

Longing for Revival

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Date: 18 September 2022

Preacher: Rev. Andrew Ong

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Please consider donating to this work in the San Francisco Bay Area online at ChristChurchEastBay.org. Good morning. My name is Carrie Moulton, and I'm a member of the Oakland Women's Little Faith Group.

And today's reading is from Paul's letter to the Philippians, chapter 3, verses 7 through 14, as printed in the liturgy. But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ.

Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake, I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him.

Not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but from that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith.

[1 : 25] That I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

Not that I have already obtained this, or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own.

Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own, but one thing I do, forgetting what lies behind, and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Jesus Christ.

This is the word of the Lord. Thank you for that scripture reading, Carrie. It's just a text that's so beautiful. It just preaches itself. Will you join me in prayer?

Father, we thank you for these words that you placed on the pen and on the lips of your servant, Apostle Paul.

[2 : 39] Lord, we ask that you would place these words on our lips as well, but yet God, place them on our hearts, convince us, O Lord, that these are not words only to be uttered by once-in-a-generation super saints, that these are the words of all your children, of anyone who has ever seen your son Jesus for who he really is.

O Lord, place these words on our lips as a people who have beheld the beauty and believed in the bounty that exists in Jesus Christ. Make us a people who are straining with all our might, pursuing just one thing, a deeper relationship with Christ.

In so doing, Lord, bring about the revival that you so desire amongst us and in the bay and all the world, God. For our good and for your glory we pray.

Amen. Good morning, everyone. My name's Andrew. I'm one of the pastors here. You'll have to forgive me. I have had a little bit of a cough, so I'm sucking on a cough drop. Hopefully that won't affect too much.

In case you are new to Christ Church, what you need to know is that we are on the third Sunday of a new ministry year. It's also the third Sunday of our lead pastor, Jonathan, being back from his sabbatical.

[3 : 58] And yeah, yay. And one of the words, the word really, that has been on our lead pastor, Jonathan's heart, coming back from sabbatical, is the word revival.

Revival. So that's what we will be preaching through in this fall season, and it's really what we're gonna be praying for for at least this whole ministry year. Lord, revive us.

Revive our city. Revive our land. Revive this world. And start with us. Revive your people. Revive your church, oh God. And you know, personally, I feel very invested in this theme because in a way, I feel like I've been praying for revival for like over a decade.

It all started actually 17 years ago. Well, actually, that's half of my life ago when I went to UC Irvine. And I had to find a church.

I'm Chinese American, but I joined a Korean American church. And you know, at this church, like all we did was pray for revival. That's all we did.

[5 : 01] So I lived there, and I worshiped there for six years. Every Friday night, Bible study. Seven to nine. Prayer meeting, 9.30 to 11. And I can still smell that office in that business park where we used to pray.

I can still feel the rough blue rug making an imprint on my knees because I always wore basketball shorts. And I can still hear the cries of my spiritual role models in that room on their knees as well. The ajashis of the church. If you don't know what that is, ask a Korean friend what an ajashi is. But these ajashis, they would cry out to God, Lord God, give me a passion.

Give us a passion for your name. Give us a passion for your name. And I remember singing with them, crying out to God, create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.

Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation, and renew a right spirit within me.

[6 : 09] And we would remember the promises of God. 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 forgive their sins, and heal their land, if they humble themselves and pray.

And honestly, these were probably the most spiritually formative years of my life. Praying on my knees with the Koreans. And like for about 10 years, between 2006 and 2015, from the beginning of college to the end of seminary, I would get up early, and I would pray this same prayer every single day.

Lord, if one day you should give me a wife. Lord, if one day you should give me children. Lord, if one day you should allow me to pastor a church. Lord, make us a people who are zealous for your glory.

Lord, make us a people who have a high regard for the scriptures, for your word. Lord, make us a people who have eyes to see the heights of our sin, and the depths of your overwhelming grace. Give us hearts that cherish and treasure Jesus Christ. Hearts that are broken for those who don't know Jesus Christ. And hearts of compassion for those who suffer in this world.

[7 : 36] I pray this every day for my future wife, for my future children, and really for all of you at my future church. And I don't share this with you so you'll think I'm a super holy man.

I am sure you I am not. You can ask my wife about that. But I share this with you because I want you to consider that our pursuit of revival here at Christ Church in this season is not some accident, not some phase that Jonathan's going through in his, what, mid-40s.

But like, what if, at least in part, at least in part, what if it's an answer to a 17 years worth of prayer? What if it's an answer to 17 years worth of prayer?

Prayers that interestingly began the year that Christ Church started. In 2006, before I even knew about Christ Church, I probably wouldn't have even wanted to come to this church back then, to be honest.

But here we are. What if? What if, right? That's a question I hope you'll consider in this season of our church. Like, what if God wants to do a thing amongst us?

[8 : 51] Like, what if the pandemic we've just endured, the polarization we're seeing in our nation, what if our public and mental health crises and the mounting global instability that all trouble us, what if these are just occasions for the power of God to be displayed?

What if these were just occasions for our church to be a non-anxious presence, a community of compassion, light in the darkness, messengers of the best possible news, the only hope of the world, Jesus Christ?

What if we've merely been enduring a season of pruning in order that the Spirit of God might produce an incredible crop of fruitfulness? What if what we thought was nothing but crap hitting the fan was God fertilizing the soil that we've been standing in for a season of revival?

Now, I understand that for some of us in this room, revival doesn't exactly excite you as it does me. Maybe you're here and you're not even sure you believe in God, let alone that you need some kind

of spiritual awakening in your life or in your community.

Maybe you're thinking, isn't revival just for religious people? And if that's you, what I want to say to you today is that sure, we do long for spiritual renewal in our church and in our community and for you too individually.

[10:12] But make no mistake, when true revival happens, it isn't merely an inward, invisible, individualistic experience, but it always results in the good of the city.

In the early church, when the Spirit came upon the apostles, the sick were healed, the lame walked, and as one witness wrote, God's grace was so powerfully at work in them all that there were no needy persons among them.

For from time to time, those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles' feet and it was distributed to anyone who had need. And even when the church was persecuted and scattered, the apostle Philip, he went out to another city and the same witness writes, when the crowds heard Philip and saw the signs he performed, they all paid close attention to what he said.

For with shrieks, impure spirits came out of many and many who were paralyzed or lame were healed. So there was great joy in that city. So there was great joy in that city.

I love that, don't you? Or take the more recent example of the Second Great Awakening, right, which historians acknowledge as significantly serving, supporting, and inspiring the abolitionist movement and women's right movement in the 19th century.

[11:27] See, when the Spirit of God comes in power to bring revival, the result isn't just a spiritual renovation within the hearts of religious people. But it's a holistic renovation of whole communities.

So like, even if you don't consider yourself religious, don't you want this revival that we're searching for? We're not after something purely religious or spiritual, we're after a sign and a taste of the new creation that Jesus Christ has promised us.

Now maybe you are a Christian, but you still hear this word revival and it just sounds like such a super churchy word to you. It reminds you of huge tent meetings, naive, mindless crowds, inauthentic, emotional outbursts, and just religious fanaticism.

Maybe you hear us talking about revival and you want to put up your defenses against the threat of manipulation and peer pressure all under the guise of God's Spirit. You know, I would say that you're right.

You're right to put up your defenses because in church history there have been Christians and churches who've tried to force the hand of God and conjure up His Spirit and harness His power and His presence by their own, you know, manipulative techniques.

[12:40] The sad reality is that a big temptation for those of us who seek revival has been to seek it by mere technique, as if we could reduce it to a formula. And we can see this in so much of the American church with its modern faith in technology and its modern conception of productivity.

