

REPENTANCE
Message 9
Text: Psalm 85:1-7
Date: 2021-04-18
Words: 5911

INTRO: I want to end this series with one message on revival. Let me first say what I mean by revival. I am talking about revival when a person has become a Christian and over time sin has entered, sometimes knowingly and sometimes unawares. And it has drained the spiritual life of vitality. For those who may be familiar with some of the special meetings held once or twice a year where people got hyped up and a week or so later things were back to normal, that is not what I mean by revival.

Revival of the spiritual life has to do with sin being exposed and dealt with by repentance and confession. What I am talking about are meetings where people meet God over hidden sins in their lives, and they repent and confess and there is sweet rejoicing.

I also add this point on revival to seek to give us a hunger for revival and to see that true revival does sometimes happen. And there is a very close connection between repentance and revival. There is no revival where there is no repentance. Some of us may be in need of personal revival. Beyond all doubt, revival is needed all across the globe in Christian churches. I have suggested the possibility that this present pandemic may be God's way of seeking to get the attention of the Church of our day.

In 2 Chronicles 7:14 the Lord said:

¹³ "When I shut up heaven and there is no rain, or command the locusts to devour the land, or send pestilence among My people,
¹⁴ "if My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land.

I know that refers to Israel, but can that happen because the Church has gone astray as well? We have been studying the book of Amos. They were living in a day when they were rich and increased with goods but they had drifted far away from God. And God said, "I withheld rain 3 months before the harvest, and you

would not return to Me. I blasted you with blight and mildew. When your gardens and crops increased, the locust devoured them, yet you would not return. I sent a plague like the plague of Egypt, and you would not return to Me. Now prepare to meet your God, O Israel!" (4:7-12).

I am not gifted as a revival preacher. I have only ever seen two gifted revivalist preachers and they were Ralph and Lou Sutera. They are Italian twins. But I do recognize the importance of revival. Revival, someone has said, is God's finger pointing at me. The Suteras said that if you point one finger at others you have four fingers pointing back at you. Revival is a divine moment when God is able to bring people to uncover their sins and confess them before others.

It is certainly one of the most fearful things to Christians before they experience it. Many who have experienced it have determined before they went to a meeting that they would not open up their sin. It is an amazing thing in revival that God does not expose our sins, He is able to make us willing to expose our own sins. The free will of man is very involved in revival.

The Psalmist said in 85:6:

6 Will You not revive us again, That Your people may rejoice in You?

Israel had been taken captive for their sinfulness and failure to repent. And in captivity they said:

4 How shall we sing the LORD'S song In a foreign land?

How can we sing the Lord's song when we are in captivity to some sin?

Now there is one major need why Christians need revival. It is this: Somewhere within there is hidden sin. It may not always be outright rebellion against God. Some very godly people need revival because there is possibly some jealousy, or envy, or even self-righteousness. One of God's choicest of men, Job, needed revival. Hidden, all unknown to him, a self-righteousness had crept in and God went to all lengths to reveal this to him in order to spare him from final destruction.

Now not all of God's people need revival because they have hidden sin. Some live clear, clean, godly lives. But many Christians need revival. The amazing thing is that when revival takes place in the hearts of those who have covered their sins, it also brings great refreshing to those who are living godly lives. There is rejoicing among all, those that are revived and those that witness such revival!

I think most of us would agree that the Church in America has drifted away from God. Revival requires the uncovering of sin and dealing with it in repentance and confession. No repentance no revival. And when true repentance takes place, rejoicing is always the result. Oh what joy it brings.

Soon after the Church was born, the Apostles Peter and John went to the temple to pray. A lame man lay there and Peter commanded him to rise up and walk in the name of the Lord Jesus. Well, the man was healed and that drew a crowd and they marveled. And Peter said, "Why are you so amazed as if I did this by my power. The Lord Jesus, whom you crucified when Pilate wanted to let him go, but you begged a murderer to be released instead, Him God has glorified, through faith in His name, this man is now walking. I know you did it in ignorance, but the things God foretold about Christ have taken place."

And then in Acts 2:19 he said this:

19 "Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord,

The true conversion of unbelievers and the turning from sin of believers brings about the same results. And the result of repentance in both, causes the sins in those who repent to be blotted out. If we repent, our sins will be wiped away and we will be clean. So Peter's instruction was, repent that times of refreshing may come. This refreshing comes from a word related to the soul. It is a cooled, a refreshed soul. Oh for times of refreshing.

