

True Revival

Many Christians today recognize the tremendous need we have for revival, in the face of societal degradation and government corruption, and the prospect of the next round of electoral fraud and mob violence. But what is revival? In a sense it is like voting. One individual vote almost never determines the outcome of an election, but the combination of multitudes of votes is (supposed to be) effective. People often say that their vote doesn't count so why bother, but if everyone said that, their side would never win.

So with revival - it is necessarily an individual matter, where people respond singly to God's moving by the Spirit. Maybe one person's salvation, or the return of one backslider to a faithful walk, will not save a nation from ruin, but if great multitudes of people are saved, and believers repent of their lukewarmness, the course of a city or nation can be turned, at least for the immediate future. That is what we should be praying for, especially now. 2 Chr. 7:14.

If you say "Why pray, the nation is lost?", then it is inevitable, or at least if the nation is turned it will be no thanks to you. Eventually a nation is so corrupt that its fall really is unavoidable and just, and God even told Jeremiah at least twice, "Don't pray for this people, I won't listen." But unless God really tells you that, your place is to be a faithful intercessor and to pray God's mercy on this nation, through widespread revival.

What is revival, and what is it not?

The word revival comes from the word revive, which is to awaken, or make alive again. This base meaning can be seen in a physical sense, in 2 K. 13:21 – Some Israelites were burying a man when they were surprised by invading Moabites, so they "cast the man into the sepulchre of Elisha: and when the man was let down, and touched the bones of Elisha, he revived, and stood upon his feet."

It can also be used in a spiritual sense as in the many places in Ps. 119 where the King James version says "quicken me", although other versions say "revive me". In this sense it is to awaken us to spiritual reality and to a closer walk with God in everyday life, so that we can hear and recognize his voice, and obey him..

Most of the time when people use or hear the word "revival", they think of a series of special evangelistic church meetings. But a lost person cannot be revived – they have never had spiritual life. They do not need a return to life, but the initial giving of life, a new birth, a regeneration by the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:5). It is certainly good and helpful to have evangelistic meetings and preaching to bring the lost to a place of conviction and faith in Christ, but in a strict meaning of "revive", you will see that it is not the lost who need revived, it is believers. So a real "revival" meeting would have three aims - to bring lost souls to the life of the new birth, to revive backslidden believers so they will return to life and regain what they have lost, and to encourage the faithful believers to greater commitment and holiness.

Yet there is a sense in which we can use the term "revival" more generally.

What is meant by a general, or societal revival?

Salvation is for individuals, not cities, states, or nations. Even in the case of Israel, the one nation who has been promised salvation and deliverance in the end, it is still on an individual basis. Israel has always had their good and bad, believers and unbelievers, faithful and unfaithful. Eventually God will purge out the rebels (Ezek. 20) and bring in his elect.

So does it make sense to speak of a national revival? When we think of the spiritual life of a nation we are really talking about the combined life and effect on society of all those in it who are believers. The nation as a whole has no life – the only life is in those who are God's own. But we could qualify our meaning somewhat to understand that when we pray for national revival, we are praying that so many of its citizens would wake up to spiritual reality, and return to an active and genuine profession of faith, that it would have a profound and lasting effect on the nation as a whole. It is to return to that "salt and light" effect on society.

It can also mean the restoration of a general decency and morality which must be the foundation of any successful society. People used to refer to the United States as a Christian nation, not because every person was a Christian, or that we were in any sense a theocracy, but because the people who initially settled the country and who later immigrated were largely Christians, and Christianity's general influence was such that its moral principles were a pervading influence that affected all its citizens, the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and the laws,

even for those who never claimed to be Christian. John Adams famously said “Because we have no government armed with power capable of contending with human passions unbridled by morality and religion. Avarice, ambition, revenge or gallantry, would break the strongest cords of our Constitution as a whale goes through a net. Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other.”

General revivals have happened in the past, and we refer to them as the Great Awakening (1730s and 1740s), the Second Awakening (1795-1840), the Welsh Revival (1904-1905), the Azusa Street Pentecostal outpouring (1906-1915), the Charismatic movement (starting in the 1960’s), or future-looking phrases like the latter rain, the manifestation of the sons of God, the end-time anointing, etc. There have been revivals so effective that all the pubs and taverns in a town have closed. Men like Billy Graham, John and Charles Wesley, Charles Spurgeon, Charles Finney, Smith Wigglesworth, and many others have been and are being used by God to bring multitudes into the kingdom.

What is meant by personal revival?

True revival in the spiritual sense of waaking, bringing back to life, or “quickenning”, is an individual matter.

Isa. 57:15 – “For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I will dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.”

Another way to say it is in Psalm 80, verses, 3, 7, and 19 – “Turn us again, O LORD God of hosts, cause thy face to shine; and we shall be saved.”

Lamentations speaks of revival as our turning to God, or as a renewal. Lam. 5:21 – “Turn thou us unto thee, O LORD, and we shall be turned; renew our days as of old.”

Other ways that the Bible uses to describe revival or the need for it include admonitions against drowsiness and sleepiness, becoming weary in well doing, slothfulness, sleeping in harvest, and that we should watch and pray. Many Christians just seem spiritually sleepy – not dead, but not fully functioning, in a fog.

Rom. 13:11 – “And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed”

“Revive” has many dictionary meanings (even in chemistry!), but in a personal and spiritual context it can mean:

- To bring back to life or consciousness
- To restore hope, confidence, love, or faith
- To renew a sense of purpose or determination
- To get back something that was lost (as the Christian walk, or a neglected Christian practice or doctrine)

To bring back to life or consciousness

This would apply to those who at one time made a real profession of faith, but have since backslidden. It may be that they no longer make any profession of Christ at all, or it may mean that they maintain the appearance of religion, but have no inner experience to back it up.

Rev. 3:1-3 – (to the church in Sardis) “... I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead. Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die: for I have not found thy works perfect before God. Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent. ...”

There are many people today, who would respond if asked, “Yes, I went forward and became a Christian, but now I never go to church, I do not profess Christ, and do not pretend to be a Christian.” Some of these people (maybe most?) were never really saved at all, they just followed someone else’s words in a prayer, with no real heart change. There are others though, like I once was, who did have a real experience, but through weakness, ignorance, or the accumulation of unconfessed sins, have given up. They may think their case is hopeless, and just resolve to live life as well as they can. Others feel the guilt and would like to return to faith, but the weight of condemnation and shame holds them back, or they believe that through their sin God has given up on them and will not take them back.

To these people, those who were genuinely saved but have since lapsed, the call of God is to turn back, return to what they once knew and experienced, and to walk again in that life, that living water that restores the soul. As they probably feel unworthy and are ashamed to admit to God their backsliding, they must be encouraged that their case is not hopeless, that if they return to God that he will have mercy on them and “restore their soul”. Rev. 3:3 said to remember what they had heard and received, to hold it fast and to repent. His warning and command makes it clear that he wants the sinner to return, Jesus said “All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.” (Jn. 6:37). That is God’s will and invitation for both the unsaved, and for lapsed believers!

Lk. 15 is the story of the prodigal son. Here is a man who had voluntarily left his father and squandered all in vain pursuits. Eventually he recognized his miserable condition and returned with fear and some doubt whether his father would want him back. The father eagerly received him and even had a big feast of celebration, saying “It was meet [*appropriate*] that we should make merry, and be glad: for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again: and was lost, and is found.” This story gives us hope to return to our heavenly Father in complete surrender, and so to be revived, or made alive again.

To restore hope, confidence, love, or faith

Sometimes we tend to lose confidence that God will continue to do, or do again, what we have experienced in the past, or heard stories of great things he has done in the past. This was the case with Gideon.

Judges 6:12-13 – “And the angel of the LORD appeared unto him, and said unto him, The LORD is with thee, thou mighty man of valour. And Gideon said unto him, Oh my Lord, if the LORD be with us, why then is all this befallen us? And where be all the miracles which our fathers told us of, saying, Did not the LORD bring us up from Egypt?”

Others have lost their zeal, commitment, or love for the Lord.

Rev. 2:4 – (to the church in Ephesus) “Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love. Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else ...”

To renew a sense of purpose or determination

The disciples had lost all hope at the crucifixion, and were mentally and spiritually crushed. Yet he appeared to them after his resurrection, and their grief was turned to joy. The expectations of the two on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24) had been dashed, so that they said to Jesus (whom they did not yet recognize), “Art thou only a stranger in Jerusalem, and hast not known the things which are come to pass there in these days? ... Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, which was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people: And how the chief priests and our rulers delivered him to death, and have crucified him. But we trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel ...”. They were saying that this had been their hope and expectation, but now those expectations were suddenly ripped away and they were left empty. But after Jesus revealed himself to them they said “Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures?” In that same context he appeared to them and others to show himself alive, and “Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures.”

If we have to any degree lost our sense of purpose because of disappointed expectations, or currently unfulfilled dreams, we need to return to him and pray that he restore to us, not merely those hopes and dreams, but his own purpose for our lives. Even if we have somehow failed in our gifts or callings, we should not think that all is lost, but determine that by God’s grace we will return to the right way and believe that he will once again use us for his own will and his kingdom.

Remember Jonah, who rejected his calling to preach to Nineveh. In the belly of the fish he said (2:4-9), “... I am cast out of thy sight: yet I will look again toward thy holy temple. ... When my soul fainted within me I remembered the LORD: and my prayer came in unto thee, into thine holy temple. ... But I will sacrifice unto thee with the voice of thanksgiving; I will pay that that I have vowed. Salvation is of the LORD.” He had faith that even in the midst of such serious chastening, God was restoring him, that his was not a final and ultimate failure. Then in 3:1, “the word of the LORD came unto Jonah the second time, saying ...”.

If you have rejected or missed your calling in life, return and repent, and believe that God will somehow “restore the years that the locust and cankerworm have eaten” (Joel 2:25).