So much of the American church has become distracted, right? Groping around for the next new thing, whether it's the next church growth strategy or just some other yet-to-be-revealed silver bullet that will somehow catalyze a revival like never before.

But I want to assure you today that that is not at all what we're after here at Christ Church. A new next thing that will generate some kind of desired outcome that we can call a revival and then pat ourselves on the back for stirring up.

Now churches that focus merely on new techniques only ever end up either looking like lame posers, always copying but never creating culture, always behind the most recent cultural trends and just trying to catch up but never really figuring out who they are and who God wants them to be, or we just end up looking no different from the world around us.

A church that's in the world and of the world just uncritically adopting wholesale one ideology after another either on the left or the right. Now this is not to say that we should be anti-technique and anti-innovation.

[14:07] Can innovative technology serve the movement of revival? Yes. And please, think about the printing press. Right? Without the printing press will you have the Protestant Reformation as it was?

The Bibles in the hands of common people, right? Feeding upon the very words of God for themselves. Blooming into a literate and increasingly democratized society.

I'm not saying that we should be anti-technique and I even pray for innovation and creativity in our church as we seek revival. But what we need to understand is that revival can't be manufactured. It can't be manufactured by manipulation, by applying the fanciest, most sophisticated, innovative technique to stir up some kind of religious fervor.

At Christ Church East Bay, we are not after the newest, next thing that will bring us to new heights. Now, in our pursuit of revival, we aren't primarily looking for something new.

[15:07] We're looking for something ancient. Not something fancy, something fundamental. Not something sophisticated, something simple, not necessarily posh, but definitely profound.

Revival is not so much about newness, but I prefer to talk about it as freshness. Revival isn't about coming upon something that's brand spanking new. It's about experiencing a fresh, something which had previously become stale.

So you see, the secret sauce for revival isn't for us to figure out again and again and again. The recipe, it hasn't changed. Revival will only happen when people are brought back to the most basic, the most necessary truth that the world truly needs and that's the gospel.

That Jesus Christ of Nazareth, crucified and risen, is Lord. At the center of revival is a white hot faith in this ancient and basic truth of Christianity, a fresh and burning passion concerning our most basic conviction, the deep, deep conviction that Jesus truly is Lord and that that is the best news for the world.

and that there is no more basic, no more ultimate, no more all-controlling truth than that. Revival happens when people awaken to the surpassing worth of knowing Christ.

[16:30] Christ Jesus as their Lord and strain forward to know Him more, to experience His presence and His power by any means possible, no matter the cost, even at the cost of suffering, even at the cost of their own lives.

And see, that is why we are turning to chapter 3 of Paul's letter to the Philippians today because Paul understood this. Paul understood that Jesus, Jesus has to be everything to us.

He has to be everything to us. Like, Jesus plus nothing equals everything. And everything minus Jesus equals nothing.

Jesus plus nothing equals everything, and everything minus Jesus equals nothing. Now listen again to these divinely inspired words from the Apostle Paul.

But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus, my Lord.

[17:34] Lord, for his sake, I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him.

Not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but the righteousness from God that depends on faith, that I may know him and the power of his resurrection and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible, I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

Not that I have already obtained it or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Brothers, I do not consider that I have already made it my own, but one thing, one thing I do, forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on for the goal, toward the goal, for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

Wow, right. That is the word of God. If you are not a Christian, I have no expectation that you would even remotely consider to take such words upon your lips.

But if you are a Christian today, even as scary and radical and extreme as this sounds, doesn't it also sound right?

[19:15] Doesn't it also sound good? And even as far away from this sentiment as you might feel, don't you want to feel what Paul feels for Christ?

Even if you don't identify with Christ, don't you want to feel this way about something? Something that you believe will change the world?

I mean, Christchurch, can you imagine if we took these words upon our own lips and upon our hearts, if this high-achieving, highly educated, highly successful community of Jesus' followers, just two blocks north of the number one public university in the nation, Go Bears.

