REVIVAL IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY
Isa. 43:18-21

Something is missing in life of the church. The passion is gone. The atmosphere is powerless. Complacency shrouds services. Deadness prevails. No fire in altar. Divisions & accusations widespread. Our churches flounder in apathy and mediocrity while the world plunges deeper into sin. Sanctity of home & family is abandoned. Standards of decency both publicly and privately have been forsaken. Lawlessness & rebellion permeates our land.

We have reached a place our stalwart forefathers feared. In a recent article, evangelist Michael Gott reflected on these giants of the past. “What was it they feared most? To the surprise of many it was not unbridled liberalism! Rather it was a form of correct biblical doctrine without God’s power. They feared a mainline denomination of educational respectability, even political influence and with notable numbers that would have lost its “first love”. They feared that Southern Baptists would lose its sense of mission and its passion for the lost and that the SBC would lose the cutting edge … and the biblical mandate to reach people and grow churches.”

Our spiritual heritage is one of passion for loving God and the lost. We have lost that passion!

The problem today in America is not the government or politicians, the educational system or economy, liberals or abortionists. The problem lies with us. We conservatives who claim the have the truth and think we are rich in Spiritual position and power, yet we are cold, complacent, impotent and unattractive to the world.
We are not just plateaued, not even just declining. We are in a freefall! We are losing our own children. The G.I. Generation (WWII) was 65% evangelical. My generation is 47%. My children (Boomers) are 35%, my grandchildren (Gen Exers) are 16% to 25% depending which end of that group you measure and the projection for the newest generation (Millennials) is 4%.

Last year Southern Baptists baptized right at 346,000. In the last 58 years only three years have produced fewer baptisms. Every year from 1950 till 1977 we baptized more. From 1979 until 1987 we baptized more, and we have baptized more every year since 1987 than we baptized last year! We have more evangelistic resources and training than at any time in our history, yet we are more ineffective than we have ever been. It is not lack of resources that hinders us, it is lack of passion for Christ and His presence. We have left our first love!

People just do not touch eternity when they are around us. We are too self-absorbed to live in the light of eternity. We desperately need a fresh touch from God!

I direct your attention to the book of Isaiah. Isaiah was God’s prophet for his day. His ministry lasted for approximately 60 years and spanned the reign of four kings in Judah. He was well-educated and highly respected. He was bold whether before the king or the people. He never tried to please anyone. He had a fiery indignation with compromise. He was the voice of God to the nation.

Isaiah preached in perilous times. The Israelites lived in two worlds: sight and faith. Did they dare believe God? Could God really make Jerusalem the city that endured rather than Babylon? They faced
their ruin, the end of their history, just the rubble of memories of what used to be…yet God said He was about to do a new thing.

We live in a similar world. We live in two worlds: the world of Sunday and preaching and music, much religious activity and ministry, but also the world of agnosticism, rising hostilities to our faith and our culture, impotent churches and apathetic leaders, danger, violence and failing economies,. Do we dare to believe that God has some good news for us?

Isa. 43:18-21: , “Look, I am about to do something new; even now it is coming. Do you not see it? Indeed, I will make a way in the wilderness, rivers in the desert, the animals of the field will honor Me, because I provide water in the wilderness, and rivers in the desert, to give drink to My chosen people. The people I formed for Myself will declare My praise.”

Acts 3:19-20, "Therefore repent and turn back, that your sins may be wiped out so that seasons of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord...."  

I. The Identity of revival

Thank God for gifted evangelists who lead our churches in revival meetings. Every church would be a healthier church if it regularly used the gift of the evangelist. But I am not talking about scheduled revival meetings.

I am talking about an extraordinary, powerful movement of God that cannot be explained in any earthly terms or human effort, but only by the Sovereign movement of God. There is no human explanation for genuine Revival.
The basic idea of revival is always a restoration of life. In revival men come alive to the life of God. It is that supernatural work of God in which He restores His own people to their first love. Sham & hypocrisy are exposed. Bitterness, resentment, envy and strife are revealed & repentance is strong.

God is not only the source of revival but He is also the end of revival. Revival comes from God and leads to God. “Revival is a people saturated with God” (Duncan Campbell).

What is happening in your church today that cannot be explained by human effort?

II. Conditions are right for revival

“Revival should be looked for during times of spiritual declension, during seasons of moral and spiritual bankruptcy, and at those periods in the history of the Church when a ‘form of godliness’ is present but the ’power thereof’ is denied.”

