

INTRODUCTION

I am interrupting my series through Luke for this Sunday because I want to speak to you about the need for revival in America and in our church. Our summer revival begins two weeks from this morning, on August 5. Dr. Darrell Robinson, one of the most gifted preachers in America, will preach these meetings.

America has seen amazing technological advancements during the past forty years, but during the same period we have witnessed an alarming moral decline. America was founded as a haven for people seeking liberty to practice their faith without persecution. I wonder what George Washington’s or Benjamin Franklin’s reactions would be if they could ride a time machine from 1776 to 2001. What would they think of our depraved culture and our huge federal bureaucracy? We all know where America has been but where do you think we are heading?

Alexander Fraser Tytler (1748-1813), a Scottish jurist and professor at the University of Edinburgh, wrote the following in “The Decline and Fall of the Athenian Republic” (1801):

“A democracy cannot exist as a permanent form of government. It can only exist until the voters discover that they can vote themselves money from the Public Treasury. From that moment on the majority always votes for the candidates promising the most benefits from the Public Treasury with a result that democracy always collapses over loose fiscal policy. The average age of the world’s greatest civilizations has been 200 years. These nations have progressed through the following sequence:

- (1) From bondage to spiritual faith
- (2) From spiritual faith to great courage
- (3) From great courage to liberty
- (4) From liberty to abundance
- (5) From abundance to selfishness
- (6) From selfishness to complacency
- (7) From complacency to apathy
- (8) From apathy to dependency
- (9) From dependency to bondage.”

Where do you think our nation is on the list? I’d say we are somewhere between #7 and #8. You cannot escape the truth that God not only holds individuals accountable, He also holds nations accountable to His Word. I believe America needs a spiritual awakening—a revival. But I don’t think it’s just a nice option; I believe America needs revival for survival! The key to any spiritual awakening is found in 2 Chronicles 7:14. The choir just sang that verse. However, I want us to study the verse in its full context.

Solomon just completed a beautiful new temple, which took seven years to build (ours only took two and a half). Over 160,000 workers were involved in the construction (we had around 400). The temple contained several tons of pure gold (estimated cost today’s is \$200 million). In Chapter 6, they had dedication services and after Solomon prayed, the fire of God fell and consumed the burnt offering. The Shekinah glory of God was thick like smoke—so thick the

priests could not even enter the temple. They had a weeklong dedication celebration. Things were going great—the people had never been happier—offerings were huge. But it is exactly at this point God spoke in Chapter 7. Does any of this sound familiar to you? Things are wonderful here—more people are joining, being saved and attending than ever before in our history. But just like Israel, God is speaking to us today. Listen carefully to His words to Solomon in 2 Chronicles 7:11:

When Solomon had finished the temple of the LORD and the royal palace, and had succeeded in carrying out all he had in mind to do in the temple of the LORD and in his own palace, the LORD appeared to him at night and said:

“I have heard your prayer and have chosen this place for myself as a temple for sacrifices.

When I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or command locusts to devour the land or send a plague among my people, if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land. Now my eyes will be open and my ears attentive to the prayers offered in this place ...

(vs. 19) But if you turn away and forsake the decrees and commands I have given you and go off and serve other gods and worship them, then I will uproot Israel from my land, which I have given them, and will reject this temple I have consecrated for my Name. I will make it a byword and an object of ridicule among all peoples.

God is speaking to me, to you, to our church. I believe He is speaking to America. At the time God spoke those words, Israel was the leading world superpower. Even Egypt’s Queen of Sheba came to see the glory of Israel. But those of you who know Old Testament history know within about 275 years of this warning, the nation of Israel became so corrupt and depraved, they fell to the Assyrians. A few years later, the Babylonians destroyed the nation of Judah along with Jerusalem and the temple. America stands as the military world leader but we also lead the world in divorce, violence and pornography. That’s why I believe we need revival for survival. In this message, I want to simply answer three questions about revival.