Can you imagine what God might do in a family of faith who believed what Paul believed about Jesus Christ? These words are not just the words of a super saint, holy man, apostle.

They were meant for our lips, for our hearts as well. This is the kindling of revival, the stuff revival is made of. Can you just imagine with me what a witness to the world we might be if we really believed that Jesus plus nothing equals everything and that everything minus Jesus equals nothing?

[20 : 39] Now maybe you're here and you're hesitant because you feel like you have too much to lose, but take it from Paul. He had it all and yet to him, Jesus was more.

Verse 7, but whatever gain, like whatever successes and achievements and merits and profits and advantages I had, he says, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ.

Verse 8, indeed, he says, he counted everything as loss because the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus as his Lord. And you have to understand that this was a man who had major gains, major advantages.

The word for gain here is plural, major achievements, major merits. This was one of the greatest minds, if not the greatest mind in the first century ancient world. Perhaps the greatest Jewish scholar and adherent of all time.

Nobody knew the Jewish faith better than Paul. Nobody lived the Jewish faith better than Paul. According to the metrics and the standards of his community and in the highest courts of Jewish opinion, Paul was at the very top.

[21 : 44] in education, in knowledge, in lifestyle, in reputation, in status, and passion, and integrity. He literally made it to the top of the ladder. He had actually achieved his highest life's ambitions.

He made it. He had finally made his parents as proud as possible. He had finally won the highest respect of the most esteemed colleagues and peers and mentors. There is no higher status for him to achieve in his career and in his community.

Can you imagine that? Being the most highly educated, most professionally successful, most reputable person in your community, the best doctor, lawyer, entrepreneur, academic, investor, executive, maybe on the cover of Forbes or Time Magazine, the expert of your field.

And the most upstanding, upright, and admirable person at that, living up to the highest, most rigorous, moral, and ethical standards, blameless, under the most intense scrutiny.

This is who Apostle Paul was. And yet, for the sake of Christ, all those gains, whatever gains he had, he counted them as loss.

[22 : 54] Even the best things he had, as loss. Even as disadvantages. This superstar who had come into a position and status that most of us can only dream of arriving at, in which anyone else in his position could justifiably lord themselves over all those they'd surpassed in merit, he had discovered something, someone, even higher.

A higher lord, far surpassing himself, Jesus Christ. A lord so high, so preeminent, that in comparison, all he ever achieved was nothing but loss and disadvantage, and even rubbish, he says.

In the Greek, skubala, literally trash, or even human excrement. For Apostle Paul, Jesus plus nothing equaled everything, and everything minus Jesus equaled nothing.

For Apostle Paul, knowing Jesus, fundamentally changed how he counted and evaluated himself and everything else. You see, Paul's eyes were opened by the Spirit of God to revalue all that he had once considered good and profitable and advantageous.

That's what he's getting at here in verse 10 when he talks about these two different kinds of righteousness. He talks about these two different kinds of righteousness, right? Not the kind of righteousness that comes from the law, but the righteousness that comes through faith in Jesus.

[24 : 21] And if this righteousness language is kind of unfamiliar to you, I love how Tim Keller describes it. He says, everybody has a slightly different set of things, but fundamentally, all of us seek to earn our own righteousness.

All of us use a resume by which we seek to face the world, ourselves, and God. It's how we get in. Paul says, everybody does it. It's your most fundamental need. You know you're naked and you're trying to clothe yourself with your righteousness.

You know in yourself you have to find some way to recommend yourself, and so you're trying to cover yourself with your resume. Adam and Eve put fig leaves on, but what those were were resumes.

They have to cover their nakedness. They want to say, this is why you should accept me. We say that to God. We say that to the world. We even say it to ourselves. We all have a set. It's the most fundamental need we have, he says.

For Paul, his righteousness was previously wrapped up in just being super Jewish, right? The Hebrew of Hebrews. That's where he placed his confidence. That's where he understood his value to be.

