



Wilt Thou Not Revive Us?

Wilt thou not revive us again: that thy people may rejoice in thee?

Psalm 85:6

Here we have a prayer in which the Psalmist is earnestly pouring out his heart to God for revival. He felt the great need in his day. And do we not need revival in our day? Surely this is the great prayer God's people should be pleading in our day! We look back over the years and notice a massive decline in church membership. Great preachers we knew in our youth are no longer with us. Godly Christians who once were pillars in evangelical churches have been taken home. The church today appears to be dying if not already dead. Worldliness has invaded the church. Christians are sleeping. Spiritual discernment is lacking. The fear of God is missing not just in society in general, but even from the church. Preaching is powerless. Few real conversions are taking place. Things seem to be going from bad to worse. It has been 150 years since the last great revival in our country. What does the future hold? Will things continue to deteriorate? Will the true church die out in Britain? Will God remove His candlestick from its place?

Jonathan Edwards' grandfather Solomon Stoddard was minister of Northampton from 1672 till 1729, almost 60 years. Edwards writes concerning his ministry that he had five harvests, as he called them, when many were added to the church. Some of these times were much more remarkable than others, and the ingathering of souls more plentiful. Yet there seemed to be a great falling away after the last of these with licentiousness, frequenting the tavern and lewd practices becoming common. But then in 1734-35 there was the first great revival of Edwards' time. The place was transformed. Everyone became concerned about their souls. Multitudes were saved. The fear of God came down on the community. He gives a full account of this in his *Narrative of Surprising Conversions*. The second revival was 1740-42 and is outlined in *An Account of the Revival of Religion in Northampton, 1740-2* (a letter written in 1743). The second revival was part of the Great Awakening and was much more widespread, covering all New England and the other colonies and with a related movement in the British Isles. Reading what Edwards has written concerning these great movements of God's Spirit stirs our hearts and makes us long for such a mighty revival of God's Spirit in our own times.

1. What is Revival?

Revival is a specific period of increased spiritual interest and renewal in the life of a church or many churches, either regionally or globally. This should be distinguished from the use of the term 'revival' to refer to an evangelistic meeting or series of meetings. Revival is when God comes down and works mightily in the church bringing new life and spiritual interest, prayerfulness, holiness of life and zeal for the conversion of souls. Communities become aware of God in a new way and many unbelievers are born again.

I come from the Island of Lewis which has been blessed with a series of revivals since the gospel first came there with power in 1828. Leaving school I went to Aberdeen as a student and became involved in the Christian Union. Hearing where I came from, folk would say to me that they had heard of the Lewis Revival. Initially, puzzled, I responded, 'Which one?' They had heard of the Duncan Campbell revival in 1949. It was just one among a whole series and certainly not the biggest but the difference in this one was that an outsider was involved and that after the revival he went to the Keswick Convention and other places talking about the great work in which he had been involved. I remember the last general revival in Lewis which

took place in the early 1970s when some hundreds were converted in the space of a year or so. God used ordinary preaching and common phrases, accompanied with power, to deeply convict the ungodly. The Lord's people were roused from their lethargy. There was no doubting that the work was of God and many lives were marvellously transformed. Converts from that movement are the elders in the church there today.

In the history of God's people in the Old Testament there were several revivals. God visited His people when they were slaves in the land of Egypt and brought them out with a mighty arm and made them into a great nation. The book of Judges records several revivals. The people fell away from God, began to worship idols, and God punished them by sending some neighbouring king to invade their land and oppress them. After several years of oppression they repented and cried to God and He raised up a deliverer for them, e.g. Gideon, Deborah and Barak, and Jephthah. All was well during the reign of that judge but after he died they again tended to forget God, fell away into idolatry and judgment came upon them once more. Samuel the prophet was used in a series of revivals which came to their climax in the reign of David and the early days of Solomon. Kings Hezekiah and Josiah also saw wonderful revivals. Led by the king the people as a whole turned from idolatry to the living God. Repentance was followed by joy and gladness and the rich blessing from the Lord.

