Samuel 4 and 1 Samuel 7.

D. Extraordinary Prayer

Example of New York in the 1850s.

“You need not fear that if you wait for God’s Spirit you will not get as much done as if you charge ahead in the flesh. After all, who can do the most, you or the God of Heaven and earth?” (Francis Schaefer, “The Lord’s Work in the Lord’s Way”- a sermon in the collection: No Little People, p. 73)

E. Conversions and Church Growth

Jonathan Edwards describing his ministry during March and April of 1736: “At that time, God’s work in the conversion of souls was carried on amongst us in so wonderful a manner, that, so far as I can judge, it appears to have been at the rate, at least, of four persons in a day; or near thirty in a week, take one with another, for five or six weeks together. When God in so remarkable a manner took the work into his own hands, there was as much done in a day or two as at ordinary times, with all endeavours that man can use, and with such a blessing as we commonly have, is done in a year.” (Jonathan Edwards, The Works of Jonathan Edwards, Volume 1, p. 350)

F. Sobriety about spiritual matters

“There is nothing that is so characteristic of revival as a great, and a deep, and a profound seriousness with respect to the things of God.” (Martyn Lloyd Jones, Revival, p. 67)

G. Unique Awareness of God's Presence in Corporate Worship

"The one constant factor that appears again and again in revival worship is this sense of the awful holiness of God." (Brian Edwards, Revival, p. 133)

"When the presence of God is an inescapable fact, then we are in revival. It was his tangible experience of the presence of God that led Duncan Campbell to describe revival as 'a community saturated with God.'" (Brian Edwards, Revival, p. 136)

H. Re-orientation of priorities: new vision for building the church

In revival, people who have lived with little awareness of God's purposes are awakened to him, to his glory and to his calling. Revived believers give themselves to fulfilling God's call to build his house. This is the story of the book of Haggai.

V. Preparing for Revival

A. Revival is a sovereign work of God. Our actions can't guarantee revival.

B. We can prepare for revival by pursuing the markers of revival.

1. Pray for revival.

"Here is the vital question. Have you seen the desperate need of prayer, the prayer of the whole Church? I shall see not hope until individual members of the Church are praying for revival, perhaps meeting in one another's homes, meeting in groups amongst friends, meeting together in churches, meeting anywhere you like, and praying with urgency and concentration for a shedding forth of the power of God" (Martyn Lloyd-Jones, Revival, p. 20)

2. Preach God's Word boldly anticipating his reviving work.

God revives his people through his word and Spirit- Ezekiel 37

3. Urgently proclaim the reality of eternity.

Jesus stresses eternity- heaven and hell- in his parables and teaching.

"The terrifying thing about modern man is that he no longer feels afraid, or feels anything, about eternity. To tell him that Christ came into the world to save sinners invites the question: 'To save sinners from what?' and when we reply 'From judgment and hell,' the response is invariably, Oh is that all? I thought you had something important to say... One thing revival does, and it always does it, is to reawaken, in both Christians and the community

around, a sense of the reality of eternal issues.” (Brian Edwards, Revival, pp. 42-43)

4. Call the church to pause, slow down, reflect and wait on God.
 - a. Reflecting in our gathered worship.
 - b. Reflecting in our daily lives.

“There are many who are not praying for revival because they are living such a superficial life. They do not even see the need of revival. They are busy and active, and they are rushing here and there. There is no time to think about revival. All is well, they say.” (Martyn Lloyd-Jones, Revival, pp. 83-84)

5. Call the church to repentance from sin.

“Whoever conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy.” (Proverbs 28:13)

“We cannot trigger revival but we can turn away from all that clogs up God’s work. We can devote ourselves to the normal ministry of the gospel in such a way that we give him no reason not to empower it mightily.” (Ray Ortlund, When God Comes to Church, p.12)

6. Teach on Revival Passages from the Scripture

- a. People will not pray for and pursue that of which they are ignorant.
- b. Help people understand that renewal may come suddenly or gradually.

Psalm 126- “Streams in the Negeb” vs. “Sowing in tears”

“We cannot trigger the Spirit’s downpour, but we should always abound in hope, for we live in the age of the Spirit. The Lord Jesus may at any time and under any circumstances grant us a fresh bestowment of his Spirit.... At any time, in any measure, upon any church, the Sovereign Lord is able to send the showers of his Spirit, for his greater glory, our richer joy and the salvation of the nations.” (Ray Ortlund, When God Comes to Church, p. 98)

“Revival is a season of refreshing from the presence of the Lord. It is sheer miracle. But it is also true that we are not to sit idly by, doing nothing while we wait for God to bless. We are to get busy sowing the seeds of revival, plentifully and constantly praying that God will honor the use of his own means.” (Ray Ortlund, When God Comes to Church, pp.137-38)

VI. Conclusion

A. Expectantly prepare for biblical revival

“Do not neglect the revival dimension of your ministry.” (J.I. Packer, quoted in When God Comes to Church, p.15)

B. Do not place your hope in revival.

“We must learn to be a people satisfied with God even when we are not yet saturated with God. A satisfied dissatisfaction is one of those necessary paradoxes of the Christian life. Besides, revival should never be the all-consuming concern of the church. Good things can happen for the church and through the church even on the outside of revival. We can only conclude with the prophet Micah, ‘Therefore I will look to the LORD; I will wait for the God of my salvation; my God will hear me.’ (Micah 7:7)” (Brian H. Edwards, Can We Pray for Revival?, p. 203)