Now I ask, what does it take for those who have hidden sin, to open up and confess their sin before people? What does it take for people in leadership to confess their sins publically? It is

easier for God to create heaven and earth than to do that! A thousand horses cannot drag such a confession from leaders. When sin lies buried in Christians, when they do not live openly and honestly, many go to the grave with those sins. This is what we are talking about when we speak of repentance.

And where do these times of refreshing come from? From the presence of the Lord! The word translated "presence" here, is usually translated "face." That is its literal meaning. After Adam and Eve sinned, they hid from the presence of the Lord. In repentance, we stop hiding and the face of the Lord is seen and it brings a refreshed soul. It brings rejoicing!

Jonathan Goforth, missionary to China, wrote a book on revival. He was a Canadian and a Presbyterian minister. He had led in many revivals and had seen great things happen. He asked his wife to write a forward to the book and she said that one day their son Fred came to visit. Dr. Goforth had had a tooth worked on and he became seriously sick from it. His only relief came from pacing the floor with his hand to his mouth. One day she entered their living room and Dr. Goforth was recounting revival stories and his son was frantically typing the accounts.

Later Dr. Goforth wrote the first and last chapter himself. And in the first chapter he talks about the results of revival as being abnormal. He says, "As well expect a hurricane, an earthquake, or a flood, to leave nothing abnormal in its course, as to expect a true Revival that is not accompanied by events quite out of our ordinary experience" (9). He later says, "Normal Christianity, as planned by our Lord, was not supposed to begin in the Spirit and end in the flesh. In the building of His temple it never was by might nor by power, but always by His Spirit" (11).

Revival is only ever needed among Christians, when they have let sin enter and have not dealt with it by repentance. And I would say from what I have seen there is no human might nor any human power that can bring a Christian to deal with hidden sin, it can only be accomplished by the Holy Spirit of God.

Then, last, I give this message so that we might be better equipped to know what to pray for when we pray for revival. And

I just add that revival is not a be all end all. But there come times when it is desperately needed.

VIII. REPENTANCE IN REVIVAL

So our eighth and last point in this series is repentance in revival. We begin by asking, just what is revival? This word comes from a Latin word. The *re* part means "again," and *vive* comes from *vivere* meaning *to live*. So it means *to live again*.

Psalm 85:6 says:

6 Will You not revive us again, That Your people may rejoice in You?

The word "revive" is the Hebrew word meaning "to live." Literally this verse then asks, "Will You not cause us to live again." That means one has once lived and now sin has entered and caused the vitality of spiritual life to cease. And in revival, what causes one to live again, to come back to life? It is dealing with sin in repentance and confession.

Let me paint a picture for you in words I did not write. Many years ago I read a book by evangelist Dr. John R. Rice. He writes of people when they are in need of revival. He in turn took his words from B. H. Carroll who describes a church or a people who are in need of revival. He says: *I have witnessed a drought in Texas. The earth was iron and the heavens brass. Dust clouded the thoroughfares and choked the travelers. Watercourses ran dry, grass scorched and crackled, corn leaves twisted and wilted, stock died around the last water holes, the ground cracked in fissures, and the song of birds died out in parched throats. Men despaired. The whole earth prayed: 'Rain, rain, rain! O Heaven, send rain!' Suddenly a cloud rises above the horizon and floats into vision like an angel of hope. It spreads a cool shade over the burning and glowing earth. Expectation gives life to desire. The lowing herds look up. The shriveled flowers open their tiny cups. The corn leaves untwist and rustle with gladness. And just when all trusting, suffering life opens*

her confiding heart to the promise of relief, the cloud, the cheating cloud, like a heartless coquette, gathers her drapery about her and floats scornfully away, leaving the angry sun free to dart his fires of death into the open heart of all suffering life.