[25 : 23] in his knowledgeable, obedient, and zealous posture toward the religious law of the Jewish faith. And his resume was nice and it was clean and it was impressive.

But how long could he sustain it? Could he keep the pace? Could he climb that ladder forever? And also I want to ask, what kind of person did it make him?

Well, the kind of person that looked down on those who weren't as far up on the ladder as he was, right? The kind of person who went and persecuted and sought to kill those who he believed threatened his Jewish identity.

Those who threatened his understanding of his own righteousness. But then he met Jesus. But then when he met Jesus, right, the standard of his confidence and value was completely, it was turned upside down.

No longer depending upon his achievements and his merits and his Jewish identity, but rather on Jesus alone. He boldly transferred his faith from dependence upon himself and his own righteousness to dependence on Jesus and Jesus' righteousness.

[26 : 31] And see, this is the stuff that revivals are made of. The gospel. The gospel. Because you see, you have to understand how liberating this must have been for Apostle Paul.

Yeah, sure, maybe he was on the top of the ladder at one point, but still, he was always just one bad homily, one bad sermon, one moral failure, one newer, smarter, better-read Pharisee away from being knocked off from the top of the ladder, right?

When Jesus came into his life and radically changed how he valued everything he'd once prized, you see what happened here? He was actually liberated when he repented of his righteousness. He was liberated when he repented of his righteousness, when he repented of all his dependence upon all his goodness and his smarts and his achievements. It was only when he changed the scales by which he once measured and evaluated all things and adopted God's scales instead of his own.

It was only then that he could really come to know Christ for who he really was. And as it says in verse 11, the power of his resurrection. See, Paul had to die to the old value system he had given everything to win at.

[27 : 48] And yet it was precisely when Paul died to himself, putting to death all he had previously worked for, that he was able to experience the resurrection power of Jesus Christ.

Gladly sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death. So what? By any means possible, Paul attaining to the resurrection from the dead. And maybe you're here today and you can't make up your mind.

You want to know Jesus a little bit more, but you don't want to go so deep, right? You're afraid that you'll lose everything just like Paul did. And you're not sure if you're ready to go that far. You've climbed up the ladder pretty far, invested too much in your own righteousness to throw it all away. You've done well for yourself. You played the game well and you're quite proud of your resume. But the question I want to ask you is how are you handling the anxiety of that one personal failure, that one accident on the surgery table, that one flawed legal argument, that one bad investment, that one bad business decision, that one bad exam score that haunts you?

And another question, what are you going to do if and when you fall from the ladder? What guarantee do you have that you can and will rise again?

[29 : 09] I was actually reminded of this ladder image by one of my best friends in seminary. Her name is Esther Liu and she's coming out with a book next month that I have been able to read in advance. It's called Shame, Being Known and Loved and I highly recommend it.

You can pre-order it now. But borrowing from our late great professor, David Pallison, she writes this, Each ladder represents a standard we live by, whether it be physical beauty, intelligence, ministry success, or something else.

The higher you are on the ladder, the better you feel about yourself. The lower you are, the more you feel resigned to a lesser, shame-filled life. We tend to look at the people above us on our ladders and feel self-condemnation or envy.

We look at the people far below us and feel superior, even judgmental. We look at the people right under us and worry that they might surpass us. And then she writes, Ladder climbing doesn't

ultimately deliver on its promises.

It doesn't provide true and abiding freedom, peace, and contentment, even if you reach the top. That's why Pallison calls these the ladders to nowhere. That's why I often call ladder climbing the ladder game of hell, because there is something hellish about this self-reliant, anxious striving that does not ultimately rescue you from shame.

[30 : 26] Some of us are working hard to climb ladders but are losing hope. Some of us have given up, resigned to our shame. Others of us may have made it relatively high on our ladders only to find our sense of insecurity isn't cured up there.

