

Lord, Revive Us!

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[0 : 00] Turn with me this morning to Psalm 85 and verse 6.

This is on page number 493 of your pew Bible. Psalm 85 and verse 6.

Given that we've sung the psalm together, we won't read the whole psalm, but we'll look at verse 6.

Will you not revive us again, that your people may rejoice in you?

Heavenly Father, we bow in your presence. May your word be our rule, your spirit our teacher, and your greater glory our supreme concern. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Will you not revive us again, that your people may rejoice in you? You don't have to be long in the church before you hear the word revival, lovingly spoken by Christians.

[1 : 14] It's a word deeply embedded in our cultural history, evoking long-lost memories of the Spirit of God working powerfully in the lives of Christians to bring them to a renewed sense of the holiness of God, the glory of God, and the love of God.

As a result of this new life, the church's preaching is powerfully blessed, and thousands of non-Christians become Christians.

One Christian preacher describes revival this way. It is a fresh outpouring of God's life-giving Spirit upon His people.

It is a fresh outpouring of God's life-giving Spirit on His people. Historically, Scotland has enjoyed its fair share of revivals.

The Cambus Lang revival of the 1740s resulted in tens of thousands of people from the West Central Belt becoming Christians. You can still visit the revival preaching braids in Cambus Lang Park, I go there often, where the English preacher George Whitefield preached to a congregation of 26,000 people.

[2 : 34] Remarkable when we consider that the population of Glasgow at the time was only 17,000. More recently, there was revival among the fishing communities of the Northeast in the 1920s, resulting in thousands of conversions.

Famously, in the 1950s, God brought revival to the west coast of the island of Lewis. Although there have been many smaller revivals in the intervening years, it is nearly 80 years since we have seen a fresh outpouring of God's life-giving Spirit upon His people in Scotland.

And if ever we needed a fresh outpouring of God's life-giving Spirit upon His people, it is now. The church in Scotland has been in decline for decades.

And while evangelical churches, reformed churches like ours, show little sign of such decline, how we long for days of revival and renewal when our exhaustion in God's service is transformed into enthusiasm.

And when our witness for Christ reaps a harvest of souls and hearts are powerfully drawn to God. We can't manufacture these times.

[3 : 53] They come only from God sending His Spirit sovereignly, powerfully, and supernaturally to work in, among, and through us.

In Psalm 85, verse 6, the sons of Korah, the famous singers of Israel, pour out their hearts and cry out to God in prayer, Will you not revive us again?

Most of us here have never experienced a genuine revival, but that is not to say that we shall not soon take part in a fresh outpouring of God's life-giving Spirit on His people.

As today we look forward with hope, as I hope we always do. We want to ask the sons of Korah three questions about revival.

First of all, for whom is revival? And secondly, how does revival come? And thirdly, what is revival? Surely our prayer today mirrors that of the sons of Korah.

[4 : 56] Lord, will you not revive us again? Such that in centuries to come, Christians will talk of the powerful outpouring of God's Spirit in Glasgow in the mid-2020s, resulting in the conversion of tens and hundreds of thousands of our fellow Glaswegians.

First of all then, for whom is revival? For whom is revival? Surely every Christian living in Scotland today wants to see a fresh outpouring of God's Spirit upon His church, resulting in new life, and our fellow countrymen and women becoming believers in Christ.

But in the psalm itself, we discover clues about those, the sons of Korah, are so earnestly praying for revival. First, they are those with memories of better days.

And then, they are those who sense God's anger. First, those who pray for revival are those with memories of better days.

Better days. As the psalm begins, Lord, you were favorable to your land. You restored the fortunes of Jacob. The songwriters have long lost memories, perhaps even folk memories, of a time when God restored the fortunes of His people.

[6 : 17] Perhaps they're recalling how God rescued them from their slavery in Egypt, or more probably, they're remembering how God saved them from their captivity in Babylon. In their collective memories, the people of Israel cherished those times of increased spiritual faithfulness, and a new experience of God's presence with them.

And it's from those with memories of better days, the sons of Korah cry out, Lord, will you not revive us again? They remember how their spiritual coldness was overcome by a fresh outpouring of God's holiness, and His glory, and His love.

They remember the power of the presence of God among them. At times, His presence among them was so thick, that all they could do was fall before Him in godly fear and worship.

