

Prayer Is A Prominent Feature Of Revival

By Tom Hill

Bible Text: 2 Chronicles 29:1-3

Many Christians today doubt the need of a spiritual revival in their lives or in the Church of Jesus Christ. As support for their conclusions, they point to the great variety of Christian ministries active today. Or they detail the many varied Church programs available. Further, they cite the popularity of religion, specifically Christianity. As a result, they reason that things could not be better, and the Church does not need a revival.

To draw such a conclusion, however, builds upon two false judgments. First, it assumes that the present state of spiritual affairs is true, valid, Biblical, and God blessed, lacking nothing but more of the same. Second, it indicates a lack of understanding of the nature of true revival and its Biblical mandate.

Against this false verdict (that we need no spiritual revival), I want to examine with you one of the prominent features of spiritual revival. It is present in every revival in Biblical and Church history. Further, it has a Biblical mandate for its presence in our Christian experience. It applies to our day and to our lives. It must be present in our lives according to its Biblical terms, or else we need spiritual revival.

I call your attention to the Biblical revival under King Hezekiah. The passage I want to study is recorded in 2 Chronicles 29.1-3. Hezekiah was the 13th king of Judah after the division of the Kingdom of Israel into two kingdoms, Israel to the north and Judah to the south. He was a descendent of David and was described as righteous before God.

When he became king, he found the Temple closed. The people had trespassed against God and forsaken worship of Him. As a result, God had delivered them to judgment for their sins. Hezekiah had one purpose, the spiritual revival of his kingdom (see 2 Chronicles 29.10). His actions and response to God give an excellent backdrop for examination of the characteristics and requirements of revival.

From this passage, I want to examine with you the role of prayer in the spiritual revival of the Church of Jesus Christ. I pray that the Holy Spirit will use these certain, sure truths in your life to clarify its Biblical mandate, to convict you of its necessity in your life, and to conform you to the truths of Scripture. I pray that God by His Spirit will use them to begin a spiritual transformation in your life today.

Priority of prayer

Note the preference that prayer had in Hezekiah's life. The Scriptures record his first action as the ruler of Judah in 2 Chronicles 29:3:

"He in the first year of his reign, in the first month, opened the doors of the house of the LORD, and repaired them."

Given the disastrous state of affairs, he had numerous options he could have followed. For instance, he could have restored civil conditions. Others in his position resolved political problems first. But not Hezekiah.

His first actions centered around the Temple. To God's chosen people, the Temple was the focus of all religious practice. It was the house of prayer and worship to God. But he realized that God had judged Israel for their failure to seek God's face. They had filled the Temple with uncleanness and had forsaken God. They had ceased to offer burnt offerings, and the candlesticks had ceased to burn. The people had closed the doors to the outside areas where people prayed. (2 Chronicles 29.4-7)

At the outset of his reign, King Hezekiah's actions proved the burden of his heart. He wanted to make prayer and worship again the heartbeat of God's people. First, he re-opened the Temple doors. He wanted to renew the former way of life of prayer to God. Then the King repaired the doors to strengthen them for a renewed practice of prayer.

No spiritual reformation occurs nor exists without the supremacy of prayer. In times of spiritual revival, prayer always becomes a priority. In fact, it becomes a priority before revival comes. Prayer is the fuel and foundation of all such awakenings. Furthermore, Jesus commanded it to be this way. Note Luke 18:1:

"And he spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint;"

Does prayer hold such a place in your life? If so, keep on; you're on the path to spiritual renewal. If it is not, then, my friend, you need spiritual revival.

Practice of prayer

In the record of King Hezekiah, it shows that he practiced what he preached. He did not simply make prayer available to people; he made a practice of seeking God's face for the direction and aid of Judah. The Bible documents it 2 Kings 18-20 and 2 Chronicles 29- 32.

Because of the leadership and example of Hezekiah, prayer became a vital part of the spiritual life of Judah. He directed the priests, the spiritual leaders of the nation, to resume regular Temple practices. They restored prayer and praise in the Temple and in their service to the people. Further, the nation became involved in worship, prayer, and praise, too. The people joined Hezekiah and the priests in prayer.

I lament that the Church of Jesus Christ has such poor leadership in this indispensable practice. I have read with great sorrow of the pitifully small amount of time that pastors and spiritual leaders spend in prayer. I should not wonder that it is true. One only needs to examine the prayer life of the Church to conclude that prayer does not have a priority in their minds.

It's almost as if the weekly prayer meeting of the Church has become the one program that they wish they could eliminate but fear to do so because of the long tradition of older members. It has become nothing more than a perfunctory meeting which many of the spiritual leaders of the church miss, including, sadly, pastors. It seems like it has become a "throw-away" service. It isn't announced, and folk are not encouraged to attend.

However, that does not describe the conditions during spiritual revival. Check out the reformation of Jacob, David, or even Samson. Prayer played a necessary role in their renewals. Or examine the restorations of the Children of Israel in Egypt, or of the times during the Judges. These revivals always included prayer as an essential ingredient. It always encompassed spiritual leadership and all of the people.

Do these descriptions characterize your spiritual life? If you are a spiritual leader or pastor, do you spend time in personal prayer? Do you encourage your people to pray and to come to times of Church family prayer? If you do, praise God. Don't quit. Redouble your efforts. If you do not, then you need spiritual revival.

Passion of prayer

The priority and practice of prayer in Hezekiah's life sprang from a passion of prayer. Note his statement in 2 Chronicles 29.10:

"It is in my heart..."

This desire of King Hezekiah came from the heart. It was no mere mental assent to a “spiritual requirement.” Nor was it merely for show and pretense. No, it came from the heart. Prayer that does not involve the heart is not true prayer. It is superficial in nature and gets no response from God. True prayer wells up from within, from the very inner core of one’s being.

The Scriptures abound with examples of this kind of prayer. For example, who could ever forget the strong desire of Moses as he prayed for God's people after they made the golden calf. (Exodus 32.30-32) Or recall that most humbling of all examples, the Lord Jesus, Who’s prayer life is described in Hebrews 5:7:

"Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared;"

The Bible contains encouragement to prayer with passion. Heed the exhortation in James 5:16:

"...The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much."

The Church and believers have come to place their confidence in organization. We say that all we need is better organization. In reality, as Leonard Ravenhill said, “We need to agonize, not organize.”

How do your times of prayer measure up with these accounts? Has it become dull, life- less, and spiritless? Have your times of prayer turned mundane, without any passion? In my own personal practice, God has recently convicted me in this area of my prayer life. I confess that tears have come infrequently. Like Elijah, I want to pray with passion for God's presence and power in my life and among His people. Will you make it your de- sire, too?

Purpose of prayer

Finally, Hezekiah had a purpose which drove his enthusiasm for prayer. Again, refer to 2 Chronicles 29:10:

"Now it is in mine heart to make a covenant with the LORD God of Israel, that his fierce wrath may turn away from us."

He had noted the deplorable spiritual condition of God's people. They justly deserved God's judgment for their sins and their rejection of God. Only spiritual repentance and revival could stem the tide of God's wrath. The king made that his driving purpose and priority. And God heard the prayers of His people, and, according to promise, He forgave their sins and healed their land. (2 Chronicles 7.14)

Why don’t God’s people want revival? Perhaps they have fallen for the fallacies which I outlined at the beginning of this article. They see active programs, growing attendance, and happy enthusiasm and conclude we only need more.

Some, I regret, avoid it out of fear: fear of the unknown, fear of their own spiritual condition, fear of loss of control, fear of loss of fame or position. I do know, much to my sorrow, that most spiritual leaders and pastors do not seek nor desire spiritual revival in their own lives or of the churches they lead.

But not Hezekiah. He had a passion with a purpose, the spiritual renewal of God's people. Nothing short of the same miracle will save the Church of today, either. I, for one, let me quickly state, share Hezekiah’s passion and purpose. There is nothing in life I desire more than to experience spiritual revival personally and among God's people everywhere. That’s why I produce and preach on “Power For Life” and write this newsletter. I pray that God will use them in some fashion to spur you on to a spiritual transformation in your life, too.

I pray that the Holy Spirit has opened your eyes and clarified these truths to you. I pray that He has identified the fallacy of the view that "We have no need of revival." I pray that He has moved you to distrust the conclusion that "I'm Okay, you're Okay."

These truths give us instruction to believe and obey. They should correct us from error. These truths should mold and shape our lives with a new realization of the importance of prayer and a devotion to its proper practice.

Where has the Holy Spirit identified your failure to apply these truths in your life?

- Do they describe you?
- Or do you believe that the Church needs nothing more than more of the same of what it now has?
- Does prayer hold a priority in your life?
- Do you practice regular times alone with God in prayer, seeking His face?
- Has your heart filled you with passion for the lost and the spiritual needs of God's people?
- Do you seek spiritual revival or do you fear spiritual revival in your own life?

I do not know where God's Spirit has identified your failure to apply these truths in your life, but I believe that He has. Maybe He has shown you that you have accepted a fallacy. Perhaps you have for a time set aside what once was a regular priority in your life.

What conclusions about your condition has the Holy Spirit revealed to you? Has He approved or disapproved? Has He found you innocent or guilty? I pray that He has revealed to you that your neglect grieves and quenches His work and ministry in your life.

The lack of conformity to God's word brings the judgment of God. Too often, I believe that we accept the mercy of God and His longsuffering nature as a wavering from His demands. Sometimes, God simply gives us up to our desires, but sends leanness to our souls. (Psalm 106.15) God does warn us that He does not always strive with us over our sin. (Genesis 6.3) He may suddenly withdraw and send punishment. I remind you of the clear warning in Proverbs 29:1:

"He, that being often reprov'd hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be de- stroyed, and that without remedy."

What changes does the Holy Spirit need to bring into your life today because of these truths? First, He must help you realize the refuge of lies that keep you from faith and obedience to them. To defend your actions or to excuse those which differ from God's word denies the truth and rejects it. A rejection of the truth does not change the truth. It still leaves you accountable to God for your sin and naked before God's judgment.

Second, you need to recognize God's requirements and your obligation to them. He de- mands personal holiness, and trusting obedience to His word. He grants no excuses for delay. Delayed obedience is disobedience.

Third, God desires you to repent from your sin. Confess your neglect of prayer without compromise or concealment. In humbleness, turn from your sin and find forgiveness from your Advocate, Jesus Christ, the Righteous. You will find cleansing unto spiritual revival. His mercies are great, and He abundantly pardons. (Isaiah 55.7)

I pray that you will experience the work and ministry of the Holy Spirit in your life today. I pray that, in grace, He will apply these Biblical truths to you and begin a spiritual trans- formation in your life that will spur you on to spiritual revival.

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