

Prayer and Revival

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Please consider donating to this work in the San Francisco Bay Area online at ChristChurchEastBay.org. My name is Elise and I'm a part of the Little Faith Group that meets once a month over somewhere in North Oakland.

Today we have a reading from the book of Exodus, Exodus 33, 7. Now Moses used to take a tent and pitch it outside the camp some distance away, calling it the tent of meeting.

Anyone inquiring of the Lord would go to the tent of meeting outside the camp. And whenever Moses went out to the tent, all the people rose and stood at the entrances to their tents, watching Moses until he entered the tent.

As Moses went into the tent, the pillar of the cloud would come down and stay at the entrance while the Lord spoke with Moses. Whenever the people saw the pillar of clouds standing at the entrance to the tent, they all stood and worshipped.

[1 : 19] Each at the entrance to their tent. The Lord would speak to Moses face to face as one speaks to a friend. Then Moses would return to the camp, but his young aide Joshua, son of Nun, did not leave the tent.

The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God stands forever. Good morning, Christ Church. Let me turn your attention to this one word that's been guiding us, which is the word revival.

And the simple prayer we've been praying, which is revive us. We've been talking about this over these past six weeks, and we've come today to this midpoint in our sermon series.

But we may have some first-time guests today, and we welcome you. And if you're just tuning in, I want to define this one word that we're focusing on, this word revival. And one of the definitions we've used is from a guy named J.I. Packer, and he said this.

He said, Revival is a quickening divine visitation, the new quality of spiritual life that comes through knowing the greatness and nearness of our holy, gracious creator.

[2 : 34] Something that in former days would have been called enlargement of heart. So I hope that by now, as a church, we're kind of grasping what this word means and what it means for us.

That revival is a quickening divine visitation. God comes among us in a fresh way. And because of that, we gain a new quality in our spiritual life.

We have a felt sense of the power of God's greatness and his nearness as our holy and gracious creator. And because of that, we are experiencing, as a people, we're experiencing the enlargement of our hearts.

That's a beautiful definition to me. And revival is the season in the life of the church when God causes the ordinary ministry of the gospel to surge forward with extraordinary supernatural and spiritual power.

And the first place that we see that extraordinary spiritual power in the church really is in her prayer meetings. And hopefully by now you've heard me say that the spiritual thermometer of any church is her prayer meetings.

[3 : 49] That's the indicator of how healthy and how vital our life with God is. But the spiritual thermostat of the church is also the prayer meeting.

This is the place where we don't just check our temperature, but we turn the temperature up. We crank up the heat and we crank the energy of the church up in our prayer meetings.

This is the place where hearts that are cold and hard become warm and soft. I've been very happy to just see over these past weeks just more and more people gathering to pray.

Whether that's in our boiler room here on Sunday mornings at 9.30 or on Wednesday nights. We've been gathering for even song and prayer. Second Wednesdays of the month. And we hope if you haven't been to that, you'll come next month at 7 o'clock.

I'm glad to know that many of our community groups are spending more time and attention on praying together. Because that's what we've seen is that the first Christians, the early church, they devoted themselves to what?

[4 : 57] To prayer. And that's what our text today is focusing on in Exodus chapter 33. This is one of the great chapters in the Old Testament. And we're spending time in Exodus 32, 33, 34 because we want all of us to know and to love the Bible that Jesus knew and loved so much in his earthly ministry.

This book of Exodus. And in the latter half of this book, God is giving instructions for how to, this is how I want you to build my tabernacle.

This is how I want you to make a place where you, my people, can meet with me. I am who I am.

And in the middle of this tabernacle building project, it's completely interrupted by a crisis.

And it's completely interrupted by God's merciful response to this crisis. And this becomes really the center point and the climax of the Torah, of the five books of Moses, these first five books of the Bible.

We see here that the people of God fail. And in response to that, Moses sets up this tent of meeting. And he begins to pray to God for the people.

[6 : 15] And God ends up hiding Moses in the cleft of a rock and then ultimately showing Moses his goodness and his glory. And that's where we're going over these next few weeks.

But the message in today's text is this, that if you want God's reviving spirit in your life, if you want God's reviving spirit in our church, if we want God's reviving spirit in the world, then meet with God and seek his friendship with others.

That's what this text is all about. Meet with God and seek his friendship with others. Let's just talk for a bit about meeting with God.

Verse 7, it says that, Now Moses used to take a tent and pitch it outside the camp some distance away, calling it the tent of meeting. And anyone inquiring of the Lord would go to the tent of meeting outside the camp.

