

When God Shows Up in Church

By Dave Butts

Christians around the world are praying for revival. What are they praying for and do they have good reason to expect revival? Is revival something God wants to do for His people today? To answer these questions, we need to understand that God has always worked in the area of revival with His people. From the earliest days of Israel, on through the history of the Church, God's method of dealing with His people has been to grant periodic times of special blessing in which His presence is made manifest and His people are drawn back to Him. The result of that is a changed society.

Perhaps the clearest view of revival can be seen by looking back at Israel in the Old Testament. Historians tell us that there are seven major revivals in the Old Testament. I would suggest that if you take away the word "major" there are somewhere between fifteen and sixteen revivals. Very clear, distinct times, in which the people of God were restored to a time of religious excitement, enthusiasm, and commitment with a resultant change in society.

You typically see something like this: Israel, as a people, called by God to make a difference...called to be a light to the Gentiles. You see them under a leader such as Moses or David, people who are living a life that causes them to be set apart from the people around them. They are worshipping God, they're holding on to His Word, they are doing what God wants them to do. Then, typically, after a generation or so when a leader has died you see Israel begin to slide. You begin to see them move farther and farther away from obedience to the Word of God. They begin to accept idolatry from the tribes around them. Pagan practices begin to come in, with acts of

immorality and all the problems associated with that – eventually times of war and even slavery.

Typically at this point of decline there arises a remnant of people who begin to pray. They begin to cry out to God asking the Lord to save them. Then, in His own timing, God sends a leader and there comes a time of revival when they begin to throw off their idolatry and paganism and restore once again the true worship of Jehovah. They begin to again hold on to the Word of God. The nation experiences a time of national prosperity, spiritual excitement and religious significance that lasts for about a generation. Then you see the cycle begin to happen again. Over and over again throughout the Old Testament: revival and decline, revival and decline.

As you move into the New Testament you see a group of people who were born in a time of revival. But we know historically that it did not last. Through the history of the Church you once again see the exact same pattern of revival and decline. It seems to be the way God deals with His people. Down through the years many countries have experienced periodic times of revival. Within the United States we have experienced three times of national revival, known as the Great Awakenings. During these times, God moved and changed the course of our nation. Many of us believe that God is getting ready to do it again in our day, in our age.

What is this thing called revival? I believe that revival is the Church waking up to the presence of Jesus in her midst. It is nothing more and nothing less than you and I beginning to experience what we already know theologically and intellectually. You believe that Jesus is with you. Why? Because He said He would be. You don't necessarily believe it because you feel Him, but just because Jesus said it. He said that where two or three are gathered together there am I in your midst. You also have to believe Colossians 1:27: "*Christ in us, the hope of glory.*"

We believe that Jesus is present when we gather as the Church. But we don't act that way. That is not the way things happen on Sunday. You know why I know your church needs revival? The reason I know your church needs revival is when church services ended last Sunday, you went home. What would happen if Jesus was there? Let's just suppose Jesus was there. Would you be looking at your watch? Would you be eager to leave? One of the characteristics of the great revivals was extended times of worship. They never wanted to end the service. Now obviously people had to leave, they had to take care of physical things, they had jobs that they had to go to, but as soon as they were done they were back, because that was where God was. They wanted to be in on the action. They wanted to be where God was. They wanted to experience His presence.

I want to suggest to you that revival is not strange or mystical. It is simply the Church waking up to the presence of Christ in her midst. It is almost as though God reaches out and slaps us and we wake up and we realize God is there. That is what revival is. It is God shaking us. It is God waking us up. And we recognize that Jesus really is here.

We are desperate for that in our nation today. I am not in any way a critic of the Church. The more I travel the more I fall in love with the Church of Jesus Christ. I am seeing so many wonderful things happen. Christians are doing wonderful things in the name of Jesus, acts of love, mercy and self-sacrifice. It is amazing what is happening today, and has been happening for years. We are doing all we know to do. But it isn't working.

Most of the churches have all kinds of activities. They've tried all kinds of programs. They've given and done everything they know how to do to get the Church going and to impact society. But in all that has happened in the last fifty years in the Church in the US, are we a more moral and ethical nation because of what we have been doing as a Church? It is unbelievable when we consider the tremendous acts of

sacrifice, service and ministry in the last fifty years in the Church, and yet it is apparent that the Church is going one way and our nation is moving the opposite way as fast as it can.

In a very real sense, we are at this wonderful point of despair. We are at a wonderful point of hopelessness in which the Church is beginning to recognize that we have been doing everything we know how to do and it is not working. It is time for revival. It is time to humble ourselves before God in prayer and ask Him to make Himself known in the midst of His people so that our nation can be saved and our world impacted for Christ.

How does revival come? Any student of revival will tell you that there has never been a revival without a movement of prayer. God always calls His people to prayer in anticipation of revival. I would ask you today to get serious about praying for revival. We need to shift our prayer focus to the issues that are close to God's heart, especially that His people, His Church, would wake up and discover the presence of Jesus in our midst.

When that happens, our lives become different. When Jesus is there, suddenly things that we accepted before, are no longer acceptable. Some of the things that go on in our church and in our society are changed because it is the Lord who is present. That is why in those great revivals in the past, there was a bit of emotionalism. Suddenly they came into a church service and there was Jesus. Now they did not see Him in the flesh, but there was a powerful sense of the presence of Jesus. What do you suppose happens if you come into a church service during a revival and there is a strong sense of the presence of Jesus and you've been sinning all week? When you come into the presence of the awesome holiness of God suddenly there is weeping, crying out, and sometimes even falling down before God in repentance.

Heaven-sent revival is our only hope. We don't have answers. We don't know what to do. We don't have any programs in our churches that are changing whole communities and our society. It's just not happening. What we need is God.

How do you pray for revival? Psalm 85 is a good place to begin: *"You showed favor to Your land, O Lord. You restored the fortunes of Jacob. You forgave the iniquity of Your people and covered all their sins. You set aside all Your wrath and turned from Your fierce anger. Restore us again, O Lord our Savior, and put away Your displeasure toward us. Will You be angry with us forever? Will You prolong Your anger through all generations? Will You not revive us again, that Your people may rejoice in You?"*

Based on that passage we will find ourselves praying, "Lord, revive us again, do it again in our day." We will come before God saying, "Lord, this is what you have done and this is what we want you to do in our life and in our nation.

Dave Butts (1953-2022) was the co-founder and president of Harvest Prayer Ministries. His popular prayer guide, [*Asleep in the Land of Nod*](#) has been used by hundreds of churches to help their congregations pray for revival.