

TRUE OR FALSE?: AN ANALYSIS OF RECENT EVENTS AT ASBURY

MARCH 5, 2023

(EVENING SERVICE)

INTRODUCTION

On February 8 of this year. . .

A chapel service was held . . .

[SLIDE]

Within the four walls of Hughes Memorial Auditorium.

On the campus of Asbury University.

In Wilmore, Kentucky.

Wilmore is a small town of 6,000 that sits 1.5 hours southeast of Louisville.

As is typical in any Christian college campus chapel.

There was a time of welcoming.

A time of song.

A time of announcements.

And a time of prayer.

Before that day's speaker came up to the podium.

That's day's speaker was this man.

[SLIDE]

Zach Meerkreebs.

Whose title is Envision Leadership Coordinator.

For the Christian and Missionary Alliance.

This young minister's message was derived from **Romans 12**.

A truly-powerful section of Scripture . . .

Which contains something like 30 commands given to Christians by the pen of the Apostle Paul.

More on the content of the message later . . .

But after he spoke for approximately 25 minutes.

Meerkreebs left the stage.

Took off his mic.

And according to at least one news report, texted these words to his wife.

[SLIDE]

“Latest stinker. I’ll be home soon.”

Words that any married teacher or preacher of God's Word

. . . can relate to at some level.

TRANSITION

Well, as Meerkreebs left the chapel.

The student praise team wound down the chapel in song.

And while most of the students in attendance filed out . . .

. . . and headed out to lunch . . .

. . . once the chapel service was over.

Approximately 20 students stayed back in the chapel building, and prayed.

There are accounts of one young man . . .

. . . in one of these prayer groups.

Who shared how he had been suicidal a few years back.

And how the Lord had grabbed a hold of him.

And spared him.

Eventually, more students began to join them this original group of 20.

Huddling together in prayer.

Then one of the students strapped on their guitar.

And another jumped behind the drum kit.

And another grabbed a mic.

And the music started.

Then, later that afternoon, the President of the seminary . . .

. . . Timothy Tennant . . .

. . . sent an email out to the student body . . .

. . . indicating that a special movement of the Spirit had come upon the school.

Then, more students started to come.

Then, Meerkreebs himself shared a video on Facebook of the chapel auditorium filled with students praying for one another.

[SLIDE]

Then, Meerkreebs returned to the chapel that evening and presided over parts of the ongoing worship service.

Some were kneeling at the front of the stage . . .

. . . others were huddled in clusters in the auditorium...

. . . and others were singing worship songs led by Asbury's student-led praise team.

[SLIDE]

And before you knew it, certain Christian social media outlets were picking up the story . . .

. . . on YouTube . . .

. . . Facebook . . .

. . . and Instagram . . .

And that led to an initial wave of visitors . . .

. . . mainly younger, social-media savvy visitors . . .

. . . to the campus.

[SLIDE]

Soon after that, local, and eventually, national media outlets had picked up on the story.

That revival had broken out at Asbury.

Look at the headlines here:

“The Revival Continues”

“Two Weeks of Worship at Kentucky School”

“Asbury Revival Continues”

Even fake news sites . . .

. . . such as the satirical site The Babylon Bee . . .

. . . picked up on . . .

... and you could say, poked fun at ...

... parts of the story.

[SLIDE]

If you can't read that ...

It says:

“Report: Asbury University Revival Started Night Before Huge Group Project Was Due”

TRANSITION

And, of course, this went on to become quite the phenomenon over the past several weeks.

By most estimates I've seen, more than 50,000 people traveled to Asbury.

These people were predominantly younger.

And represented somewhere around 260 universities and colleges.

[SLIDE]

In fact, here's a map, created by an Asbury student named Eliza Crawford, which tracks where the attendees came from.

TRANSITION

This event has been in the news.

It has been the subject of countless podcast episodes.

It has been fodder for countless blog posts.

It has been the topic of countless YouTube videos.

And it has been the source of countless questions and comments I've personally faced.

About the legitimacy.

Or the illegitimacy.

Of what has been happening at Asbury.

So I thought this would be a good opportunity this evening.

With the dust having somewhat settled on the event.

But with it still fresh in everyone's minds.

To provide some analysis and some insights into the recent events at Asbury.

TRANSITION

Now, before we get into it.

I recognize that it's not my job to be a cultural commentator or a culture warrior.

I'm a pastor.

I'm a preacher of God's Word.

I'm a shepherd of God's flock.

This isn't a Fox News studio.

It's the church of Jesus Christ.

But as I'm about to lay out for you.

This matter of what is true revival.

And what is not.

Is not merely a cultural matter.

It's a biblical matter.

It's a theological matter.

And so I would say, who better to hear this from.

Than from your pastor?

TRANSITION

In fact, that's become a real challenge – and I would even say even a real problem – in our days.

God has set up the church . . .

. . . so that its members would receive biblical instruction from their pastors and elders and teachers in their church.

Men who have devoted themselves to the study of the Word.

And the study of theology.

And whose prayerful study serves as a protective fence around what enters the minds and the hearts of our members.

But also men who live in and among them.

Who live in the same community.

Who shop at the same grocery store.

And who eat at the same Runza.

Right?

Think about it.

Historically . . .

. . . as church members would be confronted with topics and issues that were surfacing in the culture.

. . . The Civil War . . .

. . . The Cold War . . .

. . . The war on the lives of the unborn . . .

Where would they go for answers about how to think about these matters?

