

## You Asked! - Lesson 2

Question: What are the defining characteristics of revival?

Answer: This question is really a summary of three different inquiries that we received. The question is one that I anticipated and it is a marvelous subject to discuss, particularly in light of the recent events at Asbury College. Over the past few weeks, we have heard rumors of a revival that supposedly started in a chapel service on the campus of Asbury. Over several days, thousands of people flocked to the campus to take part in this supposed special outpouring of God's Spirit leading many to celebrate and others to wonder if this was really a move of God.

### A Definition

In order to answer this question, we first must make sure we are operating with a sufficient definition. The term "revival" has been commandeered by many in evangelical circles. Many of you grew up in traditions like the one I knew whereby revival was a series of planned meetings that took place over a week or two. I grew up with "spring revival" and "fall revival". The focus of these revival meetings was really evangelistic. We prayed for and invited lost people to attend in the hopes that they would hear a gifted preacher's message and come to Christ.

I do not question the intent of this kind of thinking but I do think it probably constitutes a conflation of terms. Revival is a word that breaks down into two important but unique components. The pre-fix "re" means to occur or attempt again. When we "retry" or "rearrange" we are doing something for a second time. The term "vive" comes from the root word for life. The idea here then is that revival is a reinvigoration of spiritual life in the hearts of God's people. Revival is not an act of conversion, revival is as John Piper defines it, "a fresh outpouring of God's life-giving Spirit on his people".

To be clear, we believe that revival always RESULTS in new converts but this confuses the reaction with the catalyst. Revival results in conversions because God's people are called to be faithful evangelists and this means that a fresh outpouring of God's Spirit will always generate a renewed emphasis on proclaiming the Gospel. Nevertheless, revival is a moment in time in which God reorients and re-energizes His people.

### A Roadmap

Now, the question before us is, how do we know when God is moving in such a way as to provide a fresh outpouring of God's life-giving Spirit on His people? Stated differently, are there certain indicators, or characteristics, of a genuine move of God? The answer is yes! The Bible provides us with helpful insights on the topic and those who have faithfully gone before us have helped distill those principles.

Stated simply, we don't have to invent a rubric for revival, we simply need to allow the Scripture to be our guide and we would be wise to listen to the voices of those who have been through moves of God before as those who have studied the subject and seen the reality of revival in person. One of those godly individuals was Jonathan Edwards. Edwards was a brilliant and faithful theologian/pastor who happened to be at the very center and start of the greatest revival in American history. The Great Awakening was a magnificent and genuine move of God that swept across this country. It began, in part, through the preaching ministry of Edwards as he rose to deliver a most powerful sermon entitled "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God." The sermon is one

of the great messages in Christian history and the result is almost unparalleled. As Edwards saw God move in his church, he recognized the genuine power of God to restore and revive His people but he also noticed that counterfeit individuals and movements attempted to wiggle their way into Awakening shortly thereafter. This observation prompted Edwards to write down 5 characteristics of revival. These characteristics are all grounded in one passage of Scripture (1 John 4). They form a marvelous grid for us to examine and discern the difference between true revival and satanic counterfeit.

### The 5 Characteristics of Revival

\*please note, this is not meant to be an exhaustive list. Things can be added, but nothing should be taken away

#### 1. Jesus is exalted in true revival

- a. This might sound obvious, but unfortunately, many supposed moves of God are really fixated on the people in the audience and not the Savior of the world
- b. So much of what passes for heartfelt Christianity today is truly man-centered
- c. However, when true revival happens, Jesus is the sole object of affection
  - i. 1 John 4:2-3 shares with us that this mark of calling on Jesus, preaching Jesus and glorifying Jesus is a mark of the Holy Spirit's work alone
- d. Be leery of movements that begin with commands... even if they are biblically accurate
  - i. "we need to love our neighbors"
  - ii. "you are the object of God's affection, the apple of His eye"
  - iii. "we can change this world"
- e. These things have a grain of truth in them, but they lack the indicative grounding of Christ
  - i. "We love our neighbor, because we have experienced the love of Christ"
  - ii. "we are the object of God's affection because Christ has atoned for our sins, absorbed God's right wrath towards us and reconciled us to the Father"
  - iii. "We can change this world but only through the indwelling Spirit who compels and empowers us and who is only present because of the finished work of Jesus."
  - iv. If the impetus of the move is that we can "do better" we miss the centrality of the Gospel assertion that we can do nothing apart from Christ
  - v. If we wish to see God move, we must abide in Jesus (see John 15) and any preacher/Christian worth his salt will make sure this is known
- f. To command without proclaiming Christ is to put the cart before the horse

- g. True revival can only come as the Son of man is exalted. It is as He is lifted up that all men are drawn to God's saving power (John 3:14) and it is only as the Son of man is lifted up that God's people are reacquainted and reinvigorated by God's power
  - h. A movement that knows something more than Christ and Him crucified and/or a movement that does not recognize and proclaim Christ and Him crucified is a movement that may have plenty of emotion, but it doesn't have the Spirit
  - i. How can I make such an absolute assertion? Because the Spirit has come to glorify Christ (John 16:14-15)... if the Spirit is there, Jesus will be central
2. Declaration of man's sin and his need to repent are foundational to a move of revival
- a. We see in verses 4-5 that John understood a real battle between good and evil
  - b. Christ's power comes to enliven His people so that they can be blessed, faithful and fruitful in this battle
    - i. However, if the Lord is going to reinvigorate, there must be a recognition by His people of the error of their ways and a true, Spirit-empowered, turn from their sin and pursuit of holiness
    - ii. Why? The answer is simple, God will not reinvigorate those who continue to run away from Him
  - c. This leads to a very important point: the very fact that revival is needed is a confession that we have strayed
    - i. Revival is a restoration of God's people back into life-giving relationship with Him
    - ii. However, this restoration only happens as we confess our sin (the very thing that has separated us from fellowship with Him) and confession most naturally follows loving but firm confrontation (see David/Nathan, Peter/Paul, Peter/Jesus)
  - d. Any movement that claims God's power in revival that shirks from confronting men about their unfaithful, sinful ways is not a move of God because God must deal with the cause of our lifelessness if we are going to be reinvigorated
    - i. A physician worth his salt must address the cause of the malady in his patient if he wishes to restore him to health. Likewise, our great Lord and Savior must declare to us the error of our ways and our need to turn from them if we are going to walk in life once again
    - ii. Stated simply, there is no revival without repentance because there is no life in sinful pursuits
  - e. While revival moves past the need to repent, repentance is the means that God has given to bring us back into life-giving relationship with Him

- f. Be leery of movements that don't start here
  - i. If we begin with "loving our neighbor" (I would encourage you to go back and listen to the sermon that started the supposed revival at Asbury) without a recognition that we have not been faithful to love our God, then we have not dealt with the real problem in our hearts
    - 1. A lack of love for neighbor is a huge problem, but it is the result of a lack of love and obedience to God which is the greater offense
    - 2. Stated differently, we will only faithfully love our neighbor when we are walking in obedience and love towards our God. This is why Jesus orders the commandments as follows (my paraphrase):
      - a. First, love God
      - b. Second, love others
  - ii. Furthermore, our failings, short-comings, and sins certainly have ramifications in this world but our sin is ultimately an affront to God, and therefore, it must be dealt with accordingly (Psalm 51:4)