

Revival

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Date: 04 February 2018

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[0 : 00] I encourage you to turn to Isaiah 64. I'm just going to give a reading for this morning. Isaiah 64. While you're turning there, let me pass on my greetings from Nidrae Community Church, where I and my wife Heather are members and our three little girls.

It's a great privilege to be back with you again, and thank you to Paul and all of the fellowship here for your warm welcome and invitation. Thank you. Isaiah 64, from which I'm going to be preaching in a few moments.

I'm reading from the NIV. Verse 1. Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down, that the mountains would tremble before you, as when fire sets twigs ablaze and causes water to boil.

Come down to make your name known to your enemies. And cause the nations to quake before you. For when you did awesome things that we did not expect, you came down and the mountains trembled before you.

Since ancient times no one has heard, no ear has perceived, no eye has seen any God besides you, who acts on behalf of those who wait for him.

[1 : 17] You come to the help of those who gladly do right, who remember your ways. But when we continued to sin against them, you were angry.

How then can we be saved? All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags. We all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away.

No one calls on your name or strives to lay hold of you, for you have hidden your face from us and made us waste away because of our sins. Yet, O Lord, you are our Father.

We are the clay, you are the potter. We are all the work of your hand. Do not be angry beyond measure, O Lord. Do not remember our sins forever. O look upon us, we pray, for we are all your people.

Your sacred cities have become a desert. Even Zion is a desert, Jerusalem a desolation. Our holy and glorious temple, where our fathers praised you, has been burned with fire, and all that we treasured lies in ruins.

[2 : 32] After all this, O Lord, will you hold yourself back? Will you keep silent and punish us beyond measure? Amen. Fall.

When sinners, aware of the fire of God's presence, tremble in the streets and cry out for mercy. When without human advertising, the Holy Spirit sweeps across the cities and towns in supernatural power and holds people in the grip of terrifying conviction.

When every shop becomes a pulpit, every heart an altar, every home a sanctuary, and people walk carefully before God.

This is revival. Well, revival is a sovereign work of God's Spirit in which he demonstrates his awesome power to an unusual degree in the life of the church and the world in furthering his kingdom.

Revival, in a narrow sense, is God restoring to fullness of life something that is dying or bringing back to life something which has died.

[3 : 44] We mentioned a moment ago Ezekiel 37. There's a graphic portrayal of revival as God breathes new life into dry bones that had long since died.

So while that's revival in a narrow sense, church history reveals that Christians have often used the word revival in a much broader sense. This broader sense encompasses not only restoration of believers, but large-scale conversion of unbelievers, sometimes miraculous events, and an unmistakable impact upon society as a whole.

So as we turn to Isaiah 64, we have, I would suggest, a revival prayer. A prayer that does not necessarily give the order of events leading to revival, but various characteristics that often attend revivals.

Isaiah 64, then, is not a definitive text on revival, but it's a good place to start. Let's give just some context to the chapter.

Israel is in the spiritual gutter. The temple has been burned, 64 verse 11, Israel's enemies are prevailing, chapter 63, verse 18.

[5 : 15] God has hidden his face, chapter 64, verse 7, and his presence has departed from Israel, chapter 63, verse 17.

So as a nation, the people find themselves in absolutely desperate times. So I'm just going to offer very briefly 10 characteristics from this chapter of revival.

Verse 1. Firstly, there's a desperate longing for God's presence. A desperate longing for God's presence. Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down, that the mountains would tremble before you.

not too dissimilar to David's cry in Psalm 144, verse 5. Within the context, this is a cry for judgment on Israel's enemies.

Isaiah cries out for God to come and deliver his people. Can you sense the depth, the urgency of Isaiah's desire?

[6 : 21] Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down, that the mountains would tremble before you. Such longing, such deep and unrelenting desire, such heartfelt aching for God.

This is revival prayer. Prayer that longs for God to come down. This is not just formal, clichéd prayer.

This is heartfelt. This is prayer that is offered from the core of his being. And it comes as a result of seeing the spiritual need, the physical devastation all around him.

And it moves him to plead with God to intervene. So I ask myself and I ask all of us, have we engaged in any real heartfelt prayer recently?

Or are our prayers dull, cold and lifeless? Well, Isaiah's prayer request was not without precedent.

[7 : 35] God had come down before. Exodus 3.8, he had come down to rescue Israel out of Egypt. Exodus 19.10, he had come down to give Israel the law through Moses on Mount Sinai.