Well, what happened? Why is this necessary? Why not just build the tabernacle in the middle of the camp where God's people are living? Why do we need this alternative tent to meet with God?

[7 : 29] You know, why must we go outside the camp, some distance away from the people? Why does Moses go through all this trouble and disrupt the status quo and do something different?

Well, Moses recognizes that there are problems in the church. He recognizes that there are crises in the church. Israel is the church of the Old Testament.

And these are the chosen people of God. They've been elected by his grace, but they've fallen from a very high place. And hopefully you know by now that revival always comes after a time of spiritual decline and moral decay.

And that's exactly what's happening here. This first revival in the nation of Israel follows on the heels of this golden calf incident. And if you're not familiar with that, there are many layers, right, to the people of God and their sin before God.

But we're told in Exodus 32, verse 6, that they indulged in revelry, or they rose up to play. And that's a nice, polite, biblical way of saying that they exchanged God's sex ethic for the sex ethic of the pagan nations around them.

[8 : 43] But that was not their main problem. That was just a symptom of the disease. What was their problem? What was the disease? It's that mere human beings were seizing power to decide who was going to be their God.

And the people said, we're not satisfied with Yahweh. We want this calf of gold. And this change in their doctrine led to a change in their ethics. This change in their doctrine led to immorality and shameful behavior.

So this underlying condition beneath the symptoms is what? It's human beings making their own God. Human beings deciding what God is like and what they are going to believe and not believe about God.

And friends, when we create a God that we want and a God that we need, the result is always going to be a decline in our ethics and a collapse in our morality.

But that's not the real problem. The real problem is false religion and false worship. What's the first commandment? You shall have no other gods before me.

[9 : 58] And does this not explain like so many of the problems in the church today? Does this not explain so many of the problems that we read about in the world today?

The people of God have forsaken the revelation of God. We've sought to remake God. And so it's no surprise that the North American church is so sadly captive now to ideologies and ethics of the extreme right and of the extreme left.

Can I get an amen? You guys know what I'm talking about? So what do we do with all this false religion? What do we do with all this nominal faith? Well, what did Moses do?

It says in verse 7, Now Moses used to take a tent and pitch it outside the camp some distance away, calling it the tent of meeting. Moses separates himself. Moses sets himself apart.

He goes out, as it were, and he is prepared to stand alone. He's prepared to go out and be a minority of one with the creator God.

[11 : 03] And we're told in Exodus 32, 26, he says to Israel, he says, Whoever is for the Lord, come to me. And this inevitably happens after a period of decline and decay.

That God grabs hold of one person. And that person issues a clarion call. And there's a separation. There's a separation that happens between the people who want to submit to God and his revelation and the people who don't.

And I'm glad to tell you that when Moses issued this call, the Levites, that is the pastors, rallied to Moses. And he was prepared to stand alone, but he wasn't in fact alone.

And we're told in verse 7 that anyone inquiring of the Lord would go to the tent of meeting outside the camp. And that is not just Moses, but other people with Moses. And we're told in verse 11 that Moses would return to the camp, but his young aide Joshua, son of Nun, did not leave the tent.

Joshua and others are joining with Moses to seek the Lord and to meet with the Lord. And we hardly ever find in all the histories of revival that the church just suddenly moves in one step, in one stage, from a state of, in a condition of being false and being nominal and being lifeless, to a condition of being revived and having mighty power and influence in the world.

[12 : 36] It typically happens through steps, right, and stages. And here Moses is taking that first critical step in revival. He sets up a tent of meeting where he and others can pray.

Where people can go together and they can meet with God. And notice that it's outside the camp, some distance away. Why is that? Because in the middle of the camp, God's people have become defiled.

They've become defunct. They've become distracted. And Moses knows that he needs to make a consecrated place. A simple and a quiet place.

A pure and a holy place for prayer. And notice what Moses does not do. Moses does not make it complicated.

He doesn't make it complicated. He doesn't set up this elaborate organization. He doesn't make this heavy weight and high maintenance. He doesn't give a public statement or some grand speech.

[13 : 43] He doesn't even give an address to the people. It's just so simple. He feels a burden for revival. And so he sets up a tent of meeting for himself and anybody else who shares that burden.

To come and seek the Lord and meet with the Lord. It's just lightweight and low maintenance. There's no fanfare of trumpets.

It's just quiet, unobtrusive. No great declaration. He just says, we are going to meet with the Lord in this place. And anybody can come. And who shows up?