I. WHAT IS TRUE REVIVAL?

It’s a word most of you have heard all your lives. The church I grew up in had a revival every spring and fall. These were meetings where some guest preacher and guest musician came in and lead weeklong services. But most of these were simply “meetings” and not true revivals. I have been praying that what happens starting August 5 will *not* just be another meeting but it will be a true revival.

Let me share with you **(A.) the definition** of revival. Our word comes from two Latin phrases, *re*, which means “again” and *vivere*, which means “to live.” So, basically it means to “live again.” If a person suffers a heart attack, CPR can often be used to “revive” that person. Let me give you a good definition within a spiritual context: Revival is “restoring spiritual vitality to a lifeless person, family, church or nation.” Every word is important. It is something that is

restored. If you’ve never “had spiritual vitality” there’s no way you can “get it again.” Spiritual vitality means “spiritual zeal, excitement, enthusiasm and fervor.” If you’ve never been that way before, you don’t need a re-vival, you need a “vival!” A lifeless person is someone who has lost their zeal and their spiritual life and is dull, dead and despondent. Have you ever been more excited about Jesus or more faithful to Jesus than you are at this moment? If you answer “yes” you need a revival. I agree with Pastor Chris Gowen who wrote:

The greatest need in our land today is a Heaven-sent revival! Not a manmade, or a program-generated revival, but a Revival straight from the throne room of God on High! Man can’t produce it. Never has there been a preacher who could preach it up. Never has there been a choir, or a quartet that could sing it up. If it is a real revival, it will be because sovereign God has intervened in people’s lives. Church services will take on a new face. It will not be services as usual. Revival is not eyes full of tears. That can be done by the flesh. It is not shouting. That can be done by the flesh, too. It is not large crowds. A circus can attract crowds. It is not folks getting saved. God graciously saves by grace, even when churches are not in a state of revival. The word “revival” literally means to “live again.” It is God’s people coming alive again to their responsibilities toward God.

Let’s consider **(B.) the history** of revivals in America. Personal and national revivals are not just some golden ideal that can never be attained. Spiritual awakenings have been historically documented in our nation’s history. I have been a student of great revivals for many years. Since many of our American history books have recently been re-written to remove most spiritual and religious references, let me give you an American history lesson about our rich spiritual heritage. There have been two great national revivals, which historians call Spiritual Awakenings.

• **First Great Awakening: 1734 in New England**

Like a good fire marshal tracing a fire to determine its source, historians can generally trace where and when a spark of revival ignited, because the spiritual and moral climate of an entire region was affected. After two or three generations of settlers established themselves in the New World, wickedness and depravity began to creep into cities like Boston. The human instrument of the first Great Awakening was Jonathan Edwards, a highly educated minister. He later became the third president of Princeton University. Edwards was a small man who wore spectacles with thick lenses. He read his sermons word for word in a thin monotone voice, with few gestures. But the power of God was so strong through his preaching, men and women cried out and literally grabbed onto the wooden support pillars to keep from falling into hell. Here is an excerpt from his famous sermon:

“Unconverted men walk over the pit of hell on a rotten covering, and there are innumerable places in this covering so weak that they will not bear their weight, and these places are not seen ... The lake of burning brimstone is extended abroad under you. There is hell’s wide gaping mouth open; and you have nothing to stand upon, nor anything to take hold of, there is nothing between you and hell but the air; it is only the power and mere pleasure of God that holds you up.” (From “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God”)

In a short period of time, over 30,000 residents of New England were converted and the revival fires spread throughout the Thirteen Colonies. This spiritual awakening fanned the flames of the movement to secure independence from England. Many respected historians claim America’s freedom-spirit was born during a revival. Both Edwards and John Wesley, who was a contemporary revival leader in England, were deeply influenced by a group of German Christians called Moravians. Ten years earlier in 1724, Count Nicolas Zinzendorf gathered a group of people to pray for the conversion of the lost. This prayer meeting actually continued 24 hours a day for 100 years! News of this prayer movement motivated Edwards to pray for the conversion of his congregation. He became burdened because many of the people attending his church had never been born again and thousands of “church goers” were converted during the First Great Awakening. Records indicate at least one-third of the total population of the Colonies was converted to Christ through this sweeping revival.