“If revival is the extraordinary movement of the Holy Spirit, it can be expected when the sovereign God of the universe sends it. And when is God likely to send an extraordinary work? At a time of extraordinary need when His people are in the grip of extraordinary desire and when nothing short of an extraordinary outpouring of the Holy Spirit will satisfy” (“Revival” by Richard Owen Roberts, p. 20 & p. 57).

Ezekiel the prophet was given a vision by God that gave him a tour into the holiest places in the Temple (chapters 5-8). There he saw compromise and heresy of every kind.

Then something happened that shocked the prophet. The Glory of the Lord departed. Gradually, in stages, God’s glory departed from Jerusalem…and nobody but Ezekiel noticed. The people were all too
busy with their daily lives and religious rituals to see that God had left them.

The glory of God has departed from us in America. Our compromise, indifference and disobedience have allowed us to keep up all the appearances of faith and worship, with little of the substance. We are too busy to even notice that the presence of the Lord is gone.

There are thriving churches today, but not enough to stop the decline and deadness in the majority of our churches. If ever we needed Revival it is today!

The years between the revivals of the 18th century and the 19th centuries are eerily similar to our day today. They were years of decline and spiritual deadness. Evil seemed to be in control. It was a time of unbridled infidelity, open ungodliness in society and apathy in the churches. It was a time of drunkenness, bitterness, profanity & disregard for God and for the church. Anti-Christian literature abounded. Thomas Paine, the son of an English Quaker, who emigrated to America at the beginning of the Revolutionary War. wrote “Rights of Man” and “Age of Reason”, which sold 1½ million copies and were thought by many to introduce the death of traditional Christianity. Infidels like Voltaire boldly predicted that the Bible would soon be a relic of the dark ages, suitable only to entertain the superstitious. Conditions seemed hopeless…just like today. We are primed for another touch of God in genuine Revival.

III. Crucial preparation for revival

While we cannot do anything to make revival happen, most revivals have their beginning in extraordinary prayer.
The Great Awakening of 1857-58 began with extraordinary prayer. Traced to prayer meeting in New York City begun by Jeremiah Lanphier. First meeting only 6 came. The next week 20, the next 40. Then it began to be daily event. Within 6 months, 10,000 businessmen gathered daily for prayer in NY in 150 different groups.

All kinds of people came: executives & professional men, merchants, clerks, and men from every walk of life.

The same happened in Philadelphia, where by Feb. 1858, over 2,500 attended daily prayer. Chicago saw over 2,000 daily attend prayer meetings in the Metropolitan Theater. Prayer meetings multiplied across America, pleading for God’s intervention in our nation.

Believers and churches banded together to pray for an outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Christianity is never more powerful than when a passionate unity prevails among believers. When jealousy, envy, strife, selfishness and desire for preeminence exists there is nothing in the church that shows the attractiveness of the Gospel. Such conditions drive unbelievers away from God. Most revivals began as believers gathered together to seek His face. The one thing in common was that they were not praying for lost souls, they were praying to know Him…to seek His face.

When God’s people come together in united prayer, God can move. If we cannot pray together for a movement of God in our land, then we will never act together in a way God can bless.

We don’t have to agree on everything theologically, but we can share a passion for Christ and unite together to beseech God to send revival.
This is beginning to happen across America and around the world on hundreds of college and university campuses. Prayer groups are meeting 24/7 to passionately pray for Revival.

During the Wales revival of 1904, Evan Roberts said, “My mission is first to the churches. When the churches are aroused to their duty, men of the world will be swept into the Kingdom. A whole church on its knees is irresistible” (“Revival, A People saturated with God: by Brian Edwards, Evangelical Press, 1990, p. 27).

IV. Genuine Revival dramatically impacts a culture

J. Edwin Orr reported of the Great Awakening of 1857-59, “The influence of the revival was felt everywhere in the nation. It first captured the great cities, but it also spread through every town and village and country hamlet. It swamped schools and colleges. It affected all classes regardless of condition. There was a remarkable unanimity of approval by religious and secular observers alike, with scarcely a critical voice heard anywhere. ” (The Fervent Prayer, by J. Edwin Orr, copyrighted 1964 Moody Press, p. 1)

The remarkable thing about the awakening in 1857-58 is that it covered our country from Atlantic to Pacific. Some cities in America reported that there was not an unsaved person in their city as result of this great awakening. In spite of the slavery issue, revival swept through the south. More than 200,000 converts were received by the Methodist and Baptist churches alone.