But, she writes, but knowing God, being in relationship with Him, and praising Him help us to step off our ladders to nowhere. So, if you have ears to hear, God's word to us today is that we will only ever experience the imperishable resurrection life of Christ if we will die with Him to the faulty systems of this world that only oppress us and leave us eternally anxious.

Jesus invites us to step off of our hellish ladders to nowhere and to receive the righteousness that comes from God, that depends on faith and not on ourselves, and this is the gospel.

That Christ's resurrection can be for us because His death was for us. That by faith alone we can be united with Him in both His death and His resurrection. Now, I want to close by looking at the last three verses here.

You know, a common misconception that our faith in Christ, a common misconception is that our faith in Christ is simply a passive thing. Like just hopping on a surfboard and riding the wave to the shore.

[31 : 47] But while our faithfulness could never earn or merit or put God into our debt, our faithfulness and our pressing onward, straining to go deeper with Christ, it's always assumed in a genuine faith.

That's why Paul says in verse 12, even with His faith in Christ, not that I have already obtained it or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own because Jesus has made me His own.

Brothers, I do not consider that I have already made it my own, but one thing I do. One thing. I just love that. Just one thing. Again, it's so simple, but it's absolute and totalizing, right?

Like what is our one thing, whether you claim to know Jesus or not? What is the one thing you resolve to do? The one goal, the one prize you're after. Here's what Paul, inspired by the Holy Spirit, commends to us.

One thing I do, verse 13, forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead. I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

[32 : 50] So Christ Church, as we seek revival, it is absolutely true that we cannot force the hand of God. We cannot manufacture a revival by our manipulative techniques.

And it is absolutely true that the resurrection life we long to enjoy and experience can only be received by faith. But while we depend fully on the work of God to bring about this revival and to draw us into his resurrection life, we don't just passively sit our butts on our surfboards bobbing up and down in the open waters of the ocean.

No. We get on our bellies and we paddle along with the waves that are headed to the shore. And we take risks and we stand up, straining forward to enjoy the full experience of riding the wave of God's Spirit.

Don't you want that? Don't you want that? The Lord Jesus has made us his own. So let's press on to make him our own, no matter the cost.

For if Jesus has suffered the loss of all things unto death to secure for us an imperishable resurrection life, surely it is worth it for us to count all our gains as loss, everything as rubbish, to share in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that we may know him and by any means possible that we may know the power of his resurrection.

[34 : 20] Christchurch, this is a season to lean in, to lean in, to revival, to lean into the rhythms of the church together, to seek the face of God, that we may know him and the power of his resurrection.

Will you pray with me? Lord God, make this our prayer that we may know you, that we may count everything as rubbish.

Put these words upon our lips and our hearts. Give us a yearning to know Christ and the power of his resurrection. Give us a willingness to count everything as rubbish compared to the surpassing worth of knowing him.

God, some of us here do not yet know Christ. I pray that they would come to know him and the power of his resurrection. And God, some of us here may not even know we don't actually know Christ.

Some of us here might be confusing knowledge about him with a personal relationship with him. And so I pray that you would reveal that to us today. That we would all heed your invitation to strain forward, to take hold of the one who has taken hold of us.

[35 : 26] Lord, I pray for those who need to hear your commands to forget what lies behind. Those of us who are depending on our own righteousness, confident in our own goodness, or maybe relying on some past experience with you, but not currently walking with you, straining forward to what lies ahead.

Oh Lord, stir us up to strain forward, to press on for the precious prize of just being near to you, experiencing more of you. And God, lastly, I want to pray for those of us here who need to hear your permission.

Your permission to forget what lies behind. Those of us who have fallen off of our ladders more times than we can count. Those of us who hear nothing but the lies of the evil one and our self-condemning hearts telling us that we can never take hold of this prize that is union and communion with Christ Jesus.

Oh Lord, help us to forget all of that, to leave it all behind us and to jump off our ladders into your arms that we might experience how you have already taken hold of us and would that only drive us deeper into your embrace, Lord.

We pray this in the mighty name of Jesus. Amen.