• **Second Great Awakening: 1841 in New York and Midwest**

After the Revolutionary War and the War of 1812, thousands of new settlers came to the New World and many moved westward into the wilderness of Ohio and Kentucky. Once again, sin and wickedness ruled in many of the cities and in the pioneer regions.

These were the days of the Camp Meetings. Families piled into wagons and buggies and traveled to a designated place to spend a couple of weeks in a time of fellowship, preaching and worship after the crops were “laid by” each August. Many of them were so isolated, they packed an entire year of church into this short period of time. One notable camp meeting I researched in depth took place near Cane Ridge, Kentucky. At a time when the entire population of the region was not more than 50,000 people, over 25,000 people gathered in August for the Cane Ridge Camp meeting. A group of Cumberland Presbyterians designated every Saturday as a day of fasting and prayer for two years before Cane Ridge. James B. Finley, a Methodist circuit rider preacher, described in his journal exactly what he saw:

“The noise was like the roar of Niagara. The vast sea of human beings seemed to be agitated as if by a storm. I counted seven ministers all preaching at one time, some on stumps, others in wagons, and one was standing on a tree that had fallen. Some people were singing, others praying, some crying for mercy, while others were shouting most vociferously. A strange supernatural power seemed to pervade the entire mass of mind collected there. I stepped up on a log, where I could have a better view—the scene that presented itself was indescribable. At one time, I saw at least five hundred people fall to their faces in prayer, as if a battery of a thousand guns had been opened upon them and then immediately there were shouts and prayers that rent the heavens.”

As the revival spread throughout young America, it touched a young lawyer who became one of its most effective preachers. Lawyer Charles G. Finney was reading the book of Romans as a requirement for a legal course. In the process of reading Romans he was converted. The same day, all alone, he was filled with the Holy Spirit. Here’s how he described his own personal revival:

“Without any expectation of it, without the recollection that I had ever heard the thing mentioned by any person in the world, the Holy Spirit descended upon me in such a manner that seemed to go through me, body and soul. I could feel the impression, like a wave of electricity, going through and through me. Indeed it seemed to come in waves of liquid love. It seemed like the very breath of God seemed to fan me, like immense wings. No words can express the wonderful love that was shed abroad in my heart. I wept aloud with joy and love; and I do not know but I should say I literally bellowed out the unutterable gushings of my heart. These waves came over and over me, one after the other, until I cried out, ‘I shall die if these waves continue to pass over me.’ I said, ‘Lord, I cannot bear any more;’ yet I had no fear of death.”

He traveled around the country and entire cities were converted. His eyes were so deep set and piercing, it was said one look from him caused some people to fall on their knees in repentance. The focus of his preaching was conversion that led to social reform. In every city he preached in, he preached against social injustice including slavery and child labor. This great awakening gave birth to the attitudes later leading to the emancipation of slaves.

Those are the kinds of things that happen in a real revival—a true spiritual awakening. Individuals are converted, Christians are restored to vitality, cities are changed, and an entire culture is affected.

• **Third Great Awakening: 2001? In Tyler?**

During the 20th century, there have been isolated outbreaks of revival. There was a great surge of evangelism after WWII during the 1950s (Some of you remember “A million more in ‘54”). There was the Jesus Movement of the 1970s, and we saw promising signs in the 1990s but nothing has affected our national moral position. In fact we continued to slide backwards spiritually and morally.

I believe God wants to send a great spiritual awakening to our nation again—it’s our only hope. I believe it can start in Tyler. Tyler is a unique city with a unique spiritual mix. When the leaders of ministry organizations like Keith Green, YWAM, Mercy Ships and Teen Mania chose to base their operations in the area around Tyler and Lindale, they all said they sensed God was going to do something great that would begin in this region and spread to our nation. I would love for God to use Green Acres and Tyler as a place to let the fire fall again!