Samson is a tragic example of someone who had a great and life-long calling and who had been used tremendously by God, but through carelessness, fleshly lust, and perhaps self-confidence, had been captured and shown to be powerless without God. But even in this case he regained a sense of purpose. Judges 16:28 – “And Samson called unto the LORD, and said, O LORD God, remember me, I pray thee, and strengthen me, I pray thee, only this once, O God, that I may be at once avenged of the Philistines for my two eyes.” The point is that he didn’t just give up, but repented and asked God to do one last work of power through him.

To get back something that was lost (as the Christian walk, or a neglected Christian practice or doctrine)

Ps. 51 was written by David after his sin with Bathsheba had been exposed. It was a prayer of humble and fearful repentance, confessing his sin (verses 1-4), and pleading for God to forgive and wash him (verses 2, 7, 9, 10), and then that God would restore to him that experience of joy, gladness and confidence. He prays that God would not cast him away, but to blot out his iniquities and renew a right spirit within him (10-12). Verse 13 says “Then will I teach transgressors thy ways; and sinners shall be converted unto thee.”

Even sin so serious as to bring excommunication from the church can, if properly responded to, result in restoration (1 Cor. 5:1-7 with 2 Cor. 2:5-9).

There have been great revivals in the past where something long neglected is brought back into practice, like the passover with kings Hezekiah and Josiah, or the reforms done under Ezra, or much later, the Reformation to free the church from Roman Catholic errors, and then in the early 1900’s the Pentecostal outpouring, which was a revival of something not totally, but mostly lost since the early church.

How can we experience true revival?

There is no way at all that we can directly bring about true revival. Just scheduling a speaker and reserving a location and a place in the calendar cannot do it, because it is quite literally something that only God can, and God will, do. No amount of speaking, shouting, yelling, spitting, singing, and religious hoo-rah will induce a lost sinner or a backslider to repent. We may entice people to come forward and go through a sinner’s prayer, and perhaps even be baptized, by appealing to their minds and emotions, but if that is the depth of the experience, they will inevitably backslide. They will be like those in the parable of the sower and the seed, either those in the rocky or the weedy ground.

Does this mean that we should discount or throw doubt on those who have been saved at meetings like Billy Graham or others? By no means, but time will tell who responded in truth and who were those who could not or would not stick with it.

Most people attribute the great success of Charles Finney and Billy Graham to their abilities to speak and somehow motivate people to come forward and make a profession of faith. This is partially true, but the real story lies with the men and women behind them who were serious intercessors.

“Father Nash”

Daniel Nash (1775 – 1931) was a pastor with some success but rejected by his church, who in time came to be an intercessor for Charles Finney. Wherever Finney planned to go, Nash would go ahead of time and rent a room by the week, where he and sometimes a few others, would fervently pray for the coming meetings. Sometimes he wouldn’t even be in the actual meetings, but in a house nearby where he was warring in prayer. It was this that produced such success for Finney, and Finney knew it. Shortly after Nash died, Finney left off the meetings because the “power” was gone. I would recommend reading his story in greater detail at hopefaithprayer.com, or do an internet search on “[Daniel Nash intercessor](#)”.

Armin Gesswein

From 1941 on there were a great number of prayer meetings in Los Angeles by people who recognized the need for revival. Gesswein was a Lutheran evangelist who helped get Billy Graham to come to Los Angeles for his first "Crusade" in 1949. While Graham preached in the big tent, Gesswein and around 1000 intercessors met in a "little tent" to pray for the lost, day and night. It was surely these prayers and tears that produced such great results in Billy Graham's ministry.

Pearl Goode

She was one of the intercessors at Billy Graham's 1949 Los Angeles crusade and devoted the rest of her life to praying for his meetings. She would go ahead of him anywhere in the country where he was to speak, and rent a room to pray for people to be saved. Eventually the Graham ministry found out and paid for her travel and expenses.

For more information on Gesswein and Goode, go to baptistpress.com, or do an internet search for "intercessors for evangelistic meetings".

Summary

- This country, and the world, needs revival in the general (non-individual) sense.
- This widespread revival cannot come any way except by many individual and personal revivals and new births.
- Individual believers who are weak and ineffectual need revival to return to what they have lost, or gain what they have not fully experienced.
- We must pray fervently for the lost, that they would repent and believe on Christ and his gospel message and be saved.
- We should also be praying that the combined effect of these new believers and revived believers would have a real and apparent effect on the society in which we live, that Christ would be lifted up and the nation itself turned from its present course of destruction.

Invitation

Where do you personally stand with God? Have you never believed and responded to the gospel? Are you a backslidden believer, who once received Christ but have allowed yourself to drift away for any reason? Or are you a professing Christian who has not really "backslidden", but who recognizes your need to "wake up", get more serious with God, either in consecration to Christ, in obedience, in the vital practices of the faith, as Bible reading and study, prayer, fellowship with the saints in a local church, or seeking and moving in your gifts? Now is the time to respond. Do not delay.

Sunday school teaching notes are available at: <https://howardslackteachings.com.6>