Would they go to the newspapers or the radio or the library.

For their answers?

No!

They would go to their pastors!

They would go to the men they knew . . .

. . . would look them in the eye . . .

. . . would give them an answer from the Word.

. . . and would shepherd them in the direction of
faithfulness and truth as they gave them answers from
the Scriptures.

That's not how it works anymore.

Especially in the younger generation.

Which I define as my age . . .

. . . 24 . . .

. . . or younger . . .

The younger generation . . .

. . . the generation who, by the way . . .

. . . represents the future of this church.

They don't call the church and ask to speak with the pastor about his take on this or that subject.

Instead, they go to YouTube.

Or to social media.

Or to one of the news sites.

They go to Matt Walsh.

Or Jordan Peterson.

Or Allie Stuckey.

They go to InfoWars.

Or to Fox News.

Or to Drudge.

They go to Twitter.

Or to Parler.

Or to the 'Gram.

To form their thoughts about matters happening in the world.

TRANSITION

And then . . .

. . . with this sea of information . . .

... and episodes and seasons of podcasts ...

... and otherwise loosely-assembled data ...

... floating around in their minds.

They come to church on Sundays.

And they expect the pastor not only to have answers from the text that he'll be preaching that day ...

But they expect their pastor to have specific responses to the various things they've listened to all week ...

... from the various cultural commentators they listen to.

TRANSITION

Not only is this unrealistic and unsustainable.

It completely rejects the blueprint of what life in the body of Christ was designed to look like.

Christians are to study God's Word.

And as we do so, we are to be taught, instructed, and shepherded by our pastors and elders as we grow in our understanding of the Word.

Duane Leach and Mike Shrader have a lot more wisdom to offer you than talking heads like Tucker Carlson ...

Ray Terry and Rob Jensen have a lot more wisdom to offer you than a cultural crusader like Doug Wilson.

Larry Riekenberg and Scott Bailey have a lot more wisdom to offer you than your favorite Instagram influencer.

How do I know that?

Because the Holy Spirit has . . .

Acts 20 . . .

. . . made them – those men – the elders of this church.

The Holy Spirit knew what He was doing when He made them elders here.

And the Holy Spirit knew what He was doing when He brought you into this body of believers.

Of which they are overseers and undershepherds.

Those men . . .

Are the ones who care about you.

They are the ones who pray for you.

And they are the ones . . .

. . . and me, too . . .

. . . since I'm the Chairman of the Elder Board . . .

... who will give an account to the Chief Shepherd for how they shepherded you.

TRANSITION

So with that, tonight's presentation is one pastor's attempt...

Your pastor's attempt . . .

In the midst of the bottomless sea of competing voices and opinions and hot takes . . .

To provide a relatively simple and high-level analysis of what's been happening at Asbury over the past several weeks.

I don't intend to be exhaustive.

I can't be in an hour.

But I do hope to be able to lay out some of the biblical and theological and historical track for you.

To give you all some guidance as to how we should be evaluating and thinking about this event.

TRANSITION

This won't be an expository message.

This won't be sermon.

In which we take a text of Scripture and pick it a part and explain it word by word.

Like we did this morning.

This will be more of a lesson or a lecture.

But that doesn't mean our lesson will be devoid of Scripture.

In fact, as I've been preparing for this message all week.

I've been meditating on this passage.

[SLIDE]

**1 John 4:1 – “Beloved, do not believe every spirit,
but test the spirits to see whether they are from God
...”**

And why?

**“... because many false prophets have gone out into
the world.”**

I'm sure there be some here.

Or watching online.

Or who will watch this later.

Who will say that this is a mean-spirited and close-minded
attack on a genuine work of the Spirit at Asbury.

*“There goes another Bible-thumping fundamentalist
clobbering those who are more charismatic than he.”*

But that's not the spirit with which this assessment is being offered.

My job is to instruct this church in sound doctrine.

And to refute those who contradict.

Titus 1:9

And in that vein, providing a sober analysis of Asbury.

Through the lens of Scripture.

And for tonight's purpose, with some additional theological and historical insights.

Is good for the health of this church.

As we **“test the spirits to see whether they are from God.”**

TRANSITION

As we shove off the dock here and get started.

We need to define our terms.

Let's start with the obvious one:

[SLIDE]

What is a “revival”?

The events at Asbury have been described by many as a “revival” . . .

By others as an “awakening” (which is often thought of as an elevation of the religious consciousness before true revival comes) . . .

And by others as “an outpouring of the Holy Spirit.”

We could spend a lot of time trying to sift through the nuances of these ideas.

But for the sake of time and simplicity.

Tonight we’re going to use the word “revival.”

Which has been the word most frequently attached to this event.

TRANSITION

Now, interestingly, that word – “revival” – is not technically a biblical term.

At least, in noun form.

[SLIDE]

As it says here on the slide:

“The Bible never refers to “revival” in noun form, i.e., where the term is used to describe an event in which the Spirit worked or moved in a unique way.”

However . . .

. . . as we see in this next slide . . .

[SLIDE]

... the verb form for “revive” does appear in a few places in the Old Testament.

Where the Hebrew verb – *haya*.

Which means “to make alive.”

Is translated as “revive.”

[SLIDE]

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.”

[SLIDE]

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.’”

[SLIDE]

Psalms 85:5-6 – “Will you be angry with us forever? Will You prolong Your anger to all generations? Will You not Yourself revive us again, that Your people may rejoice in You?”

The passages in Habakkuk and Psalms are prayers.

They are prayers that God would lead His people to a place of repentance.

And to pursue Him.

After a period of time in which they were not pursuing Him.

TRANSITION

And then you see, in Scripture, these periods of repentance and restoration.

And the hearts of individual worshipers.

And even Israel as a whole.

“Revived.”

We see it in the days of the Judges.

In those repeated cycles of sin, judgment, and repentance.

We see it in the days of King Josiah.

Who brought about various reforms in Israel after the book of the Law was rediscovered.

So there were periods in Israel’s history that I think we’d be comfortable with calling periods of “revival.”

Even if the noun form “revival” is never explicitly used.

It’s like the word “Trinity.”

It's not there, but it's there.

TRANSITION

So it's no surprise that those who throw around the term "revival" in our day.

Will cite instances from the Old Testament.

When national Israel repented and returned to the Lord.

And it's affections were Yahweh were at least temporarily "revived."

[SLIDE]

And it's no surprise that people will cite **2 Chronicles 7:13-14**

"If . . . My people who are called by My name humble themselves and pray and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, will forgive their sin and will heal their land."

. . . as though it applies to America.

. . . when in fact it refers to the people of Israel and promises made to Israel.

TRANSITION

Well, as with the Old Testament . . .

... the noun “revival” also doesn’t appear in the New Testament.

But of course that doesn’t mean that we don’t have a record in the New Testament of hearts being revived.

As people turned from their sin and turned to Christ.

Acts 2, of course, records the events of the Day of Pentecost.

A day on which the Spirit was poured out upon people.

Which led to the conversion of 3,000 souls.

Who then began gathering and devoting themselves to the apostle’s teaching, to fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to the prayers, as **Acts 2:42**.

This most certainly was an “outpouring of the Holy Spirit.”

And one that Pentecostal theology points to as being normative for and expected in the church today.

Once the Spirit was poured out, though.

And once the gospel was spread.

There was nothing to indicate that this was to be a regular or a repeating occurrence.

Rather, the testimony of Scripture.

Is that the after those significant early events in the book of Acts.

The key roles of the Holy Spirit would be to convict the world of sin and righteousness and judgment.

John 16:8

To regenerate the unbelieving.

Titus 3:5

And to conform believers into the image of Christ.

Romans 15:16

Is the Spirit at work and active in the lives of believers today?

Absolutely.

But it is not an outpouring of the Spirit that we should be looking out for.

That happened at Pentecost.

A unique, one-time event.

What we should be looking for instead is the upbraiding and upbuilding work the Spirit does in our hearts.

As He regenerates us.

Instructs us.

Guides us.

Convicts us.

Sanctifies us.

And conforms us into the image of our Savior.

TRANSITION

So if the word “revival” does not appear in the Bible.

Where does it come from?

How have we come to call events like what took place at Asbury.

A “revival”?

Well, to answer that question, we need to do some theological excavation . . .

. . . and some historical explanation.

Because the word “revival” is a theological term.

With a distinct history.

TRANSITION

And the roots of this concept of “revival” . . .

. . . go down deep into some theological soil that has some very interesting elements to it.

Our usage of the term “revival” today goes back to various revered forefathers of our faith.

And their commitment to a postmillennial worldview.

But our usage of the term “revival” is also rooted in Methodist and Pentecostal soil.

Let me explain to you what I mean.

[SLIDE]

Starting with postmillennialism.

Let’s start with postmillennialism.

Here’s a definition of postmillennialism.

[SLIDE]

From Augustus Strong:

“Through the preaching of the gospel in all the world, the kingdom of Christ is steadily advanced to enlarge its boundaries, until Jews and Gentiles alike become possessed of its blessings, and a millennial period is introduced in which Christianity generally prevails throughout the earth.”

[SLIDE]

From Gary Gilley:

“Ultimately, there will be worldwide acceptance of the gospel, which will usher in the millennial kingdom. Entire countries and civilizations will be spiritually changed. The

church has replaced Israel as the recipient of God's covenantal blessings, and Satan is bound (Rev. 20:1-6), which is why the world will ultimately be transformed for Christ, then Christ will return."

Well, as you know from American History class in eleventh grade . . .

. . . we had this event occur in our nation in the 1730s and 1740s called the Great Awakening.

[SLIDE]

These were the days of Jonathan Edwards reading . . .

. . . "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God" . . .

. . . from his manuscript . . .

. . . in a eerily monotone voice . . .

. . . in Enfield, Connecticut, in 1741.

. . . with reports of many being converted through that single preaching event alone.

[SLIDE]

These were the days of George Whitefield going up and down the eastern seaboard.

. . . and making multiple trans-Atlantic voyages.

. . . as he preached the gospel to tens of thousands of people in the open air.

The stories surrounding Whitefield's ministry are especially amazing.

... there are stories of people standing for hours on end to hear Whitefield preach.

... there are stories of coal workers ...

... who after coming out of the mines to hear him preach ...

... were impacted so profoundly by what he was saying ...

... that tears were streaming from their eyes.

... creating track lines down their blackened faces.

These were days which ...

... as Edwards would later recall ...

... were marked by a "surprising" work of God's Spirit.

... as more people took an interest in religious matters.

... and as churches which ...

... in the face of the advance of modernism ...

... had been dying ...

... began to fill up again.

TRANSITION

But it's also important to note.

That as clear as their presentations of the gospel were.