But some of you are skeptical at this moment. You like things just the way they are. You may not even think Green Acres or America needs revival. Let me address the question:

II. WHY DO WE NEED A SPIRITUAL AWAKENING?

The two-fold answer is simple:

(A.) The moral corruption of our culture

It can no longer be said America is the moral conscience of our world. Our cries for global human rights sound empty and hypocritical to people in other countries who realize we lead the world in divorce, violence, abortion, and crime. When I traveled to Europe for the first time, I was amazed to learn many Europeans are *afraid* to travel to America. The front page of our own local paper talked about the large number of females who are applying for concealed handgun permits to protect themselves. You don't have to be a rocket scientist to see our culture is a hundred times more corrupt than we were just 50 years ago. Most of us have become deadened to the impact of statistics but let me report to you the kind of moral climate in which our teenagers and children live every day. According to *USA Today*, every day in the USA, 2,975 teens get pregnant; 1,106 teens have an abortion; 27 children die from poverty; 3,288 run away from home; 437 children are arrested for drinking or drunk driving; 1,629 children are in adult jails; 7,742 teens become sexually active; 2,556 children are born out of wedlock; 1,849 children are abused or neglected; 2,989 children experience the trauma of their parents' divorce.

Fifty years ago, it wasn't just Bible-believing Christians who spoke out against adultery, divorce and homosexual behavior; our society as a whole disapproved of these activities. Today, not only are these common practices in our society but many churches are marrying same-sex partners and ordaining openly gay people. But as I've said before, if you have the guts to stand up and speak out against sin, you are labeled an intolerant, narrow-minded bigot. I agree with Billy Graham who said in the 1970s, "If God doesn't judge America, He owes an apology to Sodom and Gomorrah!"

But honestly, I don't blame our society or our government. I think the fault lies squarely with **(B.) the apathy of Christians**. We have stood by and watched our society go to hell in a hand basket. We have refused to leave the refuge of our pews to be salt and light in a decaying, dark culture.

Alexis de Toqueville, a famous French political philosopher, visited America over a hundred years ago. He traveled from town to town, talking with people, asking questions, examining every facet of our society. Returning to France, he wrote these amazing words:

"I sought for America's greatness. I found it not in her fields and forests. I found it not in her mines and factories. I found it not in her Congress and great tribunals. It was only when I entered her churches and heard her pulpits thundering against sin and preaching righteousness that I discovered the secret of her greatness." Then he added, "America is great because America is good. If America ever ceases to be good, America will cease to be great."

It seems too many churches have stopped thundering against sin. Do you know what apathy is? Do you even care to know what apathy is? *Pathos* is a word meaning "to feel deeply." When you put an *a* in front of it, it means "not to feel deeply." An *a*-pathetic Christian is someone who really doesn't care that our nation is in deep trouble. They don't even care enough to attend revival services, much less fast and pray for revival to come to our church and nation. Do you care? In a few minutes, I'm going to extend a good old-fashioned altar call and ask many of you come to this altar and get on your knees to demonstrate you are burdened for revival. You can't do that if you are apathetic. On the week before our revival begins, starting Monday morning,

July 30 we are going to have a prayer meeting every morning right here at this altar starting at 6:00. An apathetic Christian won't even *think* about coming. During the week of meetings, we will have services Sunday morning, Sunday night, Monday through Wednesday at 7 p.m. An apathetic Christian won't even be aware we're having services—they are too involved in the other things in their life.

That leads to the final question and I can answer it quickly.

III. WHEN WILL REVIVAL COME TO OUR LAND?

God tells us very clearly what we must do to see revival come. He says the responsibility is on us. “My people who are called by my name.” It's not up to the pornographers or the abortionists—it's up to *us*—to each of us as individuals. Like Tony Evans says, the reason we have a messed up universe is because we have a messed up world made up of messed up nations, made up of messed up states, made up of messed up cities, made up of messed up neighborhoods, made up of messed up churches, made up of messed up families, made up of messed up people.

The *only* way revival will come to America is when revival happens in your life. The *only* way revival will happen in Green Acres and Tyler is when revival happens in your life.