They remember those days. And yet, for all those memories, for all that their memories, as sharp in their minds as the day they first happened, some among us here remember better days than these. When I was a young minister, I met an old elder from Stornoway Free Church who had been converted to Christ in the 1920s revival in the west coast village of Carraway.

[7 : 43] And he lovingly told me stories of how they would spend all night in prayer and of the preaching, of the power of the preaching of the Word of God at that time, of so many conversions, and of a new zeal for God.

Later, I met an old lady who had been converted in the same 1920s revival. There was something about her. A few weeks ago, Alec Cowie preached a sermon here about the fragrance of Christ. And when I met her, that's what I perceived. She had the fragrance of another world about her and the reality of Jesus as Savior and Lord.

These two have long gone to be with their Father in heaven. They carried in their hearts a burning hope of what God had done before He would do again.

They had experienced that fresh outpouring once in the 1920s, and they prayed for the church to experience it yet again. If even in some small measure, we'd ever experienced that kind of outpouring of God's holiness, glory, and love, we would do the same as them.

[8 : 57] We would pray ceaselessly for a new movement of the Holy Spirit among us. Revival is for those who long for better days than these.

Surely all of us here long for this and cherish even the memories of such precious times.

This prayer is also for those who sense God's anger. Those who sense God's anger. There's a shift in the psalm between verses 3 and 4.

The sons of Korah are moving on from what happened to them in history to what is happening today. In yesteryear, God restored them, but now it seems that God is indignant and angry with His people.

Despite all He had done for them, their hearts have grown cold. Sinful patterns of behavior have begun to creep into their lives. They have become apathetic about holiness and have become concerned only about what made them happy, uncomfortable, and prosperous.

[10 : 06] They no longer went to war against their sin, but they made peace with it instead. They had lost a living relationship with God. God had withdrawn His presence from the temple and His people hadn't even cared enough to notice.

There were natural disasters, there were military defeats, but the people didn't view them as God calling them to dependence. Rather, they looked for answers in politics, in money, and in the worship of idols.

But the sons of Korah knew better. They knew there were all signs of God's anger upon His people. How can it be any different today? Forget the world around us who know no better.

It is the church with which God is angry. Christians, we have grown cold toward Christ. We put our happiness and our comfort and our wealth before the glory of God and the gospel of Christ.

We try to find our answers in new strategies for growth, inward investment for more prosperous denominations than our own, and some even in the safe haven of the idolatry of tradition.

[11 : 16] But what is has always been, and we dare not change anything. And all the time, the church continues to decline. Even when our churches grow in quantity, it is arguable if they're increasing in quality.

Are Christians today as godly, holy, and consecrated as once they were? Are we as bold at sharing the good news of the gospel with non-Christians as those who lived in the 19th century?

Well, you say, well, times have changed. Indeed, they have, but so have we as Christians. By no stretch are we as zealous for the glory of God and the gospel of Christ as we used to be.

That's no fault of the state of our society. That's our fault. Christian revival is for all Christians, but from Psalm 85, they are for those who remember better days than these and those who sense that God is angry with His church and as a consequence withholding the outpouring of His Spirit upon us.

One thing is for sure. If just one of those people who were powerfully affected by the Cambusland revival was present with us today, they'd be shocked by how dead our preaching is, how cold our zeal for God's glory is, how little we view the ugliness of our sin, and how slow we are to share the gospel of Jesus Christ.

[12 : 54] That is for whom revival is. Secondly, how does revival come? How does revival come? I'd like to think that by now we all see our desperate need of revival.

The English preacher Charles Spurgeon, he once referred to his preaching as having no go in it. I have no go in my preaching. How often do today's preachers, myself included, complain about the same deadness in our preaching and the coldness of response?

One may complain, well, yes, but today's preachers aren't as good as yesterday's preachers. But by all accounts, the minister through whom God began the Cambusland revival was a most ordinary preacher.

According to our text in Psalm 85 verse 6, God brings revival through two things, earnest prayer and sovereign grace.

Earnest prayer and sovereign grace. Earnest prayer, first of all. Every historian will tell you that every major world revival has been preceded by days, weeks, and years of earnest prayer.

[14 : 00] In the 1730s, led by Glasgow minister John Love, whose church was in Anderson, a worldwide concert of prayer was launched.

It included Jonathan Edwards, the famous New England minister. Christians from all over the known world committed themselves to earnest prayer for revival.

Soon after, something happened called the Great Awakening, resulting in the conversion of literally millions of people. Every genuine revival can be traced to the earnest prayers of God's people over the course of many years.