And as doctrinally-rooted as their messages were.

The men . . .

. . . George Whitefield . . .

. . . and Jonathan Edwards . . .

. . . we link most directly to the Great Awakening.

. . . which, if there's anything we can describe as a
“revival” in American Christianity.

. . . this would be it.

Were postmillennial.

Meaning, they believed that a “time of refreshing” . . .

. . . a period of mass conversion and sanctification . . .

. . . would precede the Second Coming of Christ . . .

. . . and thus they prayed for it . . .

. . . and through their preaching urged others to seek it.

And they also believed that the religious enthusiasm that was surrounding them . . .

. . . was the ushering in of the “golden age” of Christianity.

. . . in other words, that it was true revival.

Were many souls saved and converted during the Great Awakening?

There’s no doubt.

But were there also false professions, brought about by excitement and emotional excess?

Of that, there’s also no doubt.

This worry about false professions, in fact, is what prompted Edwards to write his work *A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections* in 1746.

Seeing that the kingdom of God hadn’t come.

And that this “golden age” of Christianity hadn’t arrived.

And that Christ hadn’t returned.

Edwards’ *Religious Affections* were his measured and thoughtful reflections on what marks a true awakening, or revival.

And what marks a false one.

TRANSITION

The main point, and main idea, though.

Is that the men who we think of as sparking the greatest “revival” on American soil – the Great Awakening.

Jonathan Edwards and George Whitefield.

Were postmillennial.

They believed that their preaching and their evangelism and their gospel labors . . .

. . . were “bringing the kingdom” . . .

. . . and ushering in this golden age . . .

. . . which in turn would bring about the return of Christ.

TRANSITION

So on the one hand, our modern conception of “revival” goes back to the postmillennialism of the Great Awakening.

That’s the first soil that we need to consider before addressing an event like Asbury.

[SLIDE]

The second soil we need to consider is Methodism.

And for that, we turn to a discussion of John Wesley and the Methodist movement.

As well as a discussion of modern-day Pentecostalism...

. . . which is a poisonous offshoot of Methodism.

We don't have time this evening to do a deep dive into John Wesley and Methodist theology.

But what you need to know is that he held that it was possible for believers to achieve a status of perfection in this life.

Wesley and his followers affirmed many of the things we should affirm and believe.

The deity of Christ.

The virgin birth.

The bodily resurrection of Christ

But they also taught that there was a moment in the Christian life.

Where a Christian could achieve perfection.

Not in glory.

But here on planet earth.

And in these bodies of flesh.

TRANSITION

This Wesleyan idea of perfectionism.

This idea of there being two tiers of the Christian experience.

One at which you experience salvation and conversion.

And the other at which you achieve perfection.

Fueled much of what later would become the Pentecostal movement.

Which was birthed originally in Topeka, Kansas.

At Bethel Bible School.

Which was founded by this man . . .

[SLIDE]

Charles Parham

It was there that a woman . . .

[SLIDE]

. . . named Agnes Ozman . . .

. . . was said to have spoken in tongues.

In the Pentecostal gibberish way.

Not in the book of Acts way.

These early Pentecostals would eventually migrate out to Los Angeles . . .

... where the so-called Azusa Street Revival took place in 1906.

TRANSITION

Now, while there is a relationship between Methodism and Pentecostalism.

There are key differences, as well.

While both systems taught that there are two stages of the Christian life.

Salvation, and then a second thing.

The Methodists ...

... influenced by John Wesley ...

... would say that that “second thing” was perfection.

... perfected holiness.

While the Pentecostals ...

... influenced by men like Charles Parham ...

... would say that that “second thing” was an experience.

An experience with the Spirit, specifically.

Which typically involved some manifestation of one of the unique gifts that the people experienced during the day of Pentecost in **Acts 2**.

Such as speaking in tongues.

Gifts which they believe are still in operation today.

And normative in the church today.

Pentecostalism isn't marked by holiness in the way that we think . . .

. . . a life lived in obedience to God and His Word.

. . . the demonstration of the fruit of the Spirit.

It's rather more experiential.

. . . it looks for that second experience . . .

. . . that "second blessing" . . .

. . . an additional dose of, or infilling of, the Holy Spirit.

. . . which many in this movement will call being
"baptized in the Spirit."

TRANSITION

[SLIDE]

Well, getting back to the Methodists.

They were originally called "Methodists" because of the methodical way they lived their lives.

Again, they believed that a person could achieve perfection this life.

And their founder, John Wesley, was known for a particularly holy and devout manner of life.

Going all the way back to his days at Oxford University.

Where he was classmates with George Whitefield.

TRANSITION

But what the Methodists also became known for.

Especially as the decades rolled later into the 1700s . . .

. . . and into the 1800s.

Were the evangelistic and revivalistic methods they employed . . .

. . . in establishing Methodist encampments in the frontiers of what was then known as the American West.

Places like Ohio and West Virginia and Kentucky.

In these days . . .

The “camp meeting” . . .

Had become popularized on the frontier.

As a new way to proclaim the gospel and to bring the lost to Christ.

These “camp meetings” were known for their focus on singing, on emotionalism, and various other means to secure a commitment to Christ from those who were in attendance.

The “methods” of the Methodists . . .

. . . in other words . . .

. . . were aimed at producing and stimulating revival.

TRANSITION

Well, one many who was familiar with the Methodist approach to stimulating “revival” . . .

Was this man.

