**What Is Spiritual Renewal or Revival?**

As we continue our series **“Questions And Answers”** we want to deal with an issue that has been at the forefront lately. It started at Asbury University in Kentucky and ended up spreading to other campuses, churches, and into the lives of individuals. We are talking about a heaven-sent revival.

But what is revival? And how do we experience it. What are the marks of Biblical renewal and revival (I am using these words interchangeably). The English word “revive” is found in Scripture, as is the concept of revival, which we will define soon. There are, as we begin, important points to keep in mind regarding revival, basically, what it is not:

**1) It is not man-centered.** To the credit of the Asbury campus, when big name Christian speakers or artists have contacted the campus to offer their services, Asbury said “no.” If the people wanted to come and find a seat and join in with what was happening that would be okay but they did not want anything to take away from what God was doing. It was a student and staff led movement.

**2) It is not emotion driven though emotions can and usually are a part of it.** Revival does not have to be emotional, though it can be. But emotions do not necessitate that revival is happening. Revival takes place when we sense our need of a holy God more than anything else.

**3) It is not the same as evangelism.** There are churches that hold “revivals” and have as a goal to reach people for God’s kingdom, which every church is supposed to do. But revival is for those who claim to be Christ followers. It is the renewing of our hearts and minds before God. We will want others to know God.

**4) It cannot be forced or manufactured.** Just because churches have meetings with the idea of seeking revival, that does not mean that revival has come. Revival is the Holy Spirit moving in people’s lives and that is not held to a calendar. Charles Finney, back in the 1800’s, held to this thought, that if you follow certain steps, you can make revival happen. I disagree with that thinking.

**5) It is not about gifted preachers or leaders.** Revival has started with people who were unknown, or not the best preachers. Jonathan Edwards of way back when was not a great orator but God used him to bring renewal. One revival came out of a prayer meeting started by a former businessman. That is the point behind revival. It is not about the persons doing something, but it is about being obedient to God.

So, what is revival. One of the Hebrew words translated as **“revive” means to “turn back, to return.”** It is used in various ways in the OT. It does not always refer to revival as we are talking about this morning, but a revival is a **“turning back, a returning”** to God and what He expects of us. And, as we shall see, it requires a focus on His holiness and Who He is, His attributes.

When we look at revival as we are about to define it, it is a concept, seen in God moving among people. There are certain elements that can lead to revival as we shall see, so words and definitions do not cover the entire topic. To be fair, people have different opinions regarding what revival is.

I want to clarify something before diving into the Word of God. If we do not have some personal revival, does that mean we are unspiritual. The answer to the latter question is “no.” Revival is personal. A person who is growing and consistently seeking God, learning, and becoming more like Christ, is literally experiencing revival regularly because they deal with sin and are wanting to obey and follow God.

I want to make sure that no one feels guilty if they have not had some great movement of the Holy Spirit in their life like they hear about when it comes to revival. At the same time, I think that there is the need to constantly do a spiritual reflection of our lives and if necessary, to deal with things that we need to before God - confession of sin, lack of joy in our life, no desire to pray or study the Word of God.

**Richard Owen Roberts** has a definition of revival that I think does justice to what we are talking about this morning. He writes in his book, **“Revival,”**

**“In using the term *revival*, I am speaking of *an extraordinary movement of the Holy Spirit producing extraordinary results.”*** As **Roberts** has also said, **“Wherever God is, true revival can occur.”**

**Key:** An important fact to keep in mind as we continue this morning is that revival is not just a “caught in the moment” event. It yields results. The fruit of revival is seen in the aftermath of what took place. What changes were made in people’s lives? What is someone doing now to further the kingdom of God that maybe they were not doing before? What has God taught them? What sins are they seriously dealing with? How is God being glorified in their lives?

Let’s dive into a Biblical example of revival that took place in the nation of Judah under the leadership of King Josiah, the greatest king between the two divided nations of Israel and Judah. No one pursued God like Josiah did who was in the leadership role of leading either of the two nations.

In fact, sadly, the northern kingdom of Israel never had one king who wanted to follow God. Judah had a handful and the greatest and the one who hungered for God the most was Josiah. His life is noted in **2 Kings 22-23 and 2 Chron. 34-35**. It is here that we see God at work.

There are characteristics that proceed revival, but we do not have time to cover those this morning. There are books and articles written on revival that can teach us what those particular things are.

Now, to our story. Josiah’s father, grandfather, Manasseh, was a wicked king. We see that in **2 Kings 21:1-18**. He promoted idolatry, sacrificed his own child on a pagan altar and polluted the temple of God with altars to false gods. He may have been the worse king Judah ever had though that would be debatable. Amon, Manasseh’s son, and the father of Josiah, was also wicked **(2 Kings 21:19-26)**.

By the time Josiah is made king, he is only eight years old, which means he had a lot of coaching in his early years, and the nation of Judah is in turmoil and far from God.

Note **2 Chron. 34:1-7**. What occurs here, when Josiah is 16 years old, is the beginning of revival and it is the first point I want to make.