It might have been a small prayer meeting gathering in a widow's house or a worldwide concert of prayer, but God's people pleaded with him to pour out his Spirit upon his church and he answered in power.

What do we find the sons of Korah doing in Psalm 85 verse 6? They are praying. From the way in which the prayer is framed, one can sense their earnestness and desperation.

[15 : 07] Will you not? Will you not? Lord, will you not? Our Father's promise to give good gifts to His children. Will He not give us the gift of revival again? Lord, will you not?

When was the last time we prayed either individually or collectively for God to pour out His Spirit upon His people and give us new joy in Christ? We pray for our daily concerns, but what about the greatest of all concern, God's glory in His church?

You know we struggle to get barely a quarter of our church members to attend any of our prayer meetings. Should we be so surprised that God has not revived us?

And that we live in a day of such small things. Okay, we've got Champions League game on TV on a Wednesday night, gym session, or we just can't be bothered driving into the city on a Wednesday evening.

But all the time, God is challenging us, put your comforts to the side and put my glory first. And when we arrange extra prayer meetings, how few ever come.

[16:11] God will only pour out His Spirit upon us as we commit to earnestly praying her revival and calling down His blessing from heaven. If we want a fresh outpouring of God's Spirit upon His people, we need to seriously invest in this kind of prayer.

Not the kind of prayer forced from this pulpit by guilt, but the kind of spontaneous prayer welling up from the hearts filled with the grace of Christ and struck with our great need for better days than these.

earnest prayer. Second, sovereign grace. Sovereign grace. Ultimately, as with all things, revival is a sovereign work of the grace of God.

It is He who withholds revival and He who sends revival. He has promised to use means to accomplish His purpose, namely, the earnest prayers of His people.

But the sons of Korah knew that ultimately revival must come from God and that's why they're praying so fervently for it. We cannot manufacture genuine revival.

[17:17] You know, the church has never tried so hard as it's doing today to manufacture revival. The church promises a genuine emotional experience through musical and aesthetic experience.

Or we massage our statistics to show growth in our churches when that growth consists merely in terms of church transfer rather than in genuine conversions to Christ.

We cannot manufacture revival anymore than we can manufacture conversion. Authentic Christian revival comes only from a sovereign movement of the Spirit of God.

But that's no excuse for us throwing our hands up in the air and saying, well, if it's up to God, there's nothing I can do about it. It is up to God and we're supremely thankful for that for we know that when revival comes, no work of man can thwart its power.

No government decision, no societal pressure can get in the way of a fresh outpouring of God's Spirit. What else explains the explosion of the Chinese church in the second half of the 20th century or the conversion of millions of Iranians in our world today?

[18:31] When God begins a revival, nothing can stop it. When God pours out His Spirit afresh upon His church, no amount of persecution or persuasion from outside the church can stop it.

And that's why we're so thankful that revival's a work of God's sovereign grace. And it can't be manufactured by any human effort, intelligence, or strategy. When God begins a work among His people, He will bring it to completion for His glory.

Revival is a work of God's grace, a mysterious work, and yet it begins with perhaps only two or three faithful Christians gathered together in a room, earnestly praying the promises of God.

Maybe those two or three are the first fruits of God's outpouring. But even if it is that, the call of Psalm 85, verse 6, is for us to commit ourselves to God in earnest prayer for revival.

Well, lastly, what is revival? For whom is revival? How does revival come? Lastly, what is revival?

[19:49] For all we've talked about the subject, we still haven't defined it. For some, revival summons up images of exuberance and excess for others' deep sorrow and seriousness.

In Psalm 85, verse 6, we're told two things which help us define revival, two things among many others which have been true of every revival in the Bible and in history. New life and new joy. New life, first of all. The word translated as revive us again literally means return our lives to us, return our living.

The assumption is that the life we had is all but gone and we're praying for a divine outpouring of new life. It's the difference between someone who's on a life support machine compared to a finely tuned athlete running a hundred meter sprint.

the sons of Cori, you see, feel their spiritual lives ebbing away. Their zeal for God, their experience of His presence, their passion for His glory is so very weak.

[20:55] But when revival comes, God's people experience new life in Christ. Remember our working definition of revival. It is a fresh outpouring of God's life-giving Spirit upon His people.

The immediate impact of revival isn't the conversion of those who are spiritually dead, but the reanimation of those who are spiritually alive in Christ.

Certain species of frog, I'm told, live in deserts. They're found underneath the surface of the sand, far away from all water and to all intents.

If you dug them up, they would look desiccated and dead. But when the rains come, the frogs, sensing the rain, are reanimated.

And they burrow from under the ground and they make their way to fresh pools where having mated, they produce frog spawn. And so the next generation of desert frogs are produced. [21 : 59] A fresh outpouring of the Spirit of God is like rain in the desert, bringing to life our dry and desiccated souls. Spiritual dryness is replaced by spiritual vigor and spiritual desiccation by spiritual zeal.

God's Spirit brings us new life in Christ, the fullness of His blessing, crowding out our sin and replacing it with His holiness. The devised Christian will hate his sin. He will realize just how ugly and offensive it is to God. These will be days of deep repentance when God does a genuine heart work among His people to reorient them to genuine holiness of life. So revivals are often characterized by the tears of the penitent. But that life also imbues the preaching of the Word with fresh power. Remember I talked about how Charles Spurgeon referred to his preaching as having no go in it.

And those among us who are preachers will know exactly how that feels. To have no go in our preaching. But when revival comes, God will fill the preaching of the Word with what the famous Welsh preacher Martin Lloyd-Jones called unction.

[23 : 16] Uction. What is before the preacher's words were blunt? God makes them like arrows flying straight into the hearts of its listeners.

The words of the preacher are driven home by the Holy Spirit with power and deep conviction. Those who hear are cut to the quick and they see their desperate need of Christ and His cross and are genuinely converted.

Hundreds and thousands are saved by what? By any other means might seem rather ordinary preaching. The difference is that that ordinary preaching is owned and empowered by the Holy Spirit of God.

There is new life in evangelism and the witness of the people of God. The church becomes almost unrecognizable from the formalized deadness of its previous services.

There is the new life of the frog emerging from underneath the dryness of the desert prompted by the fresh rains of the Spirit of God. New life. And then secondly new joy.

[24 : 25] New joy. Historically revivals have often been characterized by what are called excesses. Excesses. So Christians so filled with the joy of the Lord do strange things.

Now excesses may or may not have a rightful place in true revivals. It's not my place to judge but what is true is that when Christians are filled with the new life of God they are also filled with new joy in God.

That joy is what we call the fear of God. The fear of God. It's that experience of His closer presence. It's the experience of His glory love and holiness shining in your face as it were.

These are no longer abstract doctrines we read about in a book. They are lived out realities which fill us with awe and excitement and joy. Like us in the Old Testament the presence of God comes upon us and we fall to our knees in adoration and praise and worship.

People can see that we've been with Jesus by the light in our faces and the wonder in our eyes. Our evangelism becomes powerful and contagious and many are drawn by the joy of the Lord we so clearly exhibit.

[25 : 43] Our sun praise becomes more the expression of our hearts filled with wonder and the Bible becomes a book to us with God shouting to us through every page and every line and every word.

Everything else in our lives is relegated to secondary importance. All our comforts all our obsessions all our status all our pleasures. Christ and His cross are seared into the fabric of our hearts and we cannot but praise Him.

Had we the world to give Him it would be an offering far too small. Our songs would mirror the adoring angels of heaven only far more intense for we and not they have been redeemed by the blood of Jesus.

Earth shall become like heaven because in revival heaven has come to earth. Our joy so tarnished by our present experiences of pain and ruin and loss and sin shall be unmatched as we like the apostle John catch a vision of the beauty and the power and the love of the exalted Christ.

It is revival we need in our own day and generation. How desperately we need a fresh outpouring of God's life-giving Spirit upon His people. We long, don't we, for better days than these.

[27 : 10] we long for Glasgow to be brought to Christ and the banner of His cross flying high over our city in a warm Scottish breeze. But do we long enough for it to commit ourselves to earnest prayer that our sovereign God would turn from His indignance and pour out upon us His life-giving Spirit?

Let's prove it. Lord, will you not revive us again that your people made a joy in you? I close with the prayer of the already quoted Charles Spurgeon.

Lord, revive us again. Lord, revive me. Lord, revive the pastor. Lord, revive the church officers. Lord, revive the workers. Lord, revive the members of the church.

Lord, revive the backsliders. Lord, revive those who seem to live but have grown careless. Lord, revive the church at large throughout the whole earth. Spirit of Christ come upon us now.

For Jesus' sake. Amen.