[SLIDE]

Who introduced what he called his “new measures” as a way to further stimulate camp meetings and “revival” in the American West.

Finney was a former lawyer who was well known for his methods.

The anxious bench at the front of the place of assembly.

The emphasis on music.

The prolonged revival meetings.

The push for a “decision.”

Walking forward.

Altar calls.

I bring Finney up not because he was a Methodist.

He wasn't.

He wasn't even a Christian.

He was a heretic who didn't believe in original sin.

And because he didn't believe in original sin.

He wasn't preaching a real gospel that saved from sin.

He was instead a charismatic figure who brought the masses out through man-made means and methods.

But Finney – and Finneyism – is stitched deeply into the fabric of American evangelicalism today.

“I see that hand.”

“Walk this aisle.”

“Just pray after me like this.”

It's all Finneyism.

TRANSITION

So, Finney was no Methodist.

But this man was.

[SLIDE]

Francis Asbury.

He was a circuit riding evangelist.

Who was renowned for his methods in spreading the Christian gospel.

Some have called him the “father of American Methodism”...

And guess which educational institution is named after him?

You got it.

[SLIDE]

Asbury University.

Let’s just say that it’s not by accident that the events that that happened last month, in Wilmore, Kentucky . . .

Happened at Asbury College.

A school named for Francis Asbury.

Indeed, the expectation of revival . . .

. . . is woven into the theological tradition of Methodism.

And it’s woven into this flagship Methodist school.

In fact, here’s a history of the “revivals” that have taken place at Asbury in the past 100 years.

This is according to their website:

“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.

In February 1905, during a blizzard, a prayer meeting in the men’s dormitory spilled out to the rest of campus and the town of Wilmore.

In February 1908, revival broke out while someone prayed in chapel; the revival lasted two weeks and was signified by prevailing prayer and intercession.

In February 1921 the last service of a planned revival lasted until 6 a.m., and services were extended for three days.

In February 1950 a student testimony led to confessions, victories, and more testimonies. This went on uninterrupted for 118 hours and became the second leading news story nationwide; it is estimated that 50,000 people found a new experience in Christ as a result of this revival and witness teams that went out from it.

In March 1958 revival began in a student fasting prayer meeting that spilled over into chapel and lasted for 63 hours.

On February 3, 1970 Dean Custer B. Reynolds, scheduled to speak in chapel, felt led to invite persons to give personal testimony instead. Many on campus had been praying for spiritual renewal and were now in an expectant mood. Soon there was a large group waiting in line to speak. A spirit of powerful revival came upon the congregation. The

chapel was filled with rejoicing people. Classes were cancelled for a week during the 144 hours of unbroken revival, but even after classes resumed on February 10, Hughes Auditorium was left open for prayer and testimony.

In March 1992 a student confession during the closing chapel of the annual Holiness Conference turned into 127 consecutive hours of prayer and praise.

In February 2006 a student chapel led to four days of continuous worship, prayer and praise.”

TRANSITION

Now one thing that's striking to me as we go through these.

Is not only that in some of these, there is this idea of a “planned revival.”

That sounds somewhat oxymoronic.

In that a “revival,” one would think . . .

Would be an unplanned, unexpected movement of the Spirit.

And here's another thing worth nothing.

11 of the 12 revivals which Asbury has apparently had.

Took place in the month of February.

The twelfth one took place in March.

As newly-minted Midwesterners.

Even we understand that February and March are those dead-of-winter months.

Where a person can find themselves in the doldrums.

Stuck indoors.

And needing something exciting to happen to bridge us to the warmer months of Spring and Summer.

For me, it's knowing that baseball is around the corner that cheers me up.

Might it be, in a school and tradition that is expecting and looking for "revival."

That it's no coincidence that "revivals" at Asbury only occur in the dead of winter?

But I digress.

TRANSITION

So we have this Methodist school.

Named after this renowned Methodist minister.

With a history of revivals.

And going back further in history . . .

. . . we have in our American Christian tradition the notion of "awakening" and "revival" brought about by various postmillennial preachers.

So where bring us?

Well, it brings us to the perfect storm of the past four weeks at Asbury University.

With that background now in place . . .

I'm going to spend the rest of my time up here this evening . .

. . . laying out some concerns and cautions I have . .

. . . about the events at Asbury as a whole.

Which I'll follow with some cautions and counsel for us.

TRANSITION

The Pre-Revival Stage

[SLIDE]

The first thing to mention is that this event, though it was said to have started on February 8.

Actually got rolling in the weeks leading up to that date.

In a blog post he wrote on January 4 . . .

. . . the President of Asbury Theological Seminary . . .

. . . Timothy Tennent.

Indicated that the campus was in a “pre-revival” stage.

Now, either he is a prophet with a gift to predict the event that was about to come to his campus.

Or this entire event was planned.

Or, perhaps a middle solution . . .

. . . Tennant knew that each “revival” that occurred at Asbury in the past had occurred in the month of February.

In the dead of winter.

And that the college was “due” for another such event.

I bring this up not to make accusations.

Because the reality is no one knows whether there was any planning or staging behind this event.

But instead to surface concerns about those old Methodist ways.

And the “new measures” which were introduced by Charles Finney.

That a “revival” – a purported work of the Spirit.

Can somehow be planned or prepared for or staged.

It’s also at least “odd” that Asbury, on February 23, 2023.

Brought the campus portion of the revival to a close.

Basically, they said that their infrastructure could no longer support the event.

And that they needed to return to normal campus life schedules . . .

. . . which had been totally disrupted during the two weeks of the revival.

Sort of a deflating way to end a movement of the Spirit of God, isn't it?

To cap it at two weeks and say, "it's time to get back to class?"

If "revival" is truly of the Spirit, how can humans bring the curtain down on it?

TRANSITION

So one series of concerns I have is that this "revival" was one of many revivals that have allegedly happened at this seminary.

And that they all occur in the same month of February.

And that this one was brought to a close by the president of the University.

Another concern I have is with the sermon that kicked off this entire event.

[SLIDE]

Let's go back to the beginning of where we started tonight.

And to the sermon that started this entire event at Asbury.

Let's go back to the message from Romans 12 . . .

. . . that Zach Meekreebs delivered on February 8.

We're not going work through the entirety of his message.

Or pick it apart in detail.

But I do want to give you a taste of it.

Here are some of the closing words of his message.

As he "landed the plane."

He said:

"[Is] your source of love...white-knuckling it, trying really hard, or is it the love of God for you? What is the purpose of your love? Is it to look good at chapel, to look good to your family? Is it to get love in return from the person that you're giving love to?"

"That's not this love we're talking about...Some of us need to sit in the love of God. Some of us need to taste and experience the power of the Holy Spirit."

"If you really want to become love in action, you start by prostrating yourself before the love of God. If you want to become love in action, you have to experience the love of God."

“I pray that this sits on you guys like an itchy sweater, and you gotta itch; you gotta take care of it.”

“Become the love of God by experiencing the love of God.”

“Holy Spirit, if you spoke to anyone...would you produce fruit in this room, in these souls, in these minds and these hearts?”

“Do a new thing in our midst,” Meerkreebs prayed.

“Revive us by your love.”

TRANSITION

Now, there’s nothing outwardly heretical in his sermon.

There’s obviously a heavy emphasis.

Almost an exclusive emphasis.

On the attribute of the love of God.

As though that’s all God is.

But that’s just the style of soft-serve messaging that’s being offered in churches all throughout the land today.

Also concerning is the phrase “do a new thing in our midst.”

The Holy Spirit doesn’t do new things.

He does the same thing.

Which is what He was sent by the Father and the Son to do.

Which is to convict the world of sin, righteous, and judgment.

To illuminate the Word that He has breathed out.

And to conform followers of Christ into His image.

That's it.

TRANSITION

But this sermon is marked not as much by what's in it.

As it is by what is not in it.

There's no mention of sin.

There's no mention of the cross.

There's no mention of repentance.

There's no mention of hell.

The sermons that brought about genuine conversion in the days of the Great Awakening.

Like the sermons that have been preached here and in other faithful churches over the years.

Are those which mention God's holiness and His justice.

And which mention man's hopeless sinful state.

And which state clearly that unless a person is born again . . .

. . . as they from sin and trusting exclusively in the finished work of Jesus Christ on the cross.

. . . they will spend an eternity in anguish in the flames of hell.

And not one day less.

That's a much different message than “*Become the love of God by experiencing the love of God.*”

The love of God certainly is central to the gospel message.

But there is more involved in the gospel message . . .

. . . than the love of God.

In other words, Meerkreebs didn't preach the gospel that day.

And there can be no “revival” . . .

When the gospel isn't preached.

All that to say, the message given that day in chapel by Zach Meerkreebs . . .

. . . is quite different than Edwards' *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God*.

. . . and the type of heavy appeals to the conscience.

. . . and the calls to repentance.

. . . which you'd expect to hear from a sermon that brought about a genuine awakening or revival.

TRANSITION

Here's another concern.

[SLIDE]

The Pneumatology.

Meaning, the views of the Holy Spirit.

That undergirded this event.

Being a Methodist school.

Asbury would certainly be an environment that would be more open to the present-day operation of certain apostolic gifts.

Gifts we would say . . .

. . . based on our understanding of the Scriptures...

. . . that have ceased in the current age.

But that's not actually what I'm referring to when I mention "Pneumatology" – or the doctrine of the Holy Spirit – here.

What I'm referring to is the fact that tens of thousands of people made a pilgrimage to Wilmore, Kentucky.

To Jessamine County, Kentucky.

To experience the Holy Spirit.

Or to encounter the Holy Spirit.

Or to be filled with the Holy Spirit.

TRANSITION

The Holy Spirit, as is true of the other members of the Trinity.

Is omnipresent.

The Holy Spirit is just as much present in Lincoln, Nebraska and Honolulu, Hawaii . . .

. . . as He is in Wilmore, Kentucky . . .

. . . in any given moment.

So why would a resident of Lincoln, Nebraska or Honolulu, Hawaii . . .

. . . need to travel to Wilmore, Kentucky to experience the Holy Spirit?

Or to have an encounter with Him?

Those who are on the more charismatic side as it relates to whether certain gifts are in operation today.

Will often accuse people like me – cessationists.

As “putting God in a box.”

I would actually argue that it’s “putting God in a box” to say that a person must travel to Wilmore, Kentucky to experience Him.

No!

We experience the Holy Spirit when we read His Word.

Wherever we are.

When we pray in the Spirit.

Wherever we are.

When we defeat sin with His help.

Wherever we are.

And when He molds us more and more into the image of our Savior.

Wherever we are.

We can “experience” the Holy Spirit, daily, from right where we are, on any given day.

We don’t need to use SkyMiles or FuelSaver points to “experience” Him.

TRANSITION

Here’s another concern.

The focus of the event.

And the tale of the tape shows it.

Is that the focus of the Asbury event was not the preaching of God's Word.

It wasn't even the proclamation of the gospel.

Rather, the focus was music.

Now, I'm all for music.

We cherish and value our music ministries here.

And what they contribute to all aspects of our worship services here.

But if you study the great movements of God throughout the history of the church.

Pentecost.

The Reformation.

The Great Awakening.

Just for fun, let's lump in with those events what happened here at Indian Hills in the 1970s.

It wasn't music.

And especially, repetitive music.

That led to changed hearts and repentance.

No.

What was it?

It was the preached Word.

It was always the preached Word.

It's not music, beautiful though it may be.

That produces awakening and revival.

It's the preaching of Christ and Him crucified.

It's preaching the whole counsel of God.

I appreciate what Josh Buice of G3 Ministries has said on this subject.

He writes:

[SLIDE]

“Robust doctrinal preaching produces genuine change in people and at the end of the day, regardless of your definition of revival, that’s what we need. We need our minds to be renewed, our hearts to be changed, and our emotions to be checked. This happens through faithful preaching. When Peter and the others left the upper room at Pentecost and went out into the streets, Peter didn’t gather everyone’s attention and say, “Hey everyone—we’re going to sing some songs and pray together and share testimonies.” Peter stood and preached a bold and doctrinally rich sermon which

resulted in the outpouring of the Spirit and the salvation of 3,000 people.”

There were many songs.

And there were many Finney-like methods . . .

At Asbury . . .

But there was very little preaching.

And that’s concerning.

TRANSITION

Since I just mentioned “songs.”

Now would be a good time to mention.

[SLIDE]

Some of the participants in the event.

And specifically, the role of Asbury University and Asbury Theological Seminary in the event.

This seminary is openly egalitarian.

Contrary to the clear teaching of God’s Word . . .

. . . they believe that women can be elders and pastors.

Well, the Holy Spirit never acts or “moves” in a way that contradicts the Word He has breathed out.

So if this were a true move of the Holy Spirit at Asbury.

Do you know what we'd be hearing stories about?

Repentance.

As the administration of the university and the seminary
buck against cultural trends.

Acknowledge and affirm what God's Word says.

And repent of their egalitarianism.

TRANSITION

It's not only that, though.

This college and seminary is also affirming of homosexual
students and transgender students.

Who are out.

Not closeted.

About their same-sex attraction.

And consistent with that.

This man.

[SLIDE]

Elijah Blake.

Proudly tweeted that openly homosexual people were leading worship during this event.

Now, the official position of Asbury . . .

. . . in their doctrinal statements . . .

. . . is that any activity outside of heterosexual marriage is sinful.

But there have been expressions of approval of what's known as "side B Christianity."

Asbury has admitted "side B" gay Christians at the seminary.

Meaning, those who say they don't engage in homosexual activity.

Yet are openly unrepentant in their same-sex attraction.

Well, same-sex attraction is sin.

Just like same-sex activity is sin.

It's not just actions that are sinful.

It's the desires that are sinful.

Lusting after a woman is adultery.

Not just the adulterous act.

Anger is murderous.

Not just the murderous act.

Like any sin . . .

Same-sex attraction must be repented of . . .

. . . by anyone who calls themselves a “Christian.”

1 Corinthians 6:11 – “Such were some of you . . .”

The point being . . .

If these events at Asbury were in fact a genuine revival.

We’d not be hearing stories about homosexual and transgender people leading in worship.

We’d be hearing stories about homosexual and transgender people.

Encountering the living God through His Word.

Coming to saving faith in Jesus Christ.

And repenting of their sin – all of it.

As we’re all called to do.

There would be repentance of that very sin.

TRANSITION

Next on the list of things to be concerned about Asbury are the attendees.

As well as the invitees.

Here's the first one I want to mention.

[SLIDE]

Todd Bentley

He Tweeted this out, after he arrived at Asbury.

[SLIDE]

“The Holy Spirit lingers and you feel tangible waves of his presence!”

Todd Bentley is a charlatan.

He's a notorious false teacher preaches a false gospel.

Who hates the God of the Bible.

And whose life is a total shambles, and disqualifies him from ministry.

There are a few other figures the events at Asbury attracted.

Now, these men didn't actually make it to Asbury.

Only because the school shut the “revival” down before they could get there.

But they had plans to be there.

First, is Mike Bickle.

[SLIDE]

From the International House of Prayer in Kansas City.

Who is linked to various problematic charismatic groups.

Including the Kansas City Prophets.

And the New Apostolic Reformation.

He and his ministry fancy him a prophet, but his track record is – let's just say – less than stellar.

He's not exactly batting 1.000.

Next, is Francis Chan.

[SLIDE]

A Master's Seminary graduate.

Always a personable guy.

And a prolific writer of some helpful books over the past 15 years or so.

In recent years, he's been way off the deep end.

These days, he's aligned himself with the New Apostolic Reformation.

Spoken at conferences featuring heretics like Todd White and Joyce Meyer.

And has drifted, oddly, in the direction of Roman Catholicism in certain ways.

Including his belief in the Roman Catholic version of the Eucharist – transubstantiation.

Third, is Rick Warren.

[SLIDE]

From my old stomping grounds in Orange County, California.

The founder of Saddleback Church.

The author of *The Purpose Driven Life*.

A friend of the Pope.

A man who ordains women as elders in his church.

And who recently named a husband-wife team to be his replacement there at Saddleback.

TRANSITION

As I've already mentioned.

Bickle, Chan, and Warren didn't ultimately make it to Asbury.

Because they ended the "revival" before they could get there.

But Todd Bentley was able to make it there.

And his presence was felt.

See one of Todd Bentley's tricks that he plays, on his evangelistic crusades.

Is a parlor game . . .

. . . where he makes it appear that he's lengthening the leg . . .

. . . of someone who says they were born with uneven leg lengths.

The presence of men like Bentley have had an impact.

And they have had a negative impact.

[SLIDE]

I showed this slide earlier.

It's a still shot of a video interview of a young woman who drove 2.5 hours . . .

. . . each way . . .

. . . on several consecutive days . . .

. . . to experience this supposed movement of the Spirit at Asbury . . .

And look at the first thing she said to the person interviewing her.

Not, “I have repented of my sins and put my faith in Jesus Christ.”

Not, “I’ve seen others fall under conviction of their sin as they turn to the Lord.”

No.

It’s:

“We have seen limbs grow back.”

Odd.

Strange.

Concerning.

TRANSITION

The last concern I’ll raise tonight is this one.

[SLIDE]

The church.

This so-called “revival” happened on a university campus.

Albeit a Christian university campus.

It did not happen in a church.

What is it the Lord has promised to build?

His church.

Matthew 16:17-19

He said nothing about Christian universities.

Or Christian chapels.

There's obviously nothing wrong with Christian universities or chapels.

But to look there . . .

. . . as opposed to the church of Jesus Christ . . .

. . . for an experience with, or an outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

. . . undermines the primacy of the local church as God's blueprint for the believer.

Where were the pastors and the elders to shepherd those who were earnestly seeking the Lord.

And to ward off the wolves?

They weren't there, at least in their official capacity.

Because this didn't take place in a church.

Where were the ordinances?

Who was being baptized into water as they came to faith in Christ?

Where were the elements of communion, allowing for these believers to remember the Lord's death?

They weren't happening, because this didn't take place in a church.

Where were the deacons, maintaining order, and keeping the service running smoothly?

They weren't there, because this didn't take place in a church.

TRANSITION

Now, is this to say that all genuine works of the Spirit in reviving souls must happen within the four walls of a church?

No.

Genuine spiritual awakening can absolutely take place outside of formal church life.

It can happen at Christian camps.

And in Christian schools.

And in Christian homes.

But if there is a genuine movement of the Spirit . . .

One outworking of whatever profession has been made.

Will be long-term involvement in a local church.

Where believers are baptized and taught.

Where believers are fed through the preaching and teaching ministry of the Word.

Where believers are shepherded by godly elders.

In other words, a spiritual awakening of a single person.

Or many people.

Doesn't have to start in a church per se.

But it will always end in the church.

[SLIDE]

Again, Josh Buice is helpful on this point:

He writes:

“The church of Jesus Christ should be aiming in the direction of Titus 2 rather than Acts 2. God has not promised that another Acts 2 movement would occur nor should the church be aiming in that direction.”

That's so helpful.

Conversion isn't the end of the Christian life.

It's the beginning of the Christian life.

And if one has truly been regenerated.

And brought to faith in our Lord.

They will naturally graft in with a local body of believers.

Where Titus 2 is modeled.

Older men teaching and training younger men in the ways of the faith.

And older women doing the same for the younger women.

All Christians need the local church.

And one of the concerns I have with Asbury is not only that it is not attached to a church.

But that there has been very little said in these corporate worship times.

About the importance of getting attached to a local church.

TRANSITION

While I have been critical of the event at Asbury tonight.

I did say, at the beginning, that I want to provide a caution to all of us, as well.

Here's my caution.

Let's not undervalue . . .

. . . or not give proper weight . . .

. . . the power of God . . .

. . . and the supernatural and miraculous work of God.

. . . in saving souls.

Does Asbury University and Seminary have concerning doctrinal positions?

Yes, it does.

Does the history of Asbury and its involvement with revivalism raise red flags about the legitimacy of this revival?

Yes, it does.

Could there have been people at Asbury who actually heard the gospel and got saved?

Yes, for sure.

Did God not speak through a donkey back in the days of Balaam to accomplish His purposes?

So, couldn't He accomplish His purposes in saving some souls through an event like Asbury?

There may very well may have been true converts there at Asbury.

Maybe, as an event, it wasn't a true revival.

But at the same time, maybe individual hearts were revived.

Maybe, for some there was conviction of sin.

And maybe now those individuals are cultivating real religious affections.

And will go on to live fruitful lives for Christ.

While we may have concerns about the event as a whole.

We dare not demean what God can do in the hearts of individuals that He is drawing to Himself.

CONCLUSION

As we wrap up and conclude.

I'll borrow a line from Solomon in **Ecclesiastes 12:13**.

He says: **"The conclusion, when all has been heard is . . ."**

And he goes on to say, of course, **"fear God and keep His commandments."**

For us, "The conclusion, when all has been heard is . . ."

This:

We'll see.

Time will tell.

In the meantime, all we can do is pray.

We pray that hearts would genuinely turn to God.

Not only in Asbury, Kentucky.

But here in Lincoln, Nebraska.

And around the world.

As we await the appearing of our Lord.

Amen?

Let's pray.