Who shows up? Well, it says in verse 7 that anyone inquiring of the Lord would go. Now, I wish that it said everyone inquiring of the Lord would go.

But it doesn't say that. All the people of God did not go. But there were a few individuals in the camp who began to feel this burden for revival that Moses was feeling.

[14 : 40] And they said to themselves, okay, if Moses is going out there to pray on his own, I'm going to go too. And so they started to meet with the Lord one by one by one.

Now, some of us are here today and we're exploring Christianity. And I want to encourage you to remember that the essence of the Christian faith is having a personal relationship with God.

It's meeting personally and directly and intimately with the living God. So as you're here inquiring about Christ and exploring the faith, and we're so glad that you are, I encourage you to ask yourself, you know, am I interested in this religion because of what it can do for me?

Because of the answers it provides for my questions? Because of the benefits it gives and the way it enhances my life? Am I here because I need an identity and some belonging and meaning and purpose?

Or do I want, first and foremost, to meet with my creator God who wants to meet with me? Because that's what it's all about.

[15:50] And if you are here today and you identify as a Christian, I want to remind you of this simple truth from one of the apostles. This is Galatians chapter 4. The apostle Paul says, God has sent the spirit of his son into our hearts crying, Abba, Father.

That is, if you have the Holy Spirit, if you have the Spirit of Jesus Christ dwelling in you, then he is regularly prompting you to meet with the Father.

Jesus is, in fact, the tent of meeting. Jesus is that point of contact with God. So that it's through his body and through his blood, through Jesus' mediation and his reconciliation and his intercession. It's through his Spirit living in us that we have access to meet with God. This is Hebrews chapter 4. It says, Friends, if we're not approaching that throne, will we receive the mercy and will we find the grace that we need to help us?

Probably not. Probably not. And so my question for us is, are we meeting with God? Do we have the Holy Spirit living inside of us?

[17:38] And are we, through that Spirit, spiritually breathing and experiencing the communion that the Son has with his Father through the Spirit?

That's what Christianity is all about. And revivals never happen until men and women and even youth and kids take this first critical step of going to meet with God.

You guys with me? So, I want to encourage us. Let's meet with God. Let's meet with God. But also, let's seek his friendship.

Let's seek his friendship. We saw last week that the people of God forfeited the presence of God because of their sin. And when they realized that, they began to mourn.

They began to strip off their ornaments. They began to humble themselves and to repent before God. And Moses is certainly glad for their repentance, but he knows it's not enough.

[18:46] Why is it not enough? Because God's presence is gone. Because the cloudy pillar of his presence has disappeared. And God has said, you can go on into the promised land without me.

You can go and enjoy all the gifts, but not have the giver. And Moses says, I can't live with that. Who could be satisfied with that?

He says, I want the presence of God to return to the people of God. And he knows, Moses knows, that ordinary faith is not enough to bring it back.

That something more is required. Some sort of unusual action. Some sort of extraordinary effort is demanded of this moment. Why did he put this tent of meeting such a long way away from the camp?

Why did Moses set it up at such an inconvenient distance away from where all the people were?

Because he's trying to say to the people, go out of your way for God.

[19:53] Go out of your way for God. I don't want people to come here out of convenience. I want you to come out of a sense of conviction. And notice what's fueling Moses' conviction.

It says in verse 11 that the Lord would speak to Moses face to face as one speaks to a friend. Now that is an incredible statement.

That Moses has this relationship with God that's personal, that's direct, that's intimate, person to person, face to face. Like a friend. We say in one of our great hymns, we're going to sing it in a minute, that God is our maker, defender, redeemer, and our friend.

And many of us, I think, would say, yes, God is my maker for sure. God is my defender. I think so. God is my redeemer. Yeah, I think I like that. But God is my friend. What?

Isn't that the reserve for like all-star saints like Moses? I mean, me, a friend with God? But that's the gospel, right? That Jesus has made it possible to become friends with God.

[21:06] He says this in John chapter 15. He says, greater love has no one than this than to lay down one's life for one's friends. And that's what Jesus went and did on the cross.

He laid down his life so that we could be his friends and friends with God. Now what is the essence of true friendship? Friends don't just meet together when it's convenient.

Friends don't meet together because they have to. They meet together because they want to. If you say to your friends, I don't have time for you. And I can't call you back.

And I'm not going to squeeze you into my schedule and my calendar. Guess what's going to happen over time? You're not going to have any friends. You know, if you're a true friend, you say, we're going to find the time.