**1) Renewal can happen when we get desperate to know God.** What is more important than God? Most of us would say “nothing” of course. But our actions speak louder than words. Now, I am not saying that we must be in church every Sunday, that we cannot take time off, and if we miss a Sunday, that we need revival. Please understand that I do not mean that at all. We are not legalistic here.

We also know some people have to work on Sunday and others physically cannot be here. But if things consistently take precedent over being together with other believers because we would rather do such and such than worship with others, that can spiritually affect us.

People, work, hobbies, many things can take the place of God in our life. For Israel, it was worshipping false gods, idolatry. We will talk more about idolatry in a moment. Let me parallel this passage, **2 Chronicles 34**, with one in the NT.

The Lordship of Christ is a forgotten doctrine in revival or renewal. Jesus is Lord, Master, Boss, CEO of our life, regardless of whether we fully understand that or not. As Lord, Jesus is the center and guide of our life. We look to Him to lead us, direct us, which happens by the work of the Holy Spirit living in us. See **Lk. 6:46**, where Jesus asked probably the most piercing question possible, **“Why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and not do what I tell you.”**

One verse later, in **Lk. 6:46-47**, Jesus is clear that the person who **“hears” and “does”** what He says shows that they are His followers. This is from the mouth of Christ Himself.

The Lordship of Christ is not optional for the Christian. We can choose to be a disobedient follower, but we cannot consistently ignore Jesus’ rightful place in our life and think that somehow it is okay for Him not to be in charge. Again, that does not mean we cannot take some Sundays off. I take some of them off. We are simply talking about prioritizing our lives and putting God in His proper place.

Now, with that little side out of the way, back to **2 Chron. 34**. Josiah, sadly, would live to only be 39 years old but during his time as king of Judah, he led that nation back to God. It means that through his leadership, God worked in the lives of people as they refocused their personal lives and what was important. Not everyone would get on board with what was happening, and we would not expect that.

Note **vss. 1-7** of this chapter. As we shall see, the temple, a major part of the Jewish worship is in a mess. Josiah will deal with that but first, he must deal with the issue of idolatry. Before he jumped into taking down all the idols and altars dedicated to these false gods, we need to look at **vss. 2-3**.

**Vs. 2** says that Josiah did what was right in the sight of the Lord. Despite having an evil grandfather and a wicked father, this young man, chose to follow God. I think his mom played a major role in this. That is my thought. She is noted in **2 Kings 22:1**. Her name was Jedidah. We know nothing more about her.

But think about this. She was the wife of Amon, at least one of his wives and yet, I believe, though most copies of the Bible had been lost, it seems, since the time of Manasseh, she followed the God of Israel and passed that on to Josiah. I cannot prove this but that is what I think based on Josiah’s life.

As **Alfred Edersheim** also points out, there were probably others who had a positive influence on Josiah as well, possibly including Jeremiah, Zephaniah, the prophetess Huldah, and some in the priesthood who had stayed true to God despite Manasseh and Amon’s evilness.

Back to **2 Chron. 34**. It also says in **vs. 2** that not only did he do right in the eyes of the Lord, but he did not turn aside to the right hand or to the left. He stayed focused on God and what God wanted in his life. And that is seen in what follows. Now to the first part of that verse.

The word **“right”** in **vs. 2** means **“what is pleasing, agreeable to, righteous.”** It says that he chose to also **“walk”** in the ways of David when David was doing the right thing. The word **“walk” means “to follow the precepts of God”**, here, I believe, in this verse, is the meaning.

The idea of **“turning aside”** means that Josiah did not depart from God by getting caught up in what had happened to the nation. He was zeroed in on knowing the Lord. He knew that he could not influence others unless he had it together. And they did not have many Scriptures. In fact, there is a good chance that the Word of God (the first five books, probably Deuteronomy for sure) had been lost and not followed for decades because of the wickedness of the previous kings in Judah. Yet, Josiah followed the Lord.

Eight years later, and this may indicate that they may have had portions of the Torah, as the temple is being repaired a copy of God’s Word is found. In **vs. 8** we meet three men who are assigned by Josiah with the task of repairing the house of God.

One of these men, Shaphan, befriended Jeremiah the prophet and was the one who brought the book of the Law (the Bible) to Josiah **(2 Chron. 34:14-18)**. A second important point is that if we want renewal or revival to happen we must, as we have just noted briefly but now in more detail,

**2) For renewal to happen, we must deal with any idols in our life.** We talked about this briefly in our first point but let us focus specifically on this when it comes to desiring renewal.

**Vs. 3** is a key when it comes to idolatry or any sin that controls our life. We must be active in dealing with the issues that are keeping God from doing what He wants to. Whether it be selfishness, a situation, a job, a person, who we have put above the Lord, we need to deal with it. Any sin, from gossip to slander, to greed, anger, cannot be left on the table. We must be willing to deal with it. It is not easy to do that.

Josiah, at 16 years old, began to **“seek”** the Lord. This word means **“inquