

CONTEMPORARY CHURCH ISSUES

WEEK 1: REVIVAL AND REVIVALISM

INTRODUCTION TO THE SERIES

- In this 6-week series we are going to discuss various contemporary church issues. These are issues which may not have pertained to previous church eras or they have, but in a different way.
- We must remember that there is nothing new to our own time.
- **Ecclesiastes 1:9 “That which has been is that which will be, and that which has been done is that which will be done. so there is nothing new under the sun.”**
- This means that the issues which face the church today have been faced by the church before. Perhaps not in every era of the church nor in the same way we face them today. But, in reality, there is no new threat to the church; just an old threat packaged in a new way.
- **Week 1: Is it revival or revivalism?**
- Week 2: What’s wrong with singing *all* worship music?
- Week 3: Does God speak to us today? If so, how can I know that’s it’s Him?
- Week 4: How should believer respond to the homosexual revolution?
- Week 5: What should the church think about transgenderism?
- Week 6: How can I find peace in an anxiety and fear laden world?
- The overall goal of this class is to give theological understanding and practical wisdom on how we can rightly respond to the issues which we are facing today.

INTRODUCTION

- This morning we are going to be discussing the history of revivals and what these revivals look like. **How do they fit into the Scriptures?**
- We are also going to be looking at the difference between what a revival is and what revivalism is.
- The goal of this class is to be able to think critically about, not only revivals in church history, but ones which may seem to be taking place today.
- To do that we need to define what a revival is and then what should be happening during a revival.
- We also need to discuss are revivals for today and / or is that a way that God would still be working through His people to reach the world.

WHAT IS A REVIVAL?

- Before we start looking in the Bible and history, we have to know what we are looking for, in other words, *what even is a revival?*
- **Revival**: an improvement in the condition or strength of something, a new production of an old play or similar work, a reawakening of religious fervor, especially by means of a series of evangelistic meetings, a restoration to bodily or mental vigor, to life or consciousness, or to sporting success.
- Each of these definitions have something in common, there was something...that something got old, lost it's original life...that something got back to where it was, maybe even better than before.
- With this very basic definition, we can easily surmise that revivals are not when people are being saved, though that may be an outcome, **but it is when Christians come back to life by Word of God.**
- **Talking about Christian revival**: Revival refers to a spiritual reawakening from a state of dormancy or stagnation in the life of a believer. It encompasses the resurfacing of a love for God, an appreciation of God's holiness, a passion for His Word and His church, a convicting awareness of personal and corporate sin, a spirit of humility, and a desire for repentance and growth in righteousness. Revival invigorates and sometimes deepens a believer's faith, opening his or her eyes to the truth in a fresh, new way. It generally involves the connotation of a fresh start with a clean slate, marking a new beginning of a life lived in obedience to God. Revival breaks the charm and power of the world, which blinds the eyes of men, and generates both the will and power to live in the world but not of the world.¹
- Some of the characteristics of a spiritual revival are:
 - It raises the honor of Jesus amongst Christians.
 - There is genuine repentance for a lack of faith or apathy towards the things of God.
 - **Believers will respond to Scripture with a newfound vigor.**
 - Believers will begin to see clearly spiritual truth and error.
 - Believers will have a deeper sense of who they are and their love for God.
- “The idea of revival originates in the reality that, on the one hand, God is the decisive giver of all spiritual life and, on the other hand, humans, even those who are born again and part of God's covenant family, **from time-to-time drift into a kind of lifelessness and lethargy and backsliding and indifference and weakness.** And when you put those two together — God as the giver of life and man as ever drifting towards lifelessness — what you get is the need for the hope of reviving, coming back to life — **a fresh outpouring of God's live-giving Spirit on his people.** That is what revival is.”² **I only ask how...**

¹ <https://www.gotquestions.org/Christian-revival.html>

² <https://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/what-is-revival-and-where-do-we-find-it>

- We can see that regardless of what we believe a revival truly is, **it must start with and be centered on the preaching and teaching of God's Word.**
- It must also **have an affect on the people of God** who will be **moved by the Word of God.** They will have a deeper or newfound resurgence for spiritual things, for holiness, for sharing their faith and for glorifying God.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY ABOUT REVIVAL?

- We see in Scripture both personal statements about revival and corporate statements.

What does the Old Testament say about revival?

- Psalm 85:6 “Will You not Yourself revive us again, that Your people may rejoice in You?”
- Isaiah 57:15 “For thus says the high and exalted One Who lives forever, whose name is Holy, "I dwell on a high and holy place, and also with the contrite and lowly of spirit In order to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite.”
- Psalm 80:19 “O LORD God of hosts, restore us; Cause Your face to shine upon us, and we will be saved. “
- Habakkuk 3:2 “LORD, I have heard the report about You, and I fear. O LORD, revive Your work in the midst of the years, in the midst of the years make it known; in wrath remember mercy.”
- Psalm 119:25 “My soul cleaves to the dust; revive me according to Your word.”
- Nehemiah 8:1-3 “And all the people gathered as one man at the square which was in front of the Water Gate, and they asked Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses which the LORD had given to Israel. Then Ezra the priest brought the law before the assembly of men, women and all who could listen with understanding, on the first day of the seventh month. He read from it before the square which was in front of the Water Gate from early morning until midday, in the presence of men and women, those who could understand; and all the people were attentive to the book of the law.”
- (1) We see the people's great reverence in the fact that they approached Ezra to bring out the Book of the Law and teach it to them. It was also seen in how (2) they listened to the Word of God from “daybreak till noon.” This means that they listened to the Scripture being read and taught for about six hours. But more startling than that is the fact that it says (3) “all the people listened attentively to the Book of Law” while standing.³
- Nehemiah 8:5-6 “Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people for he was standing above all the people; and when he opened it, all the people stood up. Then Ezra blessed the LORD the great God. And all

³ <https://bible.org/seriespage/9-when-revival-continues>

the people answered, "Amen, Amen!" while lifting up their hands; then they bowed low and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground."

- **There is an awe and reverence for God when the people listened to the Word preached.**

- The people wanted to hear the Word, they had a desire for it to affect their own hearts and minds.
- This was not just "lip-service" or something that they wanted to do to show the onlooking world. Their actions proved where their hearts really were.

How does the New Testament describe revival?

- The Old Testament uses the term revival or revive quite a bit. It uses to speak of the nation of Israel and of those who are living in Israel.
- All throughout the Psalms we are told to pray for the Lord to search out our hearts and to make us clean.
- **But what about the New Testament?**
- "The word 'revival' is not found in the New Testament. Neither Jesus, nor Paul, nor any other Biblical writer encouraged prayer for revival. 'Revival' is a word that developed in the Church's history, not in the Church's origin. For example, 'revival' would be out of place in the Book of Acts because there we see the Church that has just come forth in the life and power of the Holy Spirit. **Only later, when the Church had institutionalized and lost the life and power of the Holy Spirit, was it appropriate to speak of the need for 'revival' or 'life again'?**"⁴
- While the word "revival" is not in the New Testament, we do see the word for "renew."
- **2 Corinthians 4:16** "Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is **being renewed** day by day."
- **Colossians 3:10** "...and have put on the new self who is **being renewed** to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him..."
- **Romans 12:2** "And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed **by the renewing** of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect."
- **Titus 3:5** "He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, **by the washing of regeneration and renewing** by the Holy Spirit..."
- While there is no direct link between the OT and the NT (Hebrew and Greek words), there's a similarity which should not be missed.
- There is, in the OT, a sense of God causing the people and / or nation to return to Him.

⁴ Hyatt, Eddie L. (2008). *Revival: Discerning Between the True & the False*. (Tulsa: Hyatt Press), 36.

- In the NT, these words mean to cause to grow up, to give new strength and vigor, to be changed into a new kind of life.
- This is why it is difficult to define what a revival is with exact precision.

Why do God's people need revival?

- While we may not be able to define exactly what it is, we can look to the Scriptures and find out **why God's people need to be revived.**
- The common theme throughout all the above passages is that God's people went astray. They did not lose their salvation, nor did they fall away from God's grace. **They simply started to allow the cares, comforts and cravings of the world creep into their lives.**
- You could say they started to look more like the world than the people of God.
- This list is certainly not exhaustive, I am sure you can think of more, but here are some examples:
- **We have fellowship with those who cause division in the church.**
 - Romans 16:17 “Now I urge you, brethren, keep your eye on those who cause dissensions and hindrances contrary to the teaching which you learned, and turn away from them.”
 - 2 Thessalonians 3:6 “Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from every brother who leads an unruly life and not according to the tradition which you received from us.”
 - Paul's admonition is to *the church*, he is not writing to a specific person. We are not to have fellowship with those who are against the church, even if they call themselves brothers.
- **We allow sexual immorality in the church.**
 - 1 Corinthians 5:1-2 “It is actually reported that there is immorality among you, and immorality of such a kind as does not exist even among the Gentiles, that someone has his father's wife. You have become arrogant and have not mourned instead, so that the one who had done this deed would be removed from your midst.”
 - There are many more verses about sexual immorality (adultery, pornography, homosexuality, etc.) and how it should not even be named among those who are in the church.
- **We no longer call sin *sin* in the church.**
 - 1 Peter 2:11-12 “Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul. Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may because of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation.”

- The idea of progressive sanctification has left the church and now the global church simply seeks to entertain the goats, pay the bills and have a country club Sunday meeting.

HISTORY OF SPIRITUAL REVIVALS

The First Awakening...1730's – 1740's Jonathan Edwards

- Beginning at 4 or 5 in the morning, for 13 hours in his **study reading**, writing numerous letters and essays and above all preparing his sermons, **for he regarded the preaching of the Word his most important duty to his congregation.**
- The stage was set for a renewal of faith, and in the late 1720's, a revival began to take root as preachers altered their messages and reemphasized concepts of Calvinism. (they stressed the importance of scripture, faith, predestination and the grace of God.)
- As a result of Edwards writings, his message and fame spread. In 1731 things picked up, and in 1734, there's a full-on fiery hunger in New England for the things of God.
- Edwards comments on this and writes: "...a great and earnest concern about the great things of religion and the eternal world became universal in all parts of the town, and among persons of all degrees and all ages; the noise amongst the dry bones waxed louder and louder. All other talk about spiritual and eternal things was soon thrown by; all the conversation in all companies and upon all occasions, was upon these things only, unless so much as was necessary for people, carrying on their ordinary secular business. Other discourse than of the things of religion would scarcely be tolerated in any company. The minds of people were wonderfully taken off from the world; it was treated amongst us as a thing of very little consequence."
- **Edwards preached and published one of his most important sermons: "A Divine and Supernatural Light."**
- His primary concerns were to distill the essence of true Christian experience and distinguish it from either mere knowledge or mere emotionalism. (Notice how it was against the enlightenment thought).
- Here Edwards explained that God communicates to people in an immediate way, beyond the reach of reason alone. The truly converted are given an entirely new sense to apprehend the things of God, a power to appreciate the beauty and excellency of Christ.
- This sense is not available to the unregenerate. In Edwards' famous illustration, it is the difference between having a rational judgment that honey is sweet and having a sense of its sweetness.
- Likewise, the "spiritually enlightened" person does not merely rationally believe that God is glorious, but he has a sense of the gloriousness of God in his heart.

- **Under the faithful preaching of the Word**, this new sense seemed to overtake many of the residents of North Hampton and the surrounding towns, and many either came to faith for the first time, or else had their stagnant faith renewed.
- Edwards believed in the ultimate supremacy of Christ, but knew that Satan worked to stop his Gospel work.
- **In 1741, Edwards gave an *infamous and emotional sermon*, entitled “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God.” News of the message spread quickly throughout the colonies.**
- Edwards’ message centered on the idea that humans were sinners, God was an angry judge and individuals needed to ask for forgiveness. He also preached justification by faith alone.
- The Great Awakening unquestionably had a significant impact on Christianity. It reinvigorated religion in America at a time when it was steadily declining and introduced ideas that would penetrate into American culture for many years to come.

The “Second” Great Awakening...1795 – 1835

- This is where we start to see the difference between “revival” and “revivalism.”
- Interesting to note: “During the Second Great Awakening revivalistic theology in many denominations shifted from Calvinism to a practical Arminianism as preachers emphasized the ability of sinners to make an immediate decision for their salvation; theological differences almost disappeared among evangelical churches.”⁵
- In his book *Revival & Revivalism*, Iain Murray defines revival as God using ordinary means to effect extraordinary change. That’s much different than revivalism, which is when man tries to use extraordinary means to affect the same, extraordinary change.
- The foundational difference between God moving and men moving to get God’s results is one relies on the Word and work of God and the other on the word and work of men. The latter is only results oriented and the former is method oriented. One wants to glorify God and the other get results.
- The Second Great Awakening was characterized by planned meetings and events which men put together.
- The First was sporadic, started by the preaching and teaching of God’s Word.
- The Second seemed to bring men to faith in Christ, but then to see them back in their old worldly ways within just a matter of time.
- The First saw men saved, cities changed, churches filled, missionaries sent out and people who continued to walk with the Lord throughout their own life.

⁵ <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Second-Great-Awakening>

WHAT ABOUT TODAY IN ASBURY?

- If we look at the NT passages, are people's *minds being renewed...are they putting off sin and putting on righteous...are they being renewed by the Word of God?*
- Where do we start? 1 John 4:1 "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world."
- 2 Corinthians 11:14 "No wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light."
- "...the Asbury "revival" started after a 10 am chapel service last week Wednesday (15th) when a group of about 20 students and the worship team said they felt prompted by the Holy Spirit to continue worship past the end of the chapel service. According to one of the students I talked to, a few hours later, the president of the seminary sent an email to the students encouraging them visit the chapel to join the 20 students on what he described as an outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Apparently 200 students arrived for worship at the chapel soon after, and there has been non-stop worship ever since."⁶
- Interestingly enough, the students maintain that this was sporadic, it was an unplanned event...but the college itself *is* part of the revivalist movement. Their own website says "*Asbury University has been known through the years for its history of great revivals. There have been several occasions when significant moves of the Holy Spirit have swept the campus and reached across the nation.*"
- This is the 8th such revival the college says that it has experienced.
- What was the message preached in that chapel? "...one former student who was at the chapel this week told me he rarely, if ever, heard a clear presentation of the gospel at the school... "Unfortunately, I have first-account experience and conversations with people who are attending and speaking on the 'greatness' of revival who are actively living in sin (to be blunt)... **the LGBTQ students** who were "worshipping" at the chapel also say they're especially hopeful the "revival" will create (progressive) change at the school."⁷
- "**Furthermore, some of the preachers at the chapel are women.** And there are also several people "prophesying", speaking in tongues, "casting out demons", and "faith healing" at the chapel."⁸
- "So, what we can learn from the Spirit of truth is, He moves in a sovereign way, but not in an unexplainable way. **His purpose is to draw people to Christ.** This is how Jesus explains the Spirit's ministry when He comes, "He shall glorify Me." **Therefore, when you hear more about what people perceive the Spirit is doing at Asbury, rather than about Jesus and the truth of His Lordship, there should be some red flags.**"⁹

⁶ <https://slowtowrite.com/is-the-asbury-revival-a-real-revival/>

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ <https://thecripplegate.com/the-asbury-revival-observations-from-a-local-pastor/>