Essentially revival is an outpouring of God's Spirit upon the church bringing new spiritual life to God's people, convicting of sin, stirring up repentance, awakening interest in spiritual concerns, increasing zeal for God's glory, burdening with prayer and making Christ and the gospel the centre of life. Revival impacts the unconverted by convicting them of their sin, of God's holiness and justice, of the hell to which they are heading, so that they cry to the Lord for mercy and are unsatisfied till they find peace with God through Jesus Christ. Edwards speaks of the presence of God felt in the community; God's day was a delight, the churches were packed, the worship was earnest and the people listened hungrily to the sermons. Some wept in sorrow for sin and others rejoiced in their own salvation and in others being saved. The town, said Edwards, was full of love and joy and distress.

2. We need Revival

We are not told who was the author of this Psalm and we can only guess when it was written. Many commentators think it was composed some time after the return from the exile in Babylon. Initially on returning to the land of Israel there was great excitement and euphoria. God's promise through Jeremiah had been fulfilled and after seventy years of bondage they were free to return to their own land. They built an altar and started the sacrifices once more. The rubbish was cleared and they proceeded to lay the foundations for the second temple. However, before long, the enthusiasm waned. There were enemies discouraging them. They had to build houses for their own families, clear the land, plant crops and look after their own livelihoods. But in all their work for themselves they were earning money to put it into a bag with holes (Haggai 1:6). They needed revival and Haggai called them back to the work of building the temple of the Lord and the blessing followed.

This situation would certainly fit the Psalm but it may come from another time in Israel's history. Days of declension were not uncommon in the experience of God's people in the Old Testament. The pious Israelite must often have felt the need and longed for revival, for a real, mighty work of God's Spirit. How often down through the centuries would the child of God have prayed prayers like this!

The Psalmist begins by remembering that there were real days of blessing in the past: *'LORD, thou hast been favourable unto thy land: thou hast brought back the captivity of Jacob'* (v 1). God had often been favourable to His people. He had delivered them from captivity and from tyrants who had been given power over them because of their backsliding. God has always been actively training His people. When they go astray after idols, or lust, or violence, He sends prophets to warn them and if they will not give heed He will send His chastisement to bring them back. This had happened in the experience of the Psalmist.

'Thou hast forgiven the iniquity of thy people, thou hast covered all their sin' (v 2). Praise God for forgiveness of sins, for justification by faith alone. God loves to pardon for Christ's sake. 'Thou hast taken away all thy wrath: thou hast turned thyself from the fierceness of thine anger' (v 3). Yes God is angry with sinners. Even His elect feel His anger, though thankfully only for a moment: 'For a small moment have I forsaken thee; but with great mercies will I gather thee. In a little wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment; but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the LORD thy Redeemer' (Is. 54:7-8).

The Psalmist is aware that he and his people have again backslidden and turned from the Lord. There is nothing easier than to backslide. Satan is always tempting and the flesh loves sin. Their environment in a sinful world makes sin seem natural and normal. So the Psalmist cried out, *'Turn us, O God of our salvation, and cause thine anger toward us to cease. Wilt thou be angry with us forever? wilt thou draw out thine anger to all generations?'* (vv 4-5).

We too have experienced the favour of God. The Gospel first came to these shores at an early date. Some reckon that it happened in the First Century. Paganism came in again with the invasion of the Angles, Saxons and Jutes from Northern Europe. God once again sent missionaries such as Columba from Ireland. The church again backslid into Medieval darkness but God sent the Reformers of the Sixteenth Century with a mighty revival — Luther, Calvin, Cranmer, Tyndale and Knox. What a revival it was that chased Roman darkness from our shores. Decline followed and then God raised up the Puritans with a new revival. Again there was spiritual backsliding but God raised up Whitefield and the Wesleys and Jonathan Edwards and brought about the Great Awakening of the Seventeenth Century. Decline followed and then once again revival came in the Nineteenth Century 1859-60. Alas since then there has been a steady decline, one hundred and fifty years of it.

