

Refreshed

I trust you have all had a refreshing time over the summer, particularly if you were able to get away for a holiday. Now is the time for us to look forward to all the good things God has in store for us as we embark on our autumn programme of Church activities.

We are launching our new Church session with a **Week of Prayer** during the first full week in September. The theme for the week will be **'Revival'** – a subject we have been looking at on Sunday mornings over the past few weeks. I realise that several of our regular attenders have been on holiday for part of the series, so I am devoting this News Letter to a résumé of what the Lord has been teaching us.

Revival!

(a) What do we mean by 'revival'?

We have learned that *revival is about people being restored to their normal level of vitality.*

- **Samson** was revived *physically*, with a refreshing drink of water, after exhausting himself fighting against the Philistines (Judges 15.19).
- **Jacob** was revived *emotionally*, after discovering that his favourite son, whom he had presumed to be dead, was alive after all. His *spirit* revived on receiving such good news! His old zest for living and sense of adventure returned (Gen 45.27).

So *spiritually speaking*, we can say that *revival is about God restoring his people to what should be their normal level of spiritual vitality.* True revival doesn't create abnormal or freakish conditions. Genuine revival restores God's people to the dynamic and effective, Spirit-filled and Spirit-empowered people he always intended us to be!

(b) When is revival needed?

Our Lord's letters to the seven churches of Revelation 2 & 3 indicate when spiritual revival is sorely needed. It is needed whenever ...

- *people's love for Jesus has grown cool* (Rev 2.4);
- *morals have become lax* (Rev 2.14);
- *false teaching and practices are wrongly tolerated* (Rev 2.20-21);
- *God's people have grown lethargic*, or have fallen asleep on the job, so that unfinished business is waiting to be completed (Rev 3.1-3);
- *a sense of self-sufficiency has crept into the Church*, so that Jesus himself is side-lined instead of occupying centre stage. Self-sufficiency

inevitably leads to lukewarmness, because it is our on-going and conscious dependence on the Lord that keeps us spiritually red-hot (Rev 3.15-20)!

(c) How does revival occur?

Our Lord's letters to the seven churches of Rev 2 & 3 indicate that *revival begins in the local church*, before it spreads out and impacts its local community.

Revival begins when individuals determine to get real with God. The Bible's technical term for this is *'repentance'*. It's our Lord's common call to all his churches in need of reviving (Rev 2.5,16,21,22; 3.3,19).

Repentance is about us having a radical rethink. It's about us *'changing our mind'* - about ourselves and the way we are living. It's about us changing our attitude towards God, such that our whole life is set on a new course. Instead of living to please ourselves, we make it our goal to please Jesus (2 Cor 5.9). Instead of pursuing our own plans and ambitions, we humbly ask God what *he* wants us to do with our lives. Repentance is about us changing our attitudes and assumptions, our values and preferences, our ambitions and priorities. It's not simply about us feeling sorry for the mistakes we have made, though it includes that. Repentance is a very positive idea. It's about us turning our whole life around to face in the right direction – away from our innate self-centredness, so that we are once again truly living under the control and guidance of Jesus. *That's how revival begins* – with individuals who are willing to put their past behind them, in order to get real with God in the present, and for the future.

(d) Longings for revival

*Will you not revive us again,
that your people may rejoice in you?*
[Psalm 85.6]

Psalm 85 provides us with an example of people who longed for a spiritual revival in their own day.

- The sons of Korah *recalled God's past blessings*, and longed for them to be seen again in their own day and age (vs 1-3).
- So they were *realistic about their present failings*. They sensed God wasn't pleased with them (vs 5-6).
- In faith, they *reached out to God*, desiring him to become their greatest joy once again, so that his glory would fill their land. For when God's people are restored to their normal level of spiritual vitality, a whole nation can start to feel the effect (vs 6-13)!