Now that may be a picture of an individual Christian's life, the life of a church, a country or a nation. And I ask, how do you know when you are revived? Nancy Leigh Demoss described it like this: The roof is off and the walls are down in the Christian's life. I spoke on the subject some years ago in Mexico and wrote a little chorus to go with the messages. It went like this in PD:

Det Dak es rauf un de Wenj zen' döl,
Nü es doa aules too zeenn.
Det Dak es rauf un de Weng zen' döl,
Fon Zind es mien Hoat nü rein.
Det Dak es rauf, de Weng zen' döl,
Nu jeit mie aules zoo sheen

The roof is off and the walls are down,
Now all there is can clearly be seen.
The roof is off and the walls are down,
From sin my heart is now clean.
The roof is off and the walls are down,
Now my heart rejoices in everything.

Revival opens up my house and I don't hide things anymore. The roof is off, and the walls are down. Anybody can look in. A life that needs revival covers things within. Only a few can look in and sometimes not even those. When it comes to prayer meeting I don't mind praying for others, but I cannot share my own requests. True revival does an amazing thing.

Lou Sutura told the story of a certain pastor. The Suterases were to have some meetings, I believe it was in his church. So before they came he told his wife he needed to go by himself somewhere to search his heart. He wanted to make sure he would not have to deal with sin during the meetings. I am not sure how much later he returned but

when he did he said, "Guess what honey? The Lord never showed me a thing."

Then the meetings began and when people began to deal with sin the Lord showed him one thing after another. And when that happens, people open their hearts and confess in church in front of other people. It can be that we are unaware of what is in our own lives. Pride, someone has said, is like bad breath. Others know you have it but you don't know it. May the Lord refresh His Church once more.

Let me begin with an account in Erwin Lutzer's book, "Flames of Freedom." He gives the story of the Sutera Twins, who were revival preachers for some years. They are the only revivalists that I have personally known. I recommend that book to anyone interested. He begins the book like this:

On May 26, 1971, seventeen-year-old Jeannie Allen walked quietly to the microphone in a small Baptist church in Rives Junction, Michigan. For the past ten days the church had experienced an unusual spiritual awakening under the ministry of the Italian twins, Ralph and Lou Sutera. When Jeanie stood up to speak, the exhilaration that swept the audience could almost be felt. And with good reason: Jeannie was regarded as a leader among the young people of the church. Yet, she was bitter, selfish, and rebellious. She had come to the meetings determined to "hold out" and blatantly let it be known that she saw no valid reason why she should surrender her life to Christ. Her avowed goal in life was to be popular, and didn't intend to have anything mar the plans she had for herself.

"But one night she had gone to a "share-in" following the evening service. Some of the people present shared what God had done in their lives; others asked for special prayer so that they too might be restored to fellowship with God. Jeannie had determined to sit through it all unmoved. But finally at 2:00 A.M., she could no longer resist the conviction of the Holy Spirit. She yielded her life totally to God.

"Now she stood before a packed church. 'I could hardly wait to come to church tonight,' she began. 'The reason I'm here is because of what has happened to the adults of this church. Before this week, I saw nothing in their lives worth having. But when they met God, I wanted what they had" (15-16).

Jeannie was going to hold out in the meetings. She was not going for prayer. You will remember of the preacher in the meetings Jonathan Goforth had in China. When he finally broke down he prayed and said: "'O God,' he cried, 'you know what my position is - a preacher. When I came to these meetings I determined that, come what would, I would keep my sins covered up. I knew that if I confessed my sins it would bring disgrace not only upon myself but upon my family and my church. But I can't keep it hidden any longer. I have committed adultery... But that is not all.'" And then he proceeded to tell another horrible thing he had kept covered up.

Erwin Lutzer, in the book I mentioned, speaks of one who said, "Such soul searching I have never experienced in thirty-seven years of ministry. I have never seen such joy and warmth among our church family before." And then he said, "God touched the hearts of people in just about everything you could possibly think of outside of murder and treason" (111).

Lutzer says that in all these meetings there was no fanaticism. It was simple, down to earth dealing with sin in sincerity and truth. The first and only major revival I know of that Canada has ever had started in 1971 in Saskatoon Saskatchewan.

He says, "Another man, bitter over the church split (they had had a church split some time earlier) began to attend only because of the drastic change he had seen in the life of his son and daughter-in-law. God took him apart piece by piece. When he realized how many people he had wronged he knew he would have to ask their forgiveness. 'I have a lot of people to see,' he told the pastor. 'It will take about two weeks before I will be fully right with God.' He was wrong. It took longer" (19).

This is revival.

Some years ago I gave a quote from the "Herald of His Coming" paper but I did not write the date down. Here is the quote:

The front page article was called, "Conviction of Sin and a Revival of Holiness." The writer, Brian H. Edwards writes:

"Revival is always a revival of holiness. It begins with a terrible conviction of sin. It is often the form that this conviction of sin takes that troubles those who read about revival. But there is no such thing as a revival without tears of conviction and sorrow."

Nancy Leigh DeMoss writes in her book called, "Brokenness," "This is a message today's men and women are not eager to hear. Most of us don't walk into a Christian bookstore and say, 'Can you help me find a book on how to 'mourn and weep'?' We want to know how to be happy and whole, how to improve our self-esteem, how to feel better about ourselves and our lives. We think we are gloomy and depressed and we need someone to make us happy. But God's Word says, 'No, before you can be close to God, you have to find the highway of lowliness" (48).

He writes of the revival in 1907 in North Korea, as described by some western missionary. And here is what he described:

"As the prayer continued, a spirit of heaviness and sorrow for sin came down upon the audience. Over on one side, someone began to weep, and in a moment the whole audience was weeping. Man after man would rise, confess his sins, break down and weep, and throw himself on the floor and beat the floor with his fists in perfect agony of conviction."

Later he writes, "Sometimes after a confession, the whole audience would break out in audible prayer, and the effect of that audience of hundreds of men praying together in

audible prayer was something indescribable. Again, after another confession, they would break out in uncontrollable weeping, and we would all weep, we could not help it. And so the meeting went on until two o'clock a.m., with confession and weeping..."

Then he writes, "My last glimpse of the audience is photographed indelibly on my brain. Some threw themselves full length on the floor, hundreds stood with arms outstretched toward heaven. Every man forgot every other. Each was face to face with God. I can hear yet that fearful sound of hundreds of men pleading with God for life, for mercy. The cry went out over the city till the heathen were in consternation."

In that sermon I said, "Now I ask you, were these people perhaps much worse sinners than we, or did they perhaps get a much more clear picture of themselves and a holy God than we have ever have? Oh, God, we need a new glimpse of a holy God. Oh God, I need a new glimpse of a holy God."

In the early 1900's Pyongyang of North Korea was known among missionaries as the "Jerusalem of the East."

As I have studied repentance I have pondered on several occasions, why is repentance so hard to come by? Why is revival so rare? All I have to do is look at my past experience when I had sinned and the Spirit of God convicted me. How I fought before I ever went to repent and confess sin. When there is revival in a church, the dam that keeps the sin is punctured. Sometimes it begins with one little hole in the dam. One person truly repents publically and like a punctured dam, it can let loose and drain a lot of sin in a short time.

Pride builds a mighty strong dam and the devil glues it together. Listen to some of the illustration I read earlier of this preacher: "'O God,' he cried, 'you know what my position is - a preacher. When I came to these meetings I determined that, come what would, I would keep my sins covered up.'" That was the story of young Jeanie. She had come to the meetings determined to "hold out" and

blatantly let it be known that she saw no valid reason why she should surrender her life to Christ.

Proverbs 28:13 says, "He who covers his sins will not prosper, But whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy." Earlier, when that pastor and others had been praying for revival, the pastors all prayed willingly. When the meetings began, they had become quiet. Like Adam and Eve, they heard the sound of God and they were afraid of exposure and it silenced them.

One of the most powerful modern reminders to repent before sin ensnares one to where nothing will move one to repent any more is Ravi Zacharias. He was known the world over for his brilliant defense of the Gospel. But I want you to consider what unconfessed sin did. I cannot describe what my family has gone through, and is still going through, because of my preaching. I cannot describe what my wife has bourn. The agony, the tears, the betrayal of good friends because they did not understand or misunderstood, has been, and still is very, very painful.

I understand Ravi's family experienced the same. Now think of that family going through all those trials, to find in the end that while they were supporting him, he was unfaithful behind their backs. And after he died they learned that what their day did was worse than all the other trials. They respected him. They worked with him. How horrible would it have been for them if he had repented? But think now how much more horrible it is because he did not repent. No man lives to himself and no man dies to himself. But think of what he could have done for them by repenting before he died. Now he heaped a huge burden upon all of what they had borne already. Oh, sin is a monster.

I have told you of the Chinese pastor who confessed to adultery and being bought off by a deacon so he would not report a certain sin. Here is what he said: "I knew that if I confessed my sins it would bring disgrace not only upon myself but upon my family and my church." So here is the devil's message after we have sinned: "You can't repent. You have to cover everything up. If you repent you

will bring shame and disgrace on yourself, your family, and your church." But the shame is not in confessing, the shame is in keeping it covered.

But when he confessed, a little hole had been poked in the dam of sin. And then he continued to pray with glowing intensity until the whole audience was swept as by fire. The whole audience was swept up by the fire, and the devil was proved to be a liar! Oh he will tell people, "Look at how much damage you will do if you repent openly!" And then pride stands up and reinforces everything the devil tells the person who needs to repent.

Revival may come to one person, it may come to one family. It may come to one church and it may come to one country. Lutzer says of the revival of Saskatoon in 1971 that, "The trickle became a stream, a river, then a flood." Churches put chairs where there had never been chairs before. In Rives Junction, some people left tractors in their corn fields when meeting time came.

In some churches some of those who had experienced revival teamed up and visited churches in other areas and revival broke out there. And let me say this, drawing from my experience. No one can work up a revival to cause people to truly deal with sin. That is possible in various kinds of meetings, but not in real Christian revival. It is nothing short of a divine intervention. God comes down.

Goforth writes of meetings at a certain place that a man came up to the platform and asked to be able to share a few words. He said, "From the beginning of this movement, with which Mr. Goforth has been connected, I have refused to believe that it originated with, or was guided by, the Holy Spirit. The conclusion that I arrived at was that it was due to some hypnotic power that Mr. Goforth was able to exercise over his audiences. But what I have seen here these past few days has convinced me, even against my will, that I was wrong. I was attributing to a man what only God could bring about. I want to say now that I believe, with all my heart, that this movement is truly of the Spirit of God" (60).

I quote again from Lutzer, "A year after the Saskatoon revival, it was estimated that 1,500 lay teams had ministered in Canada and the United States. A few months later the number jumped to 3,000 and in the years since then no one can calculate the number of lay teams and people who have gone to other churches" (68).

But it did not stop there. It went overseas to various countries. Holland was one of those. Lutzer says, "Although the Dutch do not readily speak of deep personal experiences, God gave them the ability to tell what he had done for them. Husbands stood with their wives to publically declare how God healed their faltering marriages" (62). Do you know what kind of miracle that is? If you took out the word Dutch in that paragraph and inserted German or Mennonite, and then said how they shared about their hurting marriage being healed, you will better understand what happened in Holland. By the way, during numerous revival meetings marriages were saved from divorce.

When the Suterases were in La Crete, a couple that helped them was Dutch. They joked and said, "If you ain't Dutch you ain't much." Oh the pride of the Dutch, it is much, but maybe just not quite as much as a Mennonite!

In real revival, it often happens that time no longer matters. As long as God is at work, people will stay until 10 in the evening, 11, 12, 1a.m. 2 a.m. The reason is it is a divine work. It cannot be whipped up or worked up. God will not work in that kind of meeting. One man said, "The short service in our church seemed so long; now the long service seems to short!" I read that the Welsh revival of 1904 filled churches for 18 months! When the Twin Towers went down, it filled churches for a few weeks.

One young pastor's son was smitten with conviction. He thought Christianity was for adults and he would do that when he was older. Lutzer writes, "The revival frightened him. He had planned to outgrow his carnality someday, but he was learning that Christ had plans for his life *now*. When he finally surrendered, he says his confession was like peeling an onion: 'The farther I went, the more tears

there were.' He had cheated when reading some gas meters on a summer job, and now he realized that God had been counting the numbers of meters he had read. He was guilty of gossip and involved in family squabbles. And last but not least, he had idolized an old 1958 Chevy that meant more to him than God" (105).

Lutzer says and I quote, "One of the distinctives of the revival was that the conviction of sin was overwhelming. 'For the first time,' observed one pastor, 'the people of my congregation were willing to pay any price to be fully right with God.'"