We're going to make it happen. I'm going to schedule a regular meeting with you even though it's inconvenient for me. And what do you do when you ultimately get face-to-face and person-to-person with your friend?

[22 : 09] Do you start in that conversation saying, gimme, gimme, gimme, gimme, gimme? No, you don't do that because you're not there to get something. You're there to be with someone.

And what does it look like when we're with a true friend, right? We listen to each other and we talk to each other. And if you get together with your friends and all you do is talk, talk, talk, talk, talk, and your friend can never get in a word edgewise, what's going to happen to that friendship?

Well, over time, it's going to wither away and die, right? One of my mentors used to say to me, Jonathan, you have two ears, one mouth, use proportionally. Okay?

Because a true friend listens. A true friend listens attentively, listens actively, listens carefully. And when you're in a person-to-person friendship with God, how do we listen to his voice?

Well, we do so through his revelation, through his word, through his inscripturated communication to us. And I want to say something kind of challenging maybe to some of you this morning.

[23 : 20] That if you're not making daily time for God and his word, I don't think you can call yourself his friend. Because you're essentially saying to him, I don't have ears for you.

I don't want to listen to you. I don't care what you have to say. And what sort of friendship is that?

Well, what do we do, right?

When we actually do listen to a friend and what they have to say, how do we respond? Well, having listened, we open our mouths, right?

We share our hearts. We spill our guts because true friendship is transparent. True friendship is vulnerable and it's real and it's authentic.

And in this particular case, Moses shares his burden with God. Moses and his few friends that are going with him to the tent of meeting, they're there because they say, we see nothing but the intervention of the living God can be of help to us.

[24 : 26] And so they're out there pouring out their burdens to God and saying, God, we miss you. God, we need you. Oh, God, we want you.

God, show us more of who you are. Come close to us. Give us more. They're seeking the presence of God.

They're seeking the friendship of God. And what is the result of this extraordinary, inconvenient action that they're taking? Well, God recognizes it.

God begins to add encouragement to it and he gives signs that he's pleased with Moses and his pals. It says in verse 9, As Moses went into the tent, the pillar of cloud would come down and stay at the entrance while the Lord spoke with Moses.

You see, this is a visible sign that God's presence, which had been withdrawn because of the sins of the golden calf. That cloudy pillar of his presence is now coming back as it was before.

[25 : 33] And this is the first indication that revival started to come to the people of God. Right? There's a new quickening among a small portion of God's people.

The glory cloud of God's presence comes down among them and their worship, I imagine, just becomes warmer. And something comes back that maybe they didn't even realize they were missing.

A new warmth, a new tenderness, a new encouragement, a sense among the people of expectation that God is there. And a new freedom given to the prayers of the people to just pour out their hearts to God.

You see, there's less hardness and there's less glibness. There's more of a tenderness and an earnestness and a longing because there's a return of the glory, a return of the cloudy pillar of God's presence.

God is revealing himself to Moses as a person speaks to his friend and he's giving Moses indications that, hey, buddy, you're on the right track.

[26 : 45] This revival thing, this is a good thing. I'm listening to you. I'm hearing you. I'm going to respond to you. Don't stop. Keep going. In Christchurch, don't we want this?

Don't we want to seek to become friends with God? Don't we want to experience the glory cloud of his presence coming down among us?

Don't we want to feel the warmth of his nearness in a way we've never felt it before? This is where some churches would say, amen, you know.

Yes, pastor. That is what we want. Yes, Lord. Thank you. All right. I want to, I'm encouraging us to meet with God and I'm encouraging us to seek his friendship.

But I want to encourage you, do not do that alone. Don't do it alone. I mean, you have to go pray alone. Jesus said, you know, you got to go pray in your prayer closet where only the father who sees what's done in secret will meet with you and will reward you.

[27 : 55] Okay, but meet with God and seek his friendship with others. Do it with others. We see how Joshua and others are joining Moses and they're seeking the Lord and meeting the Lord together.

Moses and one or two or three other individuals is all that's needed for a revival to begin among the people of God. And that might remind you of what Jesus said in Matthew 18.

He said, where two or three are gathered together in my name, I'm right there in the middle of them. That's all I need, Jesus says. It's all I need to revive my church. It's all I need to awaken and enliven and quicken the body of Christ.

There's just a few of you. But notice what begins to happen with the remainder of the people. In verse 8, we're told that whenever Moses went out to the tent, all the people rose and stood at the entrances to their tents, watching Moses until he entered the tent.