Look at the situation we are in today. Liberalism came in from Germany in the Nineteenth Century and took over the mainline churches. The Bible is no longer the infallible, authoritative Word of God. Evolutionary teaching has removed the Creator from the throne and man no longer feels the need to make his peace with his Maker. Mass evangelism has produced its own man-made revival with its impressive results which must not be searched or examined closely. The Charismatic Movement has produced signs and wonders and its health and wealth Gospel which promises a heaven in this world providing you generate your own faith in the movement and its leaders. Fake healings, false prophecies and gobbledegook tongue-speaking, as John Macarthur puts it, characterises many of the biggest churches. Even the better Reformed churches have looked longingly across the Atlantic at the mega-churches there and have struggled to follow them and be seeker-sensitive, to entertain and not to offend in the hopes of sharing in their seeming success. Church services must first and foremost be welcoming and entertaining. Intelligent young people are looking for exciting music, trivial choruses repeated ad infinitum and short sermons full of jokes and anecdotes. Sin, holiness, the wrath of God, the judgment day and hell must not be mentioned. The greatest fear in the church is legalism rather than worldliness. But despite all this the church continues to decline drastically in numbers. Occasionally gifted individuals with teams of helpers and lots of social activities can gather some hundreds together. However the church is making little impact on society and there are few conversions. Such conversions as there are tend to be superficial and do not last. Growth tends to be by sheep-stealing from smaller congregations as even in Christian circles a crowd draws a crowd and modern Christians show little ability to think for themselves and stand on their own feet. The fear of God is to be found neither in the world nor in the church. God has in a sense turned His back on us. His judgment rests upon the church in our land.

Even the best of churches show little true devotion to God, holiness of life, love for deep doctrine, reading of Puritan theology, solid fellowship in the Scriptures, earnestness in secret prayer, compassion for lost souls and zeal for God's glory.

Outside the church apathy pervades society. To raise the subject of Christ and Christianity, sin and judgment and heaven and hell creates embarrassment. People will happily talk on any

other subject. We have the good news of the gospel but no one wants to hear it. Invite folk to a party or a wedding and they will come in droves, but invite them to the gospel wedding feast and they will have all kinds of excuses. There is no sense of spiritual need and so the proclamation of salvation through the blood of Christ is like casting one's pearls before swine.

3. We Need God

'Wilt thou not revive us'. We need God to come. We need Him to act. We can arrange outreach visitation, evangelistic campaigns, conferences, the best visiting preachers, Christianity Explored courses, discipleship programmes, etc., but it is all in vain without the Spirit of God. It is God we need and nothing less. We need the sovereign, powerful, regenerating, reviving work of the Spirit of God. We have a valley full of dead bones, very many and truly dead, indeed whitened by the sun (Ezek. 37). Can these bones live? There is nothing we can do to revive them. But God gathers the bones, makes the flesh and sinews to grow, but they are still dead corpses. Ezekiel tells us:

'And when I beheld, lo, the sinews and the flesh came up upon them, and the skin covered them above: but there was no breath in them. Then said he unto me, Prophesy unto the wind, prophesy, son of man, and say to the wind, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live. So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood up upon their feet, an exceeding great army. Then he said unto me, Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel: behold, they say, Our bones are dried, and our hope is lost: we are cut off for our parts. Therefore prophesy and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, O my people, I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel. And ye shall know that I am the LORD, when I have opened your graves, O my people, and brought you up out of your graves, And shall put my spirit in you, and ye shall live, and I shall place you in your own land: then shall ye know that I the LORD have spoken it, and performed it, saith the LORD'.

Ezekiel 37:8-13

Christ commanded his disciples *'that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of me. For John truly baptised with water; but ye shall be baptised with the Holy Ghost not many days hence'* (Acts 1:4-5). The disciples waited in prayer in the upper room. Ten days were to pass before the Spirit came. Now Pentecost was unique. It was a once-for-all historical-redemptive act of God. It was the coming of the Comforter who would abide with the church till Christ came again. Yet Acts 2 also demonstrates how much we need God's Spirit to revive the church and convert sinners. Following the pouring out of the Spirit the disciples had new boldness, an unction from the Holy One which taught them things which before were very unclear to them, power in preaching and, most amazing of all, conviction of sin accompanying the heralding of the gospel and regeneration in the heart by the working of God's Spirit. Surely if God is teaching us one thing today in Britain it is that we need Him. He is demonstrating to us over and over again our weakness, inability and helplessness. *'Without me, ye can do nothing'* (Jn. 15:5). He also encourages us to say, *'I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me'* (Phil. 4:13). Christ says, *'I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it'* (Matt. 16:18). The building is Christ's work and His alone. Yes Paul plants and Apollos waters but God gives the increase (1 Cor. 3:6). No amount of planting and watering produces a harvest without God who gives the increase. The trouble with us is that we want some praise for ourselves but God will not give His glory to another. Oh that we would learn our own helplessness so that we would look to God and depend totally on Him!

4. We need to pray

Surely if it is God's work there is nothing we can do? In a sense that is true and yet we have human responsibility. We can pray and we can ask for revival. Yet even in this we need God's

help to pray earnestly, persistently, humbly and with faith. It is the prayer which comes down from above which will ascend to God and bring down the blessing. When God grants the Spirit of grace and supplications (Zech. 12:10) effectual, fervent prayers will ascend to heaven (Jas. 5:16). In one sense there is nothing harder to do than to pray — to pray in faith and repentance with the Holy Spirit — and yet we must pray. Satan attacks us more when we pray than at any other time. He tries his hardest to distract us and often succeeds. He floods our minds with worldly thoughts and things we have to do. Yet we must pray for revival. It is our duty and as it has been said we should pray till we pray.

The following points should be noticed with regard to prayer for revival:

1) Identify sin

Isaiah tells us why we are not seeing revival: *'Behold, the LORD's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear: but your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear'* (Isa. 59:1-2). There is a barrier between us and our God and it is one that we have raised. Let us search our hearts, see our sins, confess, repent, wash in the blood and be clean for God. Let us turn from our sins and be holy and then He will stretch out His mighty arm in revival. Are we asking why His hand in judgment is resting upon us?

2) Mourn and weep over sin

Let us fast and mourn and weep over our sins. Let us have that *'godly sorrow (which) worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of'* (2 Cor. 7:10). Let us remember how Ezra, Nehemiah, Daniel and others fasted before the Lord. Our Saviour expected us to fast, *'But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face'* (Matt. 6:17). It's when you fast, not if you fast.

3) Claim the Blood of Christ

Though we are great sinners, Christ is a great Saviour. *'If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness'* (1 Jn. 1:9). And we are assured, *'the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin'* (v 7). We must pray for Christ's sake.

4) Plead the promises

Many promises have been given which can be pleaded in prayer. Think of the words in Isaiah: *'For I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground: I will pour my Spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring'* (Isa. 44:3). We are dry and thirsty ground here in Britain. We need the water of life, the Holy Spirit, to be poured out upon us. Yes the Spirit was given in a once-for-all way at Pentecost, but we long for a fresh experience of His power to salvation. He is grieved and hiding Himself. Jesus encourages us, *'If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?'* (Lk. 11:13). We who are sinners love to give gifts to our children; how much more will our loving Father in heaven give us the Holy Spirit when we plead with Him? The Holy Spirit is the one who produces revival.

