

WHAT IS A REVIVAL?

1 Chronicles 13

Intro: The subject of revival ought to be of interest to every believer in Christ. Many have written books after they have studied the revivals of the past. As we read these books, and especially as we read in the Bible of those special times when the Lord has moved upon the hearts of men in a special way, our hearts can be quickened with a desire that we might see such days of blessing again.

But what is a revival?

When I was living and working in the south many years ago now, churches had annual revival meetings. It was usually a period of one or two weeks when an "evangelist" would be invited to come to preach each morning and each night during those "revival meetings." The dates for the meetings were sometimes set a year in advance. Signs would be put up outside the church telling everyone when these meetings would start, and when the revival would end.

But rarely, if ever, were these revivals. A few people might be saved. At least some would join the church. But, after the meetings were over, so was the revival. The signs the church put up were right, at least as far as the ending was concerned.

Perhaps you have seen such signs, or heard such announcements. In recent days the revival meetings, or evangelistic services, have been city-wide. But the result is usually the same. There may be widespread interest in the Gospel for a few weeks before the meeting, but it is over soon afterwards. And a month later it is practically impossible to find anyone who was really saved during that time.

This is not what I am talking about.

Let me define the word revival for you.

The word comes from the Latin, revivere, which means to live again. In English it means to give something new life, or to arouse from sleep. It is an awakening.

When we apply the word to the church, it means a time when there is a renewed interest in the things of the Lord after there has been indifference and decline. It is a time when there is a stirring up of true faith, and it is brought back to a vigorous, healthy state. It is a time when people get concerned about their personal relationship to God.

In other words, a true revival starts within the church where supposedly there is life, and then spreads out to those who have

never known the Lord.

But let me emphasize this—and it is borne out by history as well as by the Word of God. True revivals are not man-made, but are God-given. Man does not set the time for them; God does. It is not a time when we do something for the Lord, but when a time when God is at work in the hearts of lives of people. It is a time when the people of God are aroused from their sleep, a time when there is a fresh impact made by the people of God upon a wicked world.

There may be the false mixed in with the true during a time of true spiritual awakening, but much permanent good is done. The results are often felt for years afterwards—sometimes for several generations. The Word of God clearly indicates that it is normal for the people of God to expect the blessing of God, but, because our hearts so quickly grow cold, it makes a time of reviving look like an unusual time of blessing, a very unusual time—and so it appears to us to be something special, rather than exhibiting the normal, healthy state of the church.

But, can we expect revival today?

Many of the Lord's people are saying, "No!" And they say this because of what the Word says about the last days. For example, 2 Tim. 3:1-4:5.

It is true that things are going to get worse and worse spiritually. But the church has been in the last days ever since the Lord Jesus Christ returned to heaven. If this were strictly true, there would not have been an awakening during the last 2,000 years. But there have been—many of them. And they have always come in times of great spiritual need within the church!

Besides, we have many calls to an awakening within the Word of God itself—and this is the strongest evidence that we should always expect God to be reviving His church. Listen to the following passages from the NT:

- 1) Rom. 13:11-14.
Imagine speaking to a church like this!
- 2) 1 Cor. 15:34,
Awake to righteousness, and sin not; for some have not the knowledge of God: I speak this to your shame.
- 3) Eph. 5:14,
Wherefore he saith, Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light.
- 4) 1 Thess. 5:1-8.

So the Word of God is clear on this subject. We are prone to be like Peter and James and John in the Garden of Gethsemane—Matt. 26:36-46—we are inclined to go to sleep, and we need to be awakened.

Today I want to begin a series on revivals in Scripture. I had expected to get back to my messages on 1 Corinthians, but the Lord seems to have impressed me that this is what He wants. I trust that I have correctly sensed His leading. I do not have any set length of time for this, but am looking to the Lord to guide me—and, I hope, to give us a time of spiritual awakening here in the northwest, and perhaps beyond, such as we have never seen before. When you see what we shall see in Scripture, you may be inclined to believe with me that we are in the beginning stages of a true revival.

Please turn to 1 Chronicles 13.