They're looking on with interest. They're aware that something new is happening, something different is happening. They're watching Moses. They're talking about him.

[29 : 00] They're wondering what he's doing. And they just don't know what's going to happen next. And when you read the history of revivals in the church, you find this pattern repeated over and over, that a few people feel called and burdened by God.

And so they set themselves apart and they begin to pray and pray earnestly. And others begin to say, hey, what's happening with so-and-so?

Have you noticed what's going on with her? What's up with him? And people start to kind of talk. And I want to encourage a few of you today, don't be afraid to be that person.

Because we see here that some people are just going to stand at their tents. They're just going to look on and they're going to do nothing. But if we wait, if we wait for the whole church to be ready for revival, if we wait for the whole church to lean in and start to move toward revival, then it's not going to happen.

What God wants and what he's looking for is just a few people to be leavened in the lump. Just a few, a handful of individuals that will eventually influence the majority.

[30 : 12] And look at what begins to happen. People who are just standing there and watching in verse 8, they begin worshiping in verse 10. They see this glory cloud of God's presence returning.

They see that God is on the move. And look at what it says in verse 10. It says, Whenever the people saw the pillar of clouds standing at the entrance to the tent, they all stood and worshipped at the entrances to their tents.

You see, before they were just watching Moses and the others meet with God and worship God. But now they see this cloudy pillar of God's presence and they begin to worship God too.

They begin to bow down at their own tents. They turn their own homes into a tent of meeting and they get down on their knees and they say, We're going to pray right here. We're going to sing to God right here. We're going to worship the Lord right here, right now.

And you can almost sense the people filling up with a sense of hope, a new sense of awe, a new sense of humility before God. The whole church is beginning to be influenced and become involved.

[31 : 19] Friends, that might take a long time. We don't know how long this takes. But we do know that this is how revival begins. This is how the great awakening in the 18th century started.

I'll close just by talking about our trip to England this summer. Catherine and I went to England. And we spent a Sunday at Oxford University. And you may have heard of it.

It's a great university town. Not as great as this one, but it's pretty cool. And I was reminded while I was there that almost 300 years ago, there was a handful of students named John and Charles and George and a few other people.

And they said to themselves, they said to one another, You know, the church is full of nominal Christians today. We see the church compromised in her doctrines. We see the church assimilated in her ethics.

The Christian church, it's still the Christian church, but it's full of sin. And it's unworthy. We can see all these people riding loose to the commandments of God. We see them just sitting sort of loose and casual to the Christian life as it's depicted in the New Testament.

[32 : 30] And so we're going to set ourselves apart. We're going to start to meet together to study the scriptures and to pray together and to purify ourselves and to engage in intentional, methodical living.

And these folks, John and Charles Wesley and George Whitefield and their friends, they began to be mocked as Methodists because of their intense methods, right, of being Christians.

But what happened was that they began to awaken to the fact that they themselves were quite distant from God. In fact, two of them, John and George, realized they weren't even Christians at all.

And the Holy Spirit came down and regenerated them and caused them to be born from above, caused them to be converted to Christ. And as a result, there was a great outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon not only them, but the whole church and the whole society.

And there was a great awakening throughout the United Kingdom, throughout her colonies, that has had a profound influence on the way that we are living today, the way that we're worshiping today.

[33 : 42] But, you know, John, Charles, George, they weren't doing something new. They were doing what Moses, Joshua, and these other folks were doing. And maybe that's what God's calling some of you to do here in Berkeley and here in Oakland today.

Moses took this first step toward revival. But by faith, it wasn't going to be the last step, right? It says that Moses would return to the camp, but his young aide Joshua, son of Nun, did not leave the tent.

Moses would go back to the camp. He'd report, hey, things are going well. The presence and the power of God is coming back. He's turning his face toward us. He's showing his favor upon us. But notice that he would leave Joshua in the tent of meeting until he came back. Why did he do that? Because Moses was expecting more to come.

Moses said, I don't want to miss anything that God has to say or to do in this place. This is just the first step. This is just the beginning stage. God is going to do more.

[34 : 53] We're expecting God to do more. Christ Church, let us meet with God.

And let us seek his friendship with others. But above all else, let's expect a little bit more. Let's expect a lot more.

Let's expect God to do more than we could possibly ask or imagine to revive not just this church, but the church. Not just this place, but the whole world.

Let's pray a little bit bigger. In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.