5) Persevere in prayer

We must persevere in prayer even when it seems we are getting no answer. All Christians should persist in prayer, but especially ministers who are called to be watchmen: *'I have set watchmen upon thy walls, O Jerusalem, which shall never hold their peace day nor night: ye that make mention of the LORD, keep not silence, and give him no rest, till he establish, and till he make Jerusalem a praise in the earth'* (Isa. 62:6-7). Jerusalem is the church and instead of it being a tiny down-trodden minority we long to see it grow and multiply till it becomes a mighty city set upon a hill for all to see and admire. Persevere in secret prayer,

family prayer and congregational prayer. Remember how Jacob wrestled with God and said 'I will not let thee go, except thou bless me' (Gen. 32:26).

6) Unite in prayer

Jonathan Edwards wrote his famous book entitled *An humble attempt to promote explicit agreement and visible union of God's people, in extraordinary prayer for the revival of religion and the advancement of Christ's kingdom on earth*. He wished to see all the churches across America and Britain united in prayer for revival on a set day. He joined with others praying for God's blessing during part of every Saturday night and Sunday morning and kept the first Tuesday in each quarter as a day of special prayer and intercession.

7) Expectant prayer

Along with prayer should be expectation. We are to look for answers. Trusting in the power of God who can do anything and in the mercy of God who will do what is best, we are to look for a glorious answer. Ask and you shall receive for Jesus said: '*Every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened*' (Matt. 7:8). He '*is rich unto all that call upon him*' (Rom. 10:12).

5. What Revival achieves

Many people think of revival as lots of sinners being converted and so its main impact as they see it is upon the world. However the Psalmist starts with the church, the people of God: '*revive us again: that thy people may rejoice in thee*'. The church has fallen asleep and needs to be awakened; it has become weak and needs a new injection of energy. Edwards speaks of God bestowing a sense of need upon the church and causing God's people to start praying in earnest before a revival as the first step in a revival. When the great revival came to North Korea in 1907 the first impact was upon the church. There was a tremendous conviction of sin causing men and women to fall down weeping and confessing their sins before the church.

Revival brings a new hunger for God. Sadly in the church today we spend money for that which is not bread and our labour for that which does not satisfy (Is. 55:2). Christians have their lives taken up with pleasures, parties, sport, entertainment, TV, internet, Facebook, YouTube, etc. It is called culture and relaxation but it swallows up all spare time so that there is little reading of solid Christian books, meditating on the Scriptures, serious reflection and self-examination, and prayer. The Psalmist said, '*O God, thou art my God; early will I seek thee: my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is; to see thy power and thy glory, so as I have seen thee in the sanctuary*' (Psa. 63:1-2). He had a passion for God. Do we? When revival comes, the Lord's people will turn from trivia and devote themselves to Him. Holiness of life will become the priority. Witnessing and evangelising will become natural and constant.

Having first impacted the church, revival will with them affect the whole of society. The fear of God will come down upon the land. Christianity is shown to be real in the life of believers whom the world typically dismisses as hypocrites. This will shake sinners. Eternity will draw near and the Judgment Day will be seen as inevitable. Evangelism will be easy as people come in droves to church and sit earnestly under the preaching which now has new power. The unbelievers are convicted of sin and of God's wrath upon them and cry for mercy. Real tears are shed in repentance. Sinners are born again, delivered from a state of condemnation and brought to peace with God and assurance of His love, peace of conscience and rejoicing in adoption.

6. We need Joy

This is a world full of sorrows. Everywhere we look there is pain. Sickness, disability, disappointment, grief, tears and death are universal. Scripture states: '*We know that the whole*

creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now' (Rom. 8:22). But the Psalmist prays, *'Wilt thou not revive us again: that thy people may rejoice in thee?'* Revival brings joy to a sad and miserable world. Christians ought to be happy, because joy is a fruit of the Holy Spirit who indwells them. But we find it difficult. We have foolishly looked in the wrong place for joy. But a revival will give great joy to the Christian. It brings heaven close. The Spirit works mightily giving joy unspeakable and full of glory (1 Pet. 1:8). There is joy in seeing one sinner repent and so when many repent there is overwhelming joy (Lk. 15:7). Remember the joy you had when you were first converted and knew that your sins were forgiven and that God loved you and Christ died for you and that the Holy Spirit now lived in your heart and that you were indeed a child of God. The love of God filled your heart. In our lives since then there have been times when God has specially drawn near. Perhaps we were praying, or reading a good book or listening to a sermon and we felt God near and we were stirred to the heart. Revival is a time of overflowing joy in God.