Background: David had become king over all Israel after a long, long wait. And there was one special thing that he wanted to do, a thing which had special priority with him. Cf. 1 Chron. 13:3. Note in particular the latter part of the verse which indicates the need for a revival, the need for an awakening in Israel.

And there was an awakening. It is recorded here in chapters 13, 15, and 16. We will only take part of it today. But notice how we can define a revival from what took place in Israel about 3,000 years ago.

How can we describe those times?

I. First, and most important of all, IT WAS A TIME WHEN GOD WAS AT WORK— in David's heart, and in the hearts of his people.

Cf. 1 Chron. 13:1, 2. Note the expression in v. 2, " . . . If it seem good to you, and that it be of the Lord our God."

This work of bringing back the ark did not start with David, but with the Lord!

Next, we can determine, because this all had to do with the ark of God where the presence of the Lord was manifested in the Tabernacle, that

II. THIS WAS A TIME WHEN THERE WAS A RENEWED INTEREST IN GOD.

This really meant at least three things:

A. A time when God would be given His rightful place in the life of Israel.

Things would become more God-centered. There would be a recognition of His sovereign authority over His people, a desire to learn of Him, and to seek His glory.

Is this not what is taking place today?

B. A time of renewed interest in fellowship with God.

And this meant also . . .

C. A time of renewed interest in prayer.

All of this can be seen in v. 3b. The ark always had special significance for the people in their relationship with the Lord. So all of this was being revived again.

But there is a third point here:

III. IT WAS A TIME OF RENEWED INTEREST IN THE LORD'S WORK.

This was marked by great enthusiasm and great joy! Notice the "new cart" in v. 7, and the playing and singing "with all their might" in v. 8.

How wonderful it is to see this, when the Lord's service and His work takes priority over all other things in the lives of the Lord's people.

But there is also a warning here—a danger for us to avoid.

IV. IT WAS A TIME WHEN THEIR ENTHUSIASM OVERRAN THEIR KNOWLEDGE.

Things were going so well, and suddenly there was a great tragedy: The Lord struck Uzza dead!

And this put an end to the project of bringing the ark of the covenant back to Jerusalem. And, for the time being, it seems that no one seemed to realize why Uzza was killed just because he tried to keep the ark from falling off of the cart.

For the time being it seemed that there would be no revival, that it was all stopped short of what it was intended to be.

But this led to other important things:

V. IT WAS A TIME WHEN THE FEAR OF GOD WAS RENEWED.

Cf. v. 12.

The people of God not only need to know the Lord, but they need to fear the Lord. This is "the beginning of wisdom" (Prov. 9:10).

It is interesting to note what this led to. And here we must move on to chapter 15. The mystery about Uzza's death could be solved in only one way: by turning to the Word of God.

And so we see that, in this time of revival, there was a turning

to the Word of God.

But, you say, how do you know that?

Note what David said to the Levites in vv. 12-15, and how he found out why the Lord had killed Uzza. See v. 15b.

And so we can say,

VI. IT WAS A TIME WHEN DAVID AND HIS PEOPLE TURNED TO THE WORD OF GOD.

Two more points.

When they did what the Lord wanted them to do in the way that He had ordained,

VII. IT WAS A TIME OF TRUE BLESSING. Read ch. 15.

They succeeded in bringing the ark back to Jerusalem, and their joy was without any limitations. The singing was resumed; even David was overcome with the joy of the occasion! There is no doubt but that no one who was there had ever been that happy!

But I must close on another sober note.

VIII. IT WAS A TIME WHEN THERE WAS OPPOSITION.

A time of revival is never a time when opposition ceases. It may be a time when opposition is overcome, but the opposition will always be there. When the Lord works, the Devil goes to work, too.

And the opposition arose in David's own home—from his wife! ^{See 15:29.} Because of this, Michal had no children for the rest of her life. See 2 Sam. 6:23.

Concl: I have not finished this story. The Lord willing, I will next week when we consider from chapter 16, A SONG OF REVIVAL. But let us anticipate that the Lord may be doing a very special work among us, which also includes others. And let us learn from this time in David's life what the signs of revival are, as well as some of the dangers to be avoided, and the trials to be expected.