

Revival: Recapturing The Vanished Vision of God

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I have been a student of revival for several decades. I have read most of the important books written on the subject of revival. I have prayed for revival every day of my life for the last several decades. I've written many books on the subject of revival. And my Ph.D. dissertation was on the revival of religion in Great Britain in the eighteenth century. Therefore, I feel I can speak with some conviction about the topic of revival. I long to see revival in our day, friends. Just to preach on the subject of revival stirs my own heart within me and that's the subject that I want to preach on this morning. The title of my message is "Revival: Recapturing the Vanished Vision of God."

Before we begin, let me ask you a question: Do you believe our nation needs revival? Do you? Let me ask you another question: Do you believe the churches in our land need revival? Do they? Charles Finney used to say that, "A revival presupposes a falling away from God." And although I disagree with much of what Finney had to say, I agree with the old boy on that one. Revival presupposes a falling away from God, and that is where we are today, friends. We are a nation, a church, a people that has fallen away from God. We've fallen so far away that our very concept of God has been altered, altered to such a tragic degree that the God that many worship today in our churches doesn't even resemble the living God of my Bible.

Let me give you my definition of what a revival truly is. Revival is a recapturing of the vanished vision of God. Because we have lost that vision today, friends, that's why the church is in such a sorry state. Or why deadness and death hold court in our sanctuaries today. Or why foolishness abounds in our pulpits today. Why devilry and hell plays out on our pews today. A lost vision of God. A revival is recapturing the vanished vision of God. It is seeing God for who He really is, and then bowing in subjection to His terrible majesty, being bowed down beneath His terrible presence. When the church is realigned back to God in a right relationship to Him through lives of purity and holiness and there is a constant witness for Him in the world, that's what revival really is.

I want to make a statement: I believe that society mirrors the church in some regard. That when the church has influence and is speaking with the power of authority from on high, then society will sit up, and take notice, and look to the church for direction, and to God for guidance. But when the church languishes in a backslidden state and has no influence upon the society in which she exists, then that very society will not take the church

seriously, nor the God of the church seriously. In our day of spiritual declension within the church, we have a society that is morally bankrupt, that wildly sins its way to hell, because society at large does not fear God, nor do they believe in His existence. So sin reigns on a high horse during times of spiritual declension in the church. It is a day where evil is called good, and good evil, because everything in the nation is morally out of joint with the Word of God and the God of the Word.

In times like this where the people of God have wandered away from the heart of God, then the very concept of God is altered. Take your average church and average pastor today, where they've taken God and shrunken Him down to man size, put God on man's level. They speak about God like He's just a man on their level. They pray to God like He's just a being on man's level. And when the church maintains a low view of God, then the people in the church will maintain a low view of sin and, with reckless abandon, sin all they want to because their God won't do anything about it, because they're already assured of their salvation and their motto has become, "Once saved, always saved. Therefore, we can sin all we want to and still go to heaven." And people believe that nonsense. We call it Antinomianism, which means anti-law. Since we live in a day of grace, we do not have to live by the law of God any longer. So few do.

But Jesus declared, "If you love Me, you will obey My commands." And God declares in His Word, "Without holiness, no one will see the Lord." But because of our lost vision of God in the land and in the church, sin is reduced to acceptable indulgences. Sin is tolerated in the vast majority of our churches today, and this is why our nation has become a living hell, a perversion, an indecency, and violence grows in the land. It's not even safe to go outdoors anymore. You could be gunned down walking into a store, or killed once you were in there. But when God comes in revival, all that changes. When God takes the field and saturates a church, or a community, or a nation, then all human props are kicked out from beneath us, and all we can do is bow down before His awful majesty and confess our wicked sins in tears of repentance and humiliation.

There are three aspects that I would like to draw out today in regard to my subject of revival, recapturing the vanished vision of God. And the first of these is this, number 1: recapturing the splendor of His majesty. Number 2: recapturing the solemnity of His manifest presence. And number 3: recapturing the surety of His judgment. All three of these are uniquely related in times of revival. I have conducted primary research on the Great Awakening and the Second Great Awakening in relation to my three volumes of biography, which I have written on George Whitefield and Asahel Nettleton, two primary figures in each of those spiritual awakenings which gripped the conscience of this country so many years ago. And in my travels through university archives and church annals, I have come across a great deal of information which highlights what I'm about to speak on in these three aspects of recapturing the vanished vision of God.

Let's take the first aspect, friends, and examine it: recapturing the splendor of His majesty. Listen, when our concept of God matches the God of our Bibles, then our view of God will be elevated to a proper view of Him in the splendor of His majesty. My text which underlines this is found in the book of Isaiah chapter 6. You may turn in your

Bibles there now, friends. I will read from verses 1 through 5. Here now is the Word of God. May the Spirit of the Lord attend the reading of His Holy Word.

"In the year that king Uzziah died I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and His train filled the temple. Above it stood the seraphims: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly. And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts: the whole earth is full of His glory. And the posts of the door moved at the voice of him that cried, and the house was filled with smoke. Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts."

I will stop there. Now friends, is this not a vision of God's glorious splendor, a beautiful picture of His majesty and authority? How a sinner is undone in the presence of a Holy King. God is King, the Lord of Hosts. Listen friends, when God comes in revival, the first thing that occurs is a recapturing of a vanished vision of God. We see Him for who He is, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. He is high and lifted up, a mighty all powerful sovereign, and all we can do is worship the splendor of His majesty.

Years ago, I was preaching in a church in the south, and there was a touch of God in the service that Sunday morning. There was a stirring in the tops of the mulberry trees that special morning. When the service was over, the music minister approached me, and with a wide grin on his face, he declared, "I saw Jesus sitting on His throne!" I didn't argue with him, because I saw Him too. Jesus was in that church service in His preeminence that morning, and the Spirit of God was at work in the midst of His people. Listen friends, when revival comes, Jesus reestablishes His rightful place in the sanctuary of God through His prominence and preeminence. He is the King of Kings.

Now, allow me to go over our second aspect of our subject this morning and that is: recapturing the solemnity of His manifest presence. My text is found in the book of Hebrews in chapter 12 and beginning in verse 18. Let me read that to you now.

"For ye are not come unto the mount that might be touched, and that burned with fire, nor unto blackness, and darkness, and tempest, And the sound of a trumpet, and the voice of words; which voice they that heard intreated that the word should not be spoken to them any more: (For they could not endure that which was commanded, And if so much as a beast touch the mountain, it shall be stoned, or thrust through with a dart: And so terrible was the sight, that Moses said, I exceedingly fear and quake:)"

When revival comes, friend, there is a recapturing of the vanished vision of God atop Mount Sinai in all His power, and terror, and might. The old King James says, "And Sinai was altogether on a smoke." It will surely make you quake to where one cries out, "What must I do to be saved?"

A while back I preached a message during chapel at a local Christian school, and after my message, which was on revival, the principal of the school, who is also the pastor of a local church, approached me and said that he remembered a time about forty years ago when God was moving in the churches, and there was a God consciousness in the sanctuary back then and we talked about that, how today there is no power of God in a meeting, and that teenagers today don't know what it's like to see the manifest presence of God in a meeting, to be bowed down by that awful solemnity of His manifest presence. Oh friends, how I long for those days again! Don't you? My teenage daughter tells me that she longs to see God move like that in our churches, because she wants to experience it. Her generation needs to experience it, the power of God in a meeting.

Several decades ago, I was sitting in a church when God showed up. All you could do was drop your head and weep. All you could do was to soak in His presence as it completely permeated the sanctuary. It was heaven come down to earth. When the service was over, no one wanted to go home. The sanctuary stayed full as people hung on to the pews, and prayed, and prayed, and rejoiced, and gave God glory. Oh friends, when God comes in revival, He comes in His manifest presence, and a true vision of the Almighty is recaptured again. Lives of individuals are realigned back to a Holy God. Sin is confessed. Restitution is made. Divisions are healed. Tears are flowing and hallelujahs are being shouted all to His glory. A people saturated with the presence of God are a happy, joyful people, friend.

Lastly, let me mention our third aspect of revival in recapturing the vanished vision of God, and that is: recapturing the surety of His judgment. Listen friends, there is the surety of His judgment. I know we don't hear much preaching on that subject today, because if you mention the judgment, then you have to mention sin. And if you mention sin, then you have to mention the fires of hell and the judgment of sin, because a Holy God must punish sin. The sentence of the Law must be carried out upon all guilty rebels who have broken the Law of God. When God comes in revival, there is a recapturing of the doctrine of the surety of His judgment, and eternity is a central focus on everybody's minds.

My text is found in the book of Revelation in chapter 20. You can turn in your Bibles there now. I will read us verses 11 through 15.

"And I saw a great white throne, and Him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works. And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And

whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire."

Oh friends, the awful picture we have here of the surety of the judgment of God! It should make us tremble as we behold it. It should shame us for not witnessing more. It should shame us for not reading our Bibles more. It should shame us for not praying more. It should shame us for not pursuing God and a life of holiness more. Oh, how the church today has lost its vision of God and the surety of His judgment. If we could only recapture that aspect, it would completely alter the life of our churches in our land today. How we would fall upon our faces in sackcloth and ashes, and bemoan our dreadful spiritual condition, and confess our great sins. How it would make us weep over the lost in our communities and shame us for not reaching them more with the Gospel of the Son of God.

Listen friend, Christ will come again, and shall not the Judge of all the earth do right? Oh, that each of us should live our lives in light of eternity. All that matters is the salvation of souls. All that matters is the salvation of souls, friends. When God comes in revival, and the church recaptures the vanished vision of God, then the church is realigned to Him. The church is ignited by His Spirit. The church then goes out in a mighty witness for Him. Holiness is critical, and the salvation of souls essential. How we need that in our churches and land today, friends.

Pray that a sovereign God will show mercy and pour out His grace in revival upon us today. How desperately we need it! Do you not agree? Then do what you can, and pray. Do what you can in seeking God for revival to come in your day and mine in this sad, tragic hour that we live in. Let us pray.