7. We need to have confidence in God

The Psalmist began the Psalm by asserting that God had been good to Israel in the past. He had delivered His people from their captivity (v 1). He had forgiven their sins (v 2) and turned from His anger with them (v 3). The fact of that past deliverance encouraged the Psalmist to hope that God would answer his prayer again. Another encouragement was that God is the God of salvation, the God who loves to save (v 4). Surely this God will not always be angry with His people (v 5). He is a merciful God; let Him reveal His salvation (v 7). I will listen to God for He will speak words of peace to His people. Do not let us return to the foolish ways which brought His anger upon us (v 8). Salvation is near to us and the God of glory will reveal Himself (v 9). Through the work of Christ at Calvary, mercy and truth and righteousness and peace have met together. Heaven and earth are joined in Christ who is God and man (v 11). There is a blessed and prosperous future (v 12). Many will be justified by faith in Christ (v 13).

'Wilt thou not revive us again: that thy people may rejoice in thee?' Surely we can pray this prayer with confidence because of who God is and what He has done in the past. We live in dark days but there is no reason to despair. God has not lost His ancient power. The sophisticated sinners of today and the proud atheists who love to dismiss God are not beyond His power to save. It is as easy for Him in 2014 to save a persecutor and blasphemer as it was for Him 2000 years ago to save Paul. It takes a mighty miracle for God to regenerate anyone. The sinner who is dead in trespasses and sins has to be resurrected. Only God can do it and it takes the same mighty power as created the world and raised Jesus from the dead.

The kingdom of heaven is like the mustard seed which is the smallest of the seeds yet it grows into a great plant in which birds can roost (Matt. 13:31-32). It is like yeast which a woman took and hid in three measures of dough till the whole was leavened. The kingdom, it is promised, will permeate and transform the whole world.

King Nebuchadnezzar was given a dream in which the great empires of the world were portrayed as a huge image, the head of gold representing the Babylonian empire, the silver chest and arms representing the Medo-Persian empire, etc. But then God set up a new kingdom different from these, a stone cut out of the mountain not by human hands. This little stone rolls along and smashes the image. *'And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever'* (Dan. 2:44). We are told that, *'the stone that smote the image became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth'* (v 35).

Edwards was a postmillennialist. He looked forward to great days of Gospel blessing on earth. The Psalmist speaks of Messiah's kingdom: *'He shall have dominion also from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth. They that dwell in the wilderness shall bow before him; and his enemies shall lick the dust. The kings of Tarshish and of the isles shall bring presents: the kings of Sheba and Seba shall offer gifts. Yea, all kings shall fall down before*

him: all nations shall serve him' (Ps. 72:8-11). It is not just a remnant that will be saved. Nothing like this kind of extension of the church has been seen till now.

Let us be optimistic and excited as we view the future of the church. We look forward to seeing the Jews converted as a nation and this being *'life from the dead'* for the Gentile church (Rom. 11:15). We want to see God glorified on earth as well as in heaven. Pray for revival and look with expectation to the Lord to do it. Labour on for the Lord spreading the kingdom and waiting with excitement to see the great things that the Lord will yet do for His church, even on earth. To Abraham it was said, *'in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed'* (Gen. 12:3). Blessing is promised for the families, not just for a little minority. Moses declared that the earth is going to be full of the glory of God (Num. 14:21). John related in Revelation how *'the seventh angel sounded; and there were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign forever and ever'* (Rev. 11:15). The best is yet to be and all nations shall bow to King Jesus.

William Macleod

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