(e) Conditions for revival

God is sovereign in his work of revival, as in everything else. His Spirit blows where he chooses to blow (John 3.8). But that doesn't mean we should simply sit around passively and wait for revival to drop out of the sky! In Luke 11.9-13, Jesus says to us, *Keep on asking and it will be given to you; keep on seeking and you will find; keep on knocking and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who keeps on asking receives; the person who keeps on seeking finds; and to the person who keeps on knocking, the door will be opened. Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, though you are far from perfect, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!*

If we want the church to be revived, we must ask God to send his Holy Spirit upon us in fresh power, to make us the kind of people God always intended us to be – pulsating with the dynamic of his life and love, impacting our local community for its good and for God's greater glory.

Isaiah 57.14-21 reveals the spirit we must bring to our requests for revival:

This is what the high and lofty One says, he who lives forever, whose name is holy: "I live in a high and holy place, but also with the person who is contrite and lowly in spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite."

[Isaiah 57.15]

- We must be **contrite** – literally, *crushed* (Isaiah 53.5,10) by a sense of our failure and sinfulness. God singles out *greed* (wanting more) and *wilfulness* (wanting our own way) as particularly heinous sins (57.17). Isaiah was acutely aware of his *sins of speech* (Isaiah 6.5), despite being God's foremost prophet of the day. He knew that his flawed casual remarks were indicative of the sinful state of his heart (Mat 12.24-27; Eph 4.29; James 1.26).
- We must also be **humble** in our requests for revival, not puffed up with a sense of pride or self-importance. Pride is pleased with the way things are; pride assumes that everything is OK. This is why pride is always the biggest hindrance to God being able to revive his people. Pride causes us to be blind to our faults and failings (1 Peter 5.5-6; Rev 3.17). Self-importance is also wrong, because it leads us to seek revival for the wrong reasons – for our own glory and prestige, instead of Christ's sole honour (Psalm 115.1).

(f) God's Means of revival

Revival is a work of God's Spirit. But what means does God's Spirit use to bring about revival? The answer comes in Psalm 19.7:

The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul.

God's Spirit uses God's Word as the primary means of reviving God's people, because it is 'perfect' for such a vital task – for at least two reasons.

God's Word is able to convict us of our sin, like nothing else can. Psalm 19.12 asks how we can discern our *hidden faults*, the ones to which we are blind. The Bible is like a mirror, enabling us to see ourselves as God sees us, revealing failings we would otherwise be unaware of (James 1.21-25). It is also like a sword, penetrating deeply to judge our innermost thoughts and attitudes (Heb 4.12-13). This is why every Christian should read God's Word regularly and systematically. For unless we are convicted of our sin – indeed, crushed by a sense of its enormity and seriousness – we can't be revived by God. Revival is for the truly contrite. It is for those who are crushed by a sense of their moral failure. So long as we think we are doing OK, judging ourselves by the standards and norms of those around us – instead of measuring ourselves against God's Word – we will miss out on God's blessings. *God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble* (1 Peter 5.5). Part of the humility we need to have before God, is the humility to allow ourselves to be judged by his Word.

God's Word is also able to nourish our lives, like nothing else can. Health officials tell us that '*Breast is best*'. Mother's milk contains all sorts of antibodies to help a baby fight off infections and diseases. Similarly, God's Word is the purest form of *spiritual milk* available to us (better than Christian books or tapes). So we should *crave it like newborn babies, in order to grow up in our salvation* (1 Pet 2.2). It is also likened to *solid food*. As we digest it, applying its principles to the everyday situations we find ourselves in, we *train ourselves to distinguish between what's right and what's wrong* (Heb 5.14).

The greatest revivals of Scripture came about when God's people took God's Word seriously:

- in the days of Hezekiah (2 Chron 30.6);
- in the days of Josiah (2 Chron 34.14ff);
- In the days of the returning exiles, under Haggai (Ezra 7.14), Ezra and Nehemiah (Neh 8.3,9).

When we get into God's Word, and God's Word gets into us, we're well on the road to revival!

David Hunt