Then Lutzer says, "The sins that had long been excused ("everyone is human, you know") were suddenly seen to be hideous and, to use the apostle Paul's expression, 'exceedingly sinful'" (139).

It is an amazing thing that when Christians are revived, the lost often get saved. I quote again, "During one of McLeod's meetings in Brandon Manitoba, a man, under conviction, waved his arms to get McLeod to stop preaching so that he could get saved. Later, he said that hell had opened up right in front of him and he could feel himself slipping into the flames" (140).

One woman who had tried to get her husband saved and pushed the TV in front of him when Billy Graham preached found her husband saved in a short time when she got right with God (140). "One man made restitution for a fifty-year-old unpaid dentist bill by putting \$100.00 in the offering plate."

"Fifteen years ago a woman won money in an essay contest; the problem was that someone else had written the essay. During revival, the Holy Spirit brought this to her attention. She attempted to return the money, but the agency that sponsored the contest refused to accept it; their books were closed. So she returned the money to The Canadian Revival Fellowship with the prayer that her experience will speak to someone. 'If you have a similar problem,' she wrote, 'be perfectly honest before God and make things right... It's the only way to release.' A man

from Alberta wrote a letter to a government official with a check for \$1,000.00" (140). He had cheated on income tax.

This is what revival does. It is painful, oh so very painful, but it brings joy, oh so much joy.

What we need today is a man of God. A.W. Tozer wrote the foreword to a book written by Leonard Ravenhill called, "Why Revival Tarries." Let me read it for you:

"Great industry concerns have in their employ men who are needed only when there is a breakdown somewhere. When something goes wrong with the machinery, these men spring into action to locate and remove the trouble and the machinery rolling again.

"For these men a smoothly operating system has no interest. They are specialists concerned with trouble and how to find and correct it.

"In the kingdom of God things are not too different. God has always had His specialists whose chief concern has been moral breakdown, the decline in the spiritual health of the nation or church. Such men were Elijah, Jeremiah, Malachi and others of their kind who appeared at critical moments in history to reprove, rebuke, and exhort in the name of God and righteousness.

"A thousand or ten thousand ordinary priests or pastors or teachers could labor quietly on almost unnoticed while the spiritual life of Israel or the church was normal. But let the people of God go astray from the paths of truth and immediately the specialist appeared almost out of nowhere. His instinct for trouble brought him to the help of the Lord and of Israel.

"Such a man was likely to be drastic, radical, possibly at times violent, and the curious crowd gathered to watch him work soon branded him as an extreme, fanatical, negative. And in a sense they were right. He was single-minded, severe, fearless, and these were the qualities the circumstances demanded. He shocked some, frightened others and alienated not a few, but he knew who had called him

and what he was sent to do. His ministry was geared to the emergency, and that fact marked him out as different, a man apart.

"To such men as this the church owes a debt too heavy to pay. The curious thing is that she seldom tries to pay him while he lives, but the next generation builds his sepulcher and writes his biography, as if instinctively and awkwardly to discharge an obligation the previous generation to a large extent ignored."

He then says that Leonard Ravenhill was such a man.

Now revival is not the answer to all the church's problems, but it is the answer to the sin problem.

CONCL: Let me say that in revival, theology is not generally dealt with. It is personal sin that is dealt with. It is only God the Holy Spirit that can open us up. He brings about conviction of sin and then pressure is brought to bear until we give in. The reason revival is needed is when we carry sin that has not been dealt with. The greatest need for revival to happen is to humble ourselves before God and before man and confess and repent.

Does revival last? It only lasts as long as one does not let sin enter without dealing with it. Maintaining a vibrant, godly life is a constant battle. It is living by faith day by day. When sin enters, repentance needs to happen. As soon as one slacks off and enters some sin, some failure to repent, and the path into sin has begun. It must be maintained.

When I grew up our home was quite often a troubled home. I had not realized how I had learned to live with the roof on and the walls up. I did not share about our family things. I know some things are not meant to be shared but live in a closed house is not godly. Revival takes the roof off and puts the walls down, and frees me up to live an open, honest, transparent life.

Are you listening to this message and there are hidden things? Has God spoken to you? Do you need to open up about something? Then I encourage, don't let it go like Ravi did. Sin just imprisons more and more. The roof gets harder and the walls thicker until it is too late. Today is the day of deliverance.