This revival moved impartially within the two great divisions of evangelicalism – Calvinism and Armenianism. Those same two divisions still exist today! Revival is the only answer to that division!
Revival is largely devoid of sensational phenomena. The overwhelming evidence of genuine revival is a deep conviction of sin, repentance and a great awareness of the holiness of God. The focus is never upon high emotions, sensational display or excitement. When God comes down there is a prostrating and humbling effect – not celebration. This results in conviction of sin and repentance.

Powerful preaching is evident in times of Revival, but not necessarily with well-known preachers. Prominent preachers may emerge in times of revival, but it will be God who lifts up the preacher. Revival preaching always centers on the Word of God. The absolute inerrancy of Scripture is embraced during genuine Revival.

Some principles of Revival are always the same: concerted, passionate prayer, bold exposition of God’s Word, recognition of the holiness of God, awareness of personal sin, repentance, remarkable unity among true believers and all of culture recognizes that it is a movement of God’s presence and multitudes are saved.

But every Revival is different. No two times of revival are identical. Although the same general pattern appears in each revival every Revival has clear evidence that its source is God Himself.

Justification by grace through faith alone is cherished. The necessity of the new birth moves upon all with convicting power.

The call for repentance is prominent. The OT prophets preached repentance. John the Baptist preached repentance. Jesus began His ministry with the call to repentance. At Pentecost, Simon Peter issued the call for repentance. That same call for repentance is powerfully present in times of Revival.
The results of such a Divine intervention is that multitudes are saved and brought into the Kingdom of God and into churches. During the 1857-59 period of revival in America more than 2 million people were saved and added to the churches.

Simply put, Revival begins with a passion for the presence of God. This is missing today. The 21st Century American church has much for which to be grateful: theologically trained leaders, superior organization and materials, committed lay workers, financial resources, everything except the one thing we can least afford to be without… a passion for the presence of God.

We must confess the sins of our nation and repent. After a devastating critique of the nation’s sins (Isa. 59:1-2), Isaiah prayed “For OUR transgressions have multiplied before You, and OUR sins testify against us, and we know OUR iniquities….” (Isa. 59:12)

Ezra cried out to God, “My God, I am ashamed and embarrassed to lift my face toward You, my God, because our iniquities are higher than our heads and our guilt is as high as the heavens” (Ezra 9:6).

Nehemiah prayed with the same pattern and passion.

Even godly Daniel prayed “…we have sinned, done wrong, acted wickedly, rebelled, and turned away from Your commandments and ordinances. We have not listened to Your servants the prophets…” (Dan. 9:5-6). “Public shame belongs to us…because we have sinned against You” (Dan. 9:7-16).

His prayer concludes with “Lord, hear! Lord, forgive! Lord, listen and act! My God, for Your own sake, do not delay, because Your city and Your people are called by Your name” (Dan. 9:18-19).
Each of these men cried out to God and identified themselves with the sins of the nation. So should we! We should confess our sins and our nation’s sins, and repent, for we are to blame corporately as the church for our apathy and compromise. If we don’t repent, then repentance will not likely occur! And God is unlikely to hear our cries for revival.

A PRAYER FOR REVIVAL

O God, send us the Holy Ghost! Give us both the breath of spiritual life and the fire of unconquerable zeal. O Thou art our God, answer us by fire, we pray Thee! Answer us both by wind and fire, and then we shall see Thee to be God indeed. The kingdom comes not, and the work is flagging. Oh, that Thou wouldst send the wind and the fire! Thou wilt do this when we are all of one accord, all believing, all expecting, all prepared by prayer.

Lord, bring us to this waiting state! God, send us a season of glorious disorder. Oh, for a sweep of the wind that will set the seas in motion, and make our ironclad brethren, now lying so quietly at anchor, to roll from stem to stern!

Oh, for the fire to fall again—fire which shall affect the most stolid! Oh, that such fire might first sit upon the disciples, and then fall on all around! O God, Thou art ready to work with us today even as Thou didst then. Stay not, we beseech Thee, but work at once.

Break down every barrier that hinders the incoming of Thy might! Give us now both hearts of flame and tongues of fire to preach Thy reconciling word, for Jesus’ sake! Amen!

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