FOR PERSONAL REVIVAL, I MUST:

(1.) Be broken and have a burden to pray

“ ... humble themselves and pray ... ”

Two factors are *always* present in every great spiritual awakening: humility and prayer. Those aren't two separate steps, they happen simultaneously. The old evangelist Gypsy Smith used to say, “The way to revival is to draw a circle around yourself, get down on your knees and pray, ‘Lord send a revival and let it begin inside this circle.’” As your pastor, I'm asking you to begin to pray daily for God to revive His people and to “heal our land.” I'm asking you to take a day each week and spend that day in prayer and fasting. If your schedule allows, try to do it on the next two Thursdays. I'm asking you to come and pray here each morning at 6:00 on the week before the revival meeting begins. I'm asking you to find friends and pray with them for revival.

Next, revival will happen when I

(2.) Turn toward God's face and turn from my sin

“ ... seek my face and turn from their wicked ways ... ”

These are not two separate steps either. Like humility and prayer, they occur simultaneously. Do you know what it means to seek God's face? It's like me scanning this crowd this morning. I'm looking for one face ... There. I found the face of my wife. You see, you can't seek God's face if you are seeking your own way. I really can't seek someone else's face if I seek God's face. When you come to God with a shopping list of requests you seek God's *hand*. But when you

come to God with surrender and submission you are seeking His *face*. You can't seek God's face if there is unconfessed sin in your life. Whose face are you seeking the most?

Once when the French King, Louis XIV arrived at church, he was the only person there except the court preacher, Fenelon. When the King asked where all the people were, Fenelon replied, “I announced that His Majesty would not be attending church this morning. I wanted to see who attended worship to flatter you and who came to seek God.”

Later, when the ornate chapel was built at Versailles, the royal family sat in the center balcony opposite the altar. All the worshipers sat on the first floor *not* facing the priest or the altar but facing the king with their backs turned to the altar. I'm afraid people still come to church and never seek God's face. Did you come to church today to seek God or to see or be seen?

The word “turn” means to repent. In the early 1970s Jack Taylor was pastor of Castle Hills Baptist Church in San Antonio. His members had been praying for revival. Revival broke out on a Sunday morning at that church while Jack was away on vacation. The youth minister was scheduled to preach that morning. He had an entire message planned, but just before he stood up, He sensed God wanted him to forget his planned message and preach a three-word sermon. He walked to the pulpit and shouted, “REPENT!—REPENT!—REPENT!” And Jack Taylor writes, “And that's when all heaven broke loose.” That church experienced real revival.

CONCLUSION

There is no shortcut to revival. There is no secret to revival. It's part of God's economy. When you lower the temperature of water to 32 degrees, ice *will* form. It's just as certain when we humble ourselves, pray, seek God's face and repent, God *will* hear from heaven, forgive our sin and heal our land. *We* can't heal America but *God* can. When we are faithful to do our part, He is *always* faithful to do His part. Vance Havner used to say, “The reason America doesn't have revival is because while the situation is desperate, the saints are not.” Things are bad but Hallelujah, I believe God is going to send a mighty revival to our land and I just want to be a part of it—do you?

I wonder how many of you are burdened enough for your soul, your family, your church, your nation, to join me on your knees right now to pray for revival? If you are will you come and kneel here at these steps for a moment? If there isn't room, just turn around in your seat and get down on the floor on your knees and use your pew as a prayer altar. Will you come right now?

OUTLINE

I. WHAT IS TRUE REVIVAL?

A. The definition

“restoring spiritual vitality to a lifeless person, family, church or nation”

B. The history

- First Great Awakening: 1734 in New England
- Second Great Awakening: 1841 in New York and Midwest
- Third Great Awakening: 2001? In Tyler?

II. WHY DO WE NEED A SPIRITUAL AWAKENING?

A. The moral corruption of our culture

B. The apathy of Christians

III. WHEN WILL REVIVAL COME TO OUR LAND?

For personal revival, I must:

1. Be broken and have a burden to pray

“... humble themselves and pray ...”

2. Turn toward God’s face and turn from my sin

“... seek my face and turn from their wicked ways ...”



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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes