

What to Pray for in Revival

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 23 October 2022

Preacher: Rev. Jonathan St. Clair

[0 : 00] We hope that you enjoy this teaching from Christ Church. This material is copyrighted and no unauthorized duplication, redistribution, or any other use of any part is permitted without prior consent from Christ Church.

Please consider donating to this work in the San Francisco Bay Area online at ChristChurchEastBay.org. Good morning.

I'm Melissa Arsuniega, and I'm part of the North Berkeley Tuesday Night Community Group at the Wesolowskis. Today's scripture reading is from the book of Exodus, chapter 33, verses 12 through 18, as printed in the liturgy.

A reading from the book of Exodus. Moses said to the Lord, You have been telling me, lead these people, but you have not let me know whom you will send with me.

You have said, I know you by name, and you have found favor with me. If you are pleased with me, teach me your ways so I may know you and continue to find favor with you.

[1 : 15] Remember that this nation is your people. The Lord replied, my presence will go with you, and I will give you rest. Then Moses said to him, if your presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here.

How will anyone know that you are pleased with me and with your people unless you go with us?

What else will distinguish me and your people from all the other people on the face of the earth?

And the Lord said to Moses, I will do the very thing you have asked, because I am pleased with you, and I know you by name.

Then Moses said, now show me your glory. The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the Lord the Lord stands forever.

This week at our wonderful Wednesday gathering, we had about 20 people here, and we were talking in our adult breakout time about prayer and praying together.

[2 : 27] And I asked people to write down, you know, what's a question or a challenge that you have in your own prayers to God? And it was striking to me that out of this group of 20 people, a bunch of people mentioned the very same thing.

And they said, do our prayers affect God? Do our prayers do anything? And this is so important, because this is a sermon series where we're inviting you and challenging you to think about this one word, revival.

And particularly to pray this one simple prayer, revive us. But of course, why would we pray this prayer if we're not sure that our prayers affect God, if we're not sure that our prayers actually do anything?

So I want to begin by saying this morning that I believe God has given us the prayers of Scripture, the prayers of Abraham, Moses, and David, the prayers of the prophets, the prayers of Jesus and the apostles, so that we might learn how to pray like them.

Because God wants to be affected by those prayers. God wants to take those prayers up to himself and pour them back down upon the church and pour them back down upon the world to accomplish his purposes.

[3 : 40] And I don't think God would have given us these visions of revival, these models of revival in the Bible and in church history, unless he intended for us to be inspired by them and therefore to pray earnestly for them.

And some of you, if you're new today, you might think, gosh, revival, what's he talking about? This focus seems a little bit strange. But we've reached an age in which the vast majority of church members, at least in our part of the world, have ceased to think in terms of revival at all.

Up until about 1860, it was just instinctive to think in terms of revival, especially in our Reformed tradition.

If you hit a period of spiritual drought, if things were not going so well in the church or in society, what was the first thing that people thought? They thought to themselves, should we not enter into a time of confession?

Should we not humble ourselves? Should we not enter into a season of prayer for God to come and visit us again? But in our modern time, you know, we see the church languishing, and our first thought is we should form a committee.

[4 : 54] You know, we should host a potluck. We should play more games. But our spiritual mothers and fathers were much wiser than us, and they said, you know, why are things so bad? Why is it that we are seeing plagues and violence and drought?

Why is there seemingly an increasing amount of spiritual confusion and moral decline and social division and economic crises and cultural breakdown and communal disasters?

That's what they ask themselves. Why is it so bad? And why is the church not more alive to God and not more faithful to the gospel? And they thought to themselves, you know, we must have offended God.

Like we collectively as a society, we must have offended God. We must have grieved him in some way. Perhaps we turned our backs on God, and so he's turned his back on us.

And they thought, well, what can we do about this? And the church said, well, we, representing all the people around us, we can get down on our knees and we can ask God, please come back.

[6 : 06] Please, we're pleading with you. We're arguing with you. We're reasoning with you, God, to send your Holy Spirit and to send revival. And that's what the church would do.

They would plead the promises of God. They would agonize in prayer until God heard them, until God visited them with the Holy Spirit, until God revived not only the church but the whole society around the church.

And this is the pattern that's repeated over and over again in the prophets of Moses and Samuel and Elijah, and the kings like Asa and Jehoshaphat and Josiah and Hezekiah, and Ezra and Nehemiah, if you just go read the Bible, you'll see this pattern repeated, that God is affected by our prayers, and that God has designed things in such a way that he would take our prayers and he would use those to revive his people and therefore to revive the whole world.

And so with that, I want to invite us to turn our attention to Moses and his great prayer for revival in Exodus chapter 33. And this text today tells us, ask God for more.

Ask God for more assurance, power, and holiness. That's what Moses' prayer is about. Ask God for more assurance, power, and holiness.

[7 : 38] What does it mean to ask God for more assurance? We've seen in these last few weeks that God withdrew his presence from the church of the Old Testament. Israel, the people of God, they had this golden calf moment, and God withdrew his presence, and in response to that, the people repented.

And Moses set up this tent of meeting, and he began to pray for God to have mercy on his people, and this cloudy pillar of God's presence began to return to the church.

God was beginning to answer these prayers for revival, prayers that he would return, prayers that he would not hold the sins of the church against her, and that God would not withhold his favor and withhold his face from his people.

And I think Moses was extremely grateful to God for this. And I think the people of Israel were extremely grateful to God for this. They saw this cloudy pillar of God's presence come down upon the tent of meeting, and we saw last week all the people began to worship.

And every person began to turn their own homes into a little tent of meeting where they would pray and they would worship God. And why were they worshiping? Because God was returning.

[8 : 52] Because God was listening to Moses and speaking to Moses. And you would think that Moses would stop here, and he would be content just to enjoy the answers to his prayers.

But you can see that Moses is not satisfied, that Moses desires more, and that he in fact goes back to the tent of meeting, and he keeps on praying. And he says, Lord, what we have is not enough.

And that's the essence of revival. The essence of revival is pleading for something more. It's pleading for that which is additional, and unusual, and special, and exceptional, and extraordinary.

And this is not to say that we should be ungrateful to God for all the things that he's given us. We should thank God when we see the church knows who she believes, and when the church is firm in the truth, and experiencing God's blessings.

We should thank God when the church is conscious of his presence, and full of the Holy Spirit, and empowered for his work, and seeing regular conversions. We should hope for that, and we should thank God for those things.

[10:05] But that's not revival. Revival. That's just the regular, usual, normal, ordinary state of the church. But revival goes way beyond these things.

Revival is something startling, something amazing, something extraordinary. And if I don't draw your attention to that, you won't be concerned about it, and you won't know that you need to pray for it.

You might think to yourself, well, things are going fine. God is blessing us. We should just keep on as we are. Revival is not really necessary. And Moses himself could have settled for that.

But we see here that he pleads for more. And what did Moses pray for? Well, he prays for that same thing that men and women always pray for when they feel a burden for revival.

This characteristic prayer that people who are praying for and preparing for revival, they pray this way. And the first thing Moses prays for is he asks for assurance.

[11:05] He asks God for assurance. And he says in verse 13, if you are pleased with me, teach me your ways so I may know you and continue to find favor with you.

Remember that this nation is your people. Now that sounds strange because last week we saw that Moses was spoken to by God face to face and person to person like a friend.

So doesn't Moses already know God? Doesn't he already have the favor of God? And the reality is that Moses wants to know God more. He wants to experience the favor of God more.

He's not content with mere knowledge that God has accepted him or that God cares for him. He knows that. He knows God's concern and he knows God's kindness. But what he wants is a deeper and a fuller knowledge of God.

He wants more personal and direct experience that God really loves him. It's like a child. A child might know that you love them but that child needs to hear from you.

[12:14] You are my pride and joy. I love you to the moon and back. Right? A child desperately needs to hear those words and that's what Moses is praying for.

Lord, press your love so deep into my heart that I'm confident of it, that I'm assured of it. And Moses is like a, I imagine him like a little child playing at the edge of the water on the beach and he's praying, Lord, I want to know the mighty ocean depths of your love for me.

I'm not content to stay here in the shallows. Let me know beyond any doubt how vast and unmeasured and boundless is the ocean of your deep, deep love for me.

And if even Moses had to pray that, how much more do you and I need to pray for this? But Moses doesn't stop there. He's like a daring child, right?

A daring child doesn't just ask for one thing. They keep going and he asks God for more and he says in verse 13, he says, Lord, teach me your ways. Now that's also strange because Moses of all people, does he not know the ways of God?

[13:25] What does this mean? He's saying, Lord, show me your purposes and your plans. You've told us, you've told Israel that we can go forward into the promised land without you.

That we can go ahead and have all the gifts without the giver. That we can go and have this kingdom without the king. But Lord, who can live with that? You've got to come with us.

You've made promises to us. You've sworn oath to us. You've made a covenant commitment to us.

So Moses is saying, Lord, let me in. Teach me your ways. Show me your thoughts and your mind.

I want to know what your secret plans are for us. Are you coming with us or not? Is what he says.

And don't we need this kind of assurance from God?

Don't we need this assurance of his deep love for us? I mean, we know that God sent his son to die on the cross, but doesn't that need to be applied to me so that I experience it and so that I feel it in my bones?

[14:30] Don't we need this assurance that God is going with us? Yes, he's given his spirit to the church, but is he going to fill us? Is he going to enable us to move forward into the future together at Christ Church?

Yes, of course, we all need this assurance. It's one thing to know about the love of God and the presence of God, but it's another thing to know it, to experience it, to feel it, to live in it. Last night or this morning as we were preparing ourselves to come here and meet with God, did you offer any special prayer that God might reveal more of his love to us today? That he might let us know in some special way that he's going to be here with us? Or did we just kind of show up assuming that he'll do it without asking for it? You see, Moses teaches us how to pray for revival.

He says, Lord, on the basis of your favor, on the basis of your mercy and your grace, and given everything that you've done for us, everything you've spoken to us, I want to humbly ask and yet boldly ask for more.

[15 : 44] Will you please build us up in a new confidence and a fresh certainty and a blessed assurance of your affections for us?

And won't you show us how much we matter to you? And won't you please reveal to us your intentions and your specific purposes for us, your people?

Friends, that type of praying affects God. That is the type of praying that God wants to hear and cause him to move and pour himself out and answer to our prayers, and it's what he did for Moses in verse 14.

It says, the Lord replied, my presence will go with you and I will give you rest. Friends, are you feeling this desire to be let into God's heart?

Are you wanting to know whether or not God is going to do something great for us here in the East Bay? Are you wanting to know, Lord, are you going to revive us or not?

[16 : 51] Are you going to revive your church with a capital C or not? Are you going to revive the city or not? Teach me your ways. Are you going with us or not? What's it going to be, Lord?

That's the kind of praying that we're meant to be doing as a people. So we should ask for more. We should ask for more assurance and we shouldn't stop there.

We should ask for more assurance and we should ask for more power. So verse 15, Moses says to the Lord, if your presence does not go with us, then do not send us up from here.

And why does Moses say this? Does he not hear God's answer to his prayer in the previous verse? See, he does hear it, but the problem there in verse 14 is that God said, my presence will go with you singular.

It doesn't say my presence will go with y'all plural or you's guys, depending on where you're from. And you see, Moses doesn't just want to personally be blessed as an individual.

[17 : 59] Moses is praying for the church. He's concerned to stress the collective good of God's people. He says in verse 13, remember that this nation is your people.

And do we pray in the plural like that? Are we praying for me or will you go with me or will you go with us? And you see, the other problem in verse 14 is that the Lord said, I will give you rest.

My presence will go with you and I will give you rest. And that word rest got Moses praying for more because that phrase, I will give you rest, can be translated as I will lighten your burden.

And that's the phrase continually found in the context where God is bringing relief to Israel and giving her rest from the burden of her enemies.

And this gets Moses thinking about the great difficulties that are facing the people of God. It gets him thinking about the great task that lays before them to go in and claim the promised land, the task to go and set up the kingdom of God in the midst of hostile territory.

[19 : 04] And you see, you got to remember that this is a little ragtag group of nomadic people. They've been slaves for 400 years. They've been wandering without a home for 40 years.

They're about to cross into enemy territory completely weak and vulnerable and defenseless.

They're about to be attacked by strong and armed and fortified people and this is overwhelming.

This is a terrifying reality for Moses. He's meditating on the magnitude and the immense problem that confronts the people of God, the burden of her enemies.

And so he says, Lord, do not send us without your supernatural power, without the power of your presence because we are going to get crushed. We're going to be destroyed.

We're going to be annihilated without your strength and without your might and without your authority going with us. Now some of us today might say, well it's a good thing that the church today doesn't have such big problems and such scary enemies.

[20 : 10] And if that's you, I want to encourage you to read the newspaper and to read the New Testament because we're told that the church has three great enemies. The world, the flesh, and the devil.

Think for a moment about our enemies, the world, and the flesh. You're probably aware of the stats about church decline in the western world over the past 150 years.

You're probably aware that church membership in the United States has gone down sharply over the last two decades, roughly the lifespan of Christ's church. I won't bore you with all the data this morning.

You can read the polls. You probably read about the rise of the nuns, N-O-N-E-S, people who no longer have a religious identity or a religious group affiliation.

You're probably aware of this movement in the Protestant world of deconstruction and deconversion. And, you know, those things didn't just happen as a result of the past few years.

[21 : 10] The past few years have not been the cause of these things. They've just revealed to us the depths of the problem of these things. It showed us how much power the world is actually exerting over the church.

It showed us how the world is conforming us to its patterns and squeezing us into its mold. It showed us in a fresh way how the world is pulling us, the church, down into its secularity and its functional atheism and its godlessness.

Listen to these words from the apostle in his epistle to the Romans, chapter 1. He says, For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened.

They exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshipped and served created things rather than the creator. And the result of all this is that they become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed, and depravity.

They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, and malice. They are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant, and boastful. They invent ways of doing evil.

[22 : 26] They disobey their parents. They have no understanding, no fidelity, no love, no mercy. Now that's meant to be a description of the world, but does that not more and more apply to the church of North America?

No love, no mercy. We're getting pulled down by this great enemy and can't you see our need for God's supernatural power in the church?

Or what about our other great enemy, the devil? Jesus taught us to pray, deliver us from the evil one.

And his lead disciple, Peter, says this in his first epistle. He says, be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking those whom he might devour.

The apostle Paul says in Ephesians 6, he says, take your stand against the devil and his schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but our struggle is against rulers and against authorities.

[23 : 35] It's against dark powers. It's against spiritual forces of evil in high places. Christchurch, what if we believe that? Would we not tremble like Moses?

Would we not pray more like Moses? Would we not see our need for God to come down in his power and to lighten our burden and give us rest from our enemies?

We live in the most unchurched region of the United States of America and we've been given the one task of making disciples of Jesus Christ here in this place.

Do you think that we can do that in our own resources and with our own power? You see, Moses humbles himself and he realizes his great weakness and his inability and he says to God, who am I to meet this situation?

Lord, I'm not enough. I'm not, I'm totally inadequate. And he says, Lord, I'm not going to take another step unless I know that the power of your presence is going to go with us.

[24 : 42] I'm not going to go on. I'm not going to even attempt to do one more thing without you. He's pleading for an unusual manifestation of God's supernatural power.

And if we as a church in North America are confident in ourselves and we're proud of our abilities, then number one, we don't know our enemies and number two, we don't know ourselves. and it's unless we become aware of our impotence, of our weakness, of our desperate dependence on God and his power to carry out his mission, then we simply won't pray for it.

The Apostle Paul writes this in 1 Thessalonians 1. He says, our gospel came to you not simply with words but also with power and with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction.

Now, do you think the Apostle Paul just rolled up into that Greco-Roman pagan city of Thessalonica and he just kind of didn't pray for anything and stuff started to happen?

[25 : 50] No, I imagine him agonizing in prayer beforehand just like Jesus agonized in prayer before every great act of his ministry and I imagine Paul saying, Lord, bring your gospel to this place and to these people with power and with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction.

The Apostle also writes in 1 Corinthians 2, he says, I came to you, I came to Corinth in weakness and with great fear and trembling and my message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power so that your faith might not rest on human wisdom but on God's power.

How in the world did his message of Christ crucified penetrate and transform that pagan city, that port city of Corinth?

Don't we think the Apostle and some of his friends were agonizing in prayer and saying, Lord, won't you please, please, please accompany the message, accompany the preaching of your gospel with a demonstration of your Spirit's power.

And oh, how the church needs to relearn how to pray for power. It's the reason we're so weak because we haven't learned to pray and need to pray for power.

[27 : 25] But I would suggest you shouldn't stop there. Ask God for more. Ask Him for more assurance and ask Him for more power.

And the last thing I want to say is ask Him for more holiness. Revival's all about asking God for more holiness. In our ordinary conversations at home or at work or at school, we often express our urgency to get something or to get something done by setting up reasons why this other person should do this thing for us.

Right? We might even seek the advice of other people or plan beforehand what we want to say in our conversation. And Moses is kind of like that. He's like a lawyer who's gone to court and he's building this great case before God, the judge, and he's teaching us that we too should pray like this.

How do we communicate our petitions to God with the kind of intensity and the persuasive urgency of Moses? His first step is he says, God, I want to draw your attention to our own needs and desires.

Lord, we want to know you more. We want to experience your favor and your pleasure. We want to be assured that you are going to go with us. And the second case that he makes, the second step in his argument is that he says, God, I want to draw your attention to your people.

[28 : 46] Lord, remember that this nation is your special people. And send us, Lord, with your power and the power of your presence because he knows that the Israelites are not just an ordinary people, that they're the apple of God's eye.

They're dear to his heart. He says, Lord, I want you to focus on the special character of your people. Do not let us face our powerful enemies without your superior power. But then Moses takes his urgent prayer one step forward.

Actually, two steps forward. We'll see the next step next week. But he takes it one step forward and this third step, he draws his attention to God's glory among the nations. And he says this in verse 16.

He says, How will anyone know that you are pleased with me and with your people unless you go with us? What else will distinguish me and your people from all the other people on the face of the earth?

Who is anyone? It's all the peoples, all the nations of the earth. And Moses said, How are they going to know that we are the people of your pleasure, that we are the people of your favor and your grace?

[29 : 57] The way they're going to come to know that is because you, Lord, distinguish us. You make us a different people and a distinct people.

They'll know it, Lord, when they see that you separated us, you set us apart, you made us holy. They'll come to know you when they see that we've come to share in the honor and the glory of your holiness.

And that's what revival's all about. Lord, if you allow your people to be diminished by the nations or to be assimilated into the nations, that is going to bring about an unacceptable result for your reputation.

But, the nations of the earth will come to know you and they'll come to know your glory when they see your holiness reflected in the distinct and distinguished holiness of your people.

When they come to experience our holy lives individually and our holy character collectively. And this is a prayer that the church should be as she's meant to be.

[31 : 06] Lord, make your church distinguished. Make your church set apart. Make your church unique. Robert Murray McShane is a great Scottish pastor and preacher and he prayed this prayer.

He said, Lord, make me as holy as a pardoned sinner can be made. And that's become my prayer for me and for my family. It's become my prayer for our church.

Lord, make us as holy as pardoned sinners can be made. Lord, make it clear that we are not just one among many peoples and many nations in the world, but make it clear that we are the people who are blessed by your pleasure and your favor and your grace.

Lord, make it clear that we belong to a holy and distinguished God. And make us so different, so distinct, so distinguished that it will arrest the attention of the rest of the world and they will come to see the glory of your holiness expressed in us.

Christ Church, how different are we than other agencies other bodies, other institutions? Is it clear to them that, to other people that we're more than just nice people or respectable people or likable people, but that we're holy people?

[32 : 32] Is it clear that we're more than just a social club or a community organization or a political affinity group? Do people look at us and say, we don't really know what's going on over there, but we know that what's going on is not of human beings, it's of God.

In Acts chapter 4, shortly after Pentecost, this little church is facing great difficulty and they're experiencing incredible resistance to the gospel.

People are being thrown in jail and threatened with execution for preaching the gospel. And so what does the church do? the church gets together and has a prayer meeting and they say, Lord, do something special.

Do something extraordinary. Distinguish us and glorify yourself among the nations through us. And what happens? The Holy Spirit came down.

The Holy Spirit was poured out. And that whole place, it says, was shaken. And all the people there, they were shaken by the presence of the Holy Spirit in their midst.

[33 : 44] Is that how we're praying? Lord, distinguish us by your Holy Spirit. Lord, distinguish us by your Spirit of holiness in us.

Because that's the prayer we know God likes to answer. We know that's the prayer God likes to have affect him and likes to use to affect the world because we're told in verse 17, the Lord said to Moses, I will do this very thing you've asked because I am pleased with you and I know you by name.

Christ Church, may we ask for more assurance, more power, and more holiness. And may we ask with confidence knowing that God wants to give us this very thing because he's pleased with us and he knows us by name.

In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.