And God coming down is what Isaiah mentions three times in the first three verses of chapter 64. When God came down, it was unmistakable and unexplainable in merely human terms.

the intense sense of God's presence is often described as one of the key characteristics in times of revival. A man by the name of Norman Campbell who experienced the Isle of Lewis revival in 1949 said this, the outstanding feature of the 1949 revival was the presence of God.

You could sense and feel the presence of God everywhere. Even the children sensed something. It was the power of God let loose. People went on their knees anywhere.

When God comes down and brings revival, Christians generally don't need to be encouraged to come to church nor to read their Bibles nor to pray or to sing up.

[8 : 53] The reality is that you just can't stop them. In fact, people historically have often gladly stayed up into the early hours of the morning delighting in God.

O let us embrace verse 3 of Albert Midlane's hymn Revive Thy Work O Lord. It says this, Revive Thy Work O Lord Create soul thirst for thee and hungering for the bread of life O may our spirits be.

So that's our first characteristic, desperate longing for God's presence. Secondly, verse 2, God's name is honoured within society.

God's name honoured within society. As when fire sets twigs ablaze and causes water to boil, come down to make your name known to your enemies and cause the nations to quake before you.

Isaiah not only longed for God's presence, he wanted God's name to be feared among the nations. He was concerned about the glory of God, not just among God's people, but among outsiders as well.

[10 : 13] Israel had dragged God's name through the mud before Israel's enemies, and Isaiah was now crying out for God to take action for the sake of his own great name.

Isaiah wasn't just requesting some spectacular spiritual fireworks, no, it wasn't just for his own personal enjoyment, he was genuinely concerned about God's reputation, among the godless.

And so it must be, if we are to see God move in revival again. In revival, when God comes down and restores the church, there's often an accompanying transformation of society as a whole.

When revival comes, the world does not remain unaffected. the following is just one account from the Welsh revival of 1905.

Drunkards have been soberized, publicans have lost much business, conduct on public streets has been elevated, and the police and magistrates have had quieter times.

[11 : 25] The bottom of the pits have been utilized as centres for prayer and praise meetings, and there has been a general raising of the standard of public life.

Do we really believe that God can change a whole community? Do we really believe that God can change a city?

Do we really believe that God can change an entire nation? Well, he's done it before, and in the not too distant past.

Thirdly, there are unexpected and awesome events. Verse 3, for when you did awesome things that we did not expect, you came down, and the mountains trembled before you.

This is possibly a reference to the giving of the law at Mount Sinai, where there was an earthquake, fire, darkness, thunder, lightning. Deuteronomy 4, and Exodus 19.

[12 : 34] So when God comes down in revival, there's an exceptional demonstration of his power. Another example of this was in a little village called Arnall, on the Isle of Lewis, during the revival there in the mid-20th century.

Sometime after midnight, Duncan Campbell, who was a key leader during that revival, asked John Smith, the blacksmith, to pray. He had not prayed all night. He rose and prayed for some time, and then said, Lord, I do not know how Mr.

Campbell, or any of these other men stand with you, but if I know my own heart, I know that I am thirsty. You have promised to pour water on him that is thirsty.

If you don't do it, how can I ever believe you again? Your honour is at stake. You are a covenant keeping God. Fulfill your covenant engagement.

Colin Mary Peckham Wright, the quote was from their book, it was a prayer from a man who was walking with God. At that moment, the house shook. Someone next to Mr.

[13 : 46] Campbell said to him, Mr. Campbell, an earthquake. The next day, they were to discover that no other house shook. not too dissimilar to what we read in Acts 4, verse 31, where we read of Peter, John, and the other disciples.

After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and spoke the word of God boldly. While God's power in revival is sometimes observed in miraculous events, it's more commonly manifest in anointed preaching, agonizing conviction of sin, numerous conversions, and a general quickening of spiritual life.

Interestingly, in the account of the shaken house above, the Peckhams record that two unbelievers who were dozing at the time suddenly were wide awake as the building shook under deep conviction of sin and began to cry for mercy.

You can't manufacture this kind of thing. God's supernatural power should not be disconnected from the need for repentance and faith in Jesus Christ.

When God moves with great power, it's to demonstrate his holiness, man's sinfulness, and our desperate need of his salvation. When God moves in revival, one commentator writes that God accomplishes more in hours or days, than usually results from years of faithful non-revival ministry.

[15 : 29] But revival was far more than evangelism. Man can evangelize, only God can give revival. Another pastor who lived during the first great awakening in northeast America said of God's work in 1735 that more had been done in one week than in seven years before.

more. So it's not to say that we've not to do the day-to-day ordinary work of the church ministry. It's not what he's saying. It's just saying that when revival comes, God accomplishes more in a short period of time than is ordinary through our daily efforts.

it must also be said that when there are unexpected and awesome events, there is also controversy and opposition. We see that in the day of Pentecost, don't we, in Acts 2, 12-13.

Amazed and perplexed, they, that was the God-fearing Jews staying in Jerusalem, asked one another, what does this mean? Some, however, made fun of them and said they've had too much wine.

Martin Lloyd-Jones commenting on these verses said, in the history of revivals you will find with practically no exception the same kind of reaction.

[16 : 49] There's going to be misunderstanding, there's going to be opposition, the work of Satan does not stop in the midst of God's supernatural activity. Sometimes people will make fun, sometimes there will be vehement opposition.

It's a general rule that where God is at work, Satan is also at work to disrupt and to distort. Number four, there's waiting on God, waiting on God, verses four through five.

Since ancient times no one has heard, no ear has perceived, no eye has seen any God beside you who acts on behalf of those who wait for him.

You come to the help of those who gladly do right, who remember your ways. God acts on behalf of those who wait for him.

What does it mean to wait on God? It does not mean sitting at home or church twiddling your thumbs, hoping God will suddenly do a miracle or send revival.

[18 : 01] Waiting on God involves an active ongoing dependence on God which manifests itself in righteous living. Waiting means gladly doing right, remembering God's ways, verse five.

Before, during, and after revival, there's an increasing emphasis on personal holiness, gladly doing right, and also on the holiness of God.

People who are casual and careless in their relationship with God are confronted with the fear of the Lord. Holiness is taken seriously.

The Holy Spirit, in a sense, is rediscovered as the Holy Spirit. Those who wait on God gladly do right and show that they remember God's ways by obeying God's Word.

Obedience and surrender are not seen as optional extras for super-spiritual Christians, but as joyful necessities under the Lordship of Christ.

[19 : 09] Therefore, waiting on God is not necessarily about extra long prayer meetings that last into the early hours of the morning. Waiting on God encompasses so much more than that.

It's a committing of the entire life to God, willingly doing His work in His way. Mortifying sin, killing sin, putting sin to death in our lives, using the means of grace.

Waiting on God is anything but inactive. It involves an active, ongoing trust and obedience. So, four was waiting on God.

Five, recognition of corporate helplessness. Recognition of corporate helplessness, verses five through seven. Notice the personal pronouns here.

But when we continued to sin against them, you were angry. How then can we be saved? All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags.

[20 : 19] We all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind, our sins sweep us away. No one calls on your name or strives to lay hold of you, for you have hidden your face from us and made us waste away because of our sins.

This isn't just an individual prayer. Isaiah is praying on behalf of the nation. Isaiah speaks on behalf of God's people, not only on behalf of himself.

And as he looks at the dreadful predicament that God's people are in, he recognizes that everyone is to blame, everyone. And consequently, if the problem is corporate, the solution must also be corporate.

Revival, when it comes, is attended with a corporate sense of helplessness before Almighty God. Revival is not an individualistic experience.

You don't experience revival in your quiet time in the morning on your own. Revival is essentially a corporate experience.

[21 : 31] And although God may use one person or a small number of people to lead a revival, that must not detract from the fact that revival is generally sought and experienced corporately.

In 1857, there was a famous New York prayer meeting in America. In 1857, a 46-year-old man by the name of Jeremiah Lamphere began a noontime weekly prayer meeting in Fulton Street, New York.

At the first meeting, for the first 30 minutes, there was no one but himself. By the end of the hour, six people had joined him. The next week, there were 20.

The following week, nearly 40. people then decided to meet daily. Over the next few weeks and months, this prayer meeting exploded all across America, bringing revival, and then it made its way across the Atlantic to the United Kingdom.

There were reports of people on boats up to 100 miles away off the east coast of America who felt God's holy presence in a tangible way as they moved towards the land.

[22 : 45] land. This experience of God's presence and conviction of sin that came with it resulted in people turning to Jesus Christ despite being totally unaware of the revival or these prayer meetings happening on the land.

But from the human perspective, it started with one man, but it reached thousands. It did so as scores and then multitudes of people gathered to pray.

As the little saying goes, little prayer, little power, much prayer, much power. Are you one man this morning?

Are you one woman this morning? Never underestimate what God can do. number six, acknowledgement of sin.

Characteristic of revival, acknowledgement of sin, verses five through seven again. Accounts of revival often talk of people coming under agonizing conviction of sin.

[23 : 55] Not just, oh, I think I did something wrong, but agonizing conviction of sin. The awareness of personal sinfulness and the desperate need to get right with God become the all-consuming issues in someone's life.

There's an inescapable urgency to address things that have perhaps been put off or laid aside for years. The sinfulness of sin is pressed upon people and felt deeply, even among those who seem to be living upright and godly lives.

Joseph Kemp, who was the minister at Charlotte Chapel here in Edinburgh during the 1907 revival, wrote that one of the key features of the revival was a deep conviction of sin, even where the outward life appeared blameless.

And this deep conviction of sin seems to be one of the key characteristics of all true revivals. Things that used to be viewed as acceptable are now seen in a different light.

What used to be tolerated now becomes intolerable in the increasing awareness of the holiness of God. Those who experience soul torment find that they're only able to find relief at the cross of Jesus Christ.

[25 : 17] The blood of Christ shed at the cross becomes sweeter than honey as the agony of conviction overshadows every other concern. The death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ become more precious than any worldly care as the agonized soul turns to Christ in faith for salvation.

I wonder this morning, do you have that assurance of faith in Jesus Christ? Have you come to know him as your Lord and Savior, the only one who can forgive your sins, who can turn your life upside down and inside out, who can put you on the road and give you eternal life?

The path of righteousness. He comes to you this morning and he welcomes you. He says, come to the cross, die at the cross, and find a new life, life that is truly life.

Number seven, we have surrender. Surrender, verse eight. Yet, O Lord, you are our Father. We are the clay.

You are the potter. We are all the work of your hand. Isaiah, Jeremiah, and the Apostle Paul all use this image of the potter and the clay.

[26 : 44] Within this phrase is an acknowledgement that we have a maker who has the right to do with us as he pleases, and yet works for our eternal good. To acknowledge and embrace that God Almighty is our creator, and therefore our ruler is to come to a place of surrender.

I surrender all. I surrender all. All to thee, my blessed Savior, I surrender all.

I find those words some of the hardest to sing sincerely, because I know in my own life how often I don't surrender all. But that's what God calls us to.

Surrender. To die a thousand deaths to self. That he might rule. So when revival comes, these words become more than good intentions or wishful thinking.

They become a living reality in people's lives. And if we were to come to a place where we genuinely wanted to experience revival, we must also ask ourselves this morning, are we willing to embrace the cost of what revival may bring?

[28 : 07] Jesus often told prospective followers the cost, and it's no different today, is it? There's a cost to following Christ.

There's a cost to putting him first in our lives. But oh, what joy. Oh, what pleasure there are with Christ.

For if revival brings transformation, we must be willing to embrace change. I surrender all. I surrender all. All to thee, my blessed Savior.

I surrender all. easy words to sing, not easy words to embrace.

Do we want revival? Really? Count the cost. Number eight, there's a pleading for mercy.

[29 : 09] A pleading for mercy. Verse nine. Do not be angry beyond measure, O Lord. Do not remember our sins forever. O look upon us, we pray, for we are all your people.

When people come to truly see their desperate condition before Almighty God, one result is a heartfelt pleading for mercy. God's people recognize that they've grievously offended not only their maker, but the one who exercises all power over them.

God, in his perfect holiness, has every right to be angry with the least departure from his righteous commands. When God's people recognize that the only one who can help them is the same one who they have rebelled against, they find that there is only one course of action open to them.

Begging for mercy. pleading with God in prayer. There's no rules for this. It may last hours, days, months, or years.

I've known people who've prayed for revival their whole life and never saw it. Faithful prayer warriors. But who knows, their prayers may yet have still to be yes.

[30 : 36] In the history of revival, the only rule is that there is no one set rule for how they come about. You can't manufacture revival. You can't give us a 12-step program of revival.

But one of the common things seems to be this pleading for mercy. And even this is a gift from God, isn't it? Do we not need God to come and soften our hard hearts and enable us to plead and pray as we ought given the desperate condition of our land?

That was the verse up on the screens behind us as the offering was taken. Did you notice it? Heal our nation. We're saying our nation's not right.

There are things in my life and your life that are not right. God, come. Come to us. And as New Testament Christians, we have the glorious person and work of Jesus Christ fully revealed, providing the foundation for our pleading.

We can come through Christ. The temple curtain has been torn in two. We come to Christ, the King of Kings, the Lord of Lords, the Almighty One, the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end, the Eternal One.

[31 : 58] We come to Him. Is anything too hard for Him? So on account of God's mercy to us in Christ, we're assured that God is a merciful God.

He forgives our sins. How wonderful. So as we pray, let us lean heavily on the marvelous mercy of Christ.

Number nine, there's a reckoning with reality, a reckoning with reality, verses 10 through 11. Your sacred cities have become a desert.

Even Zion is a desert. Jerusalem, a desolation. Our holy and glorious temple where our fathers praised you has been burned with fire and all that we treasured lies in ruins.

Isaiah looks around at the physical devastation of the land, a physical devastation which was symptomatic of a deeper spiritual devastation. What was once sacred has now become desolation.

[33 : 04] What was once holy and glorious had now been ruined. This reckoning with reality, this ability to see things as they really are, is often the first step in humility and seeking God's help.

In fact, even the ability to see things as they really are is a gift of the Holy Spirit. Open our eyes, O Lord. I've yet to read of a revival where no one saw any great need of it.

It seems to be that God works through the desperate cries of his people which are built on the awareness of how bad things really are. And this is one reason why people who talk about revival and pray for revival are often opposed.

Some people just don't like the negativity associated with telling things how they really are. And we're not talking about just walking along the street with our friends saying, Oh no, did you see what happened again?

We're not talking about that. We're not talking about the complaint, the murmuring. We're talking about seeing the need all around us in Westerhailes, in Nidre, throughout Edinburgh.

[34 : 20] We're looking at statistics that say something like 2-3% of Scotland are evangelical Christians. And the way that the schools are going, the way that children are being led astray, we're looking at government policies, we're looking at all of this in society, and we're saying, God, we need revival.

We need a supernatural move of God's spirit because we don't have the tools outwith the gospel to change a thing. God, help us.

God, have mercy on us. Help us to see. Isaiah saw the problem and kept preaching even when no one wanted to listen.

And I said, here am I, send me. He said, go and tell this people, be ever hearing but never understanding. Be ever seeing but never perceiving.

Make the heart of this people callous. Make their ears dull and close their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn and be healed.

[35 : 36] Then I said, for how long, O Lord? And he answered, until the cities lie ruined and without inhabitants, until the houses are left deserted and the fields ruined and ravaged, until the Lord has sent everyone far away and the land is utterly forsaken.

It's Isaiah chapter 6. That's exactly what we read in Isaiah 64, 10 through 11. And so I asked myself and all of us, what do we see?

What do we see in Westerhailes? What do we see in Edinburgh? What do we see in Scotland and the United Kingdom? What do we see around our world?

What do we see in our own hearts? Do we see the desolation? Do we see the ruin? And if so, what are we asking God to do about it?

Finally, number 10. There's a turning to God, verse 12. Turning to God. After all this, O Lord, will you hold yourself back? Will you keep silent and punish us beyond measure?

[36 : 49] Chapter 64 closes with Isaiah acknowledging that God's silence to Israel was bound up with his punishment of Israel. And while God's silence does not always equal punishment for Israel in Isaiah 64, it did.

And so Isaiah does what any sensible person should do when they realize that the ruin of the people is attributable to the sin of the people. He turns to God. And in his turning to God, he longs for the voice of God to be heard again.

Often in revival, God's voice is heard through spirit-anointed preaching that results in observable transformation in people's lives. Unbelievers are converted.

Backsliders are restored. Believers are renewed in zeal and good works. When God speaks in times of revival, people not only hear the word, they long to hear it.

And they not only long to hear it, they delight in obeying it. And they not only delight in obeying it, they delight in speaking it to others so that they too may hear and obey it as well.

[38 : 03] Do we see the need? Are we turning to God? Revive thy work, O Lord, thy mighty arm make bare. Speak with the voice that wakes the dead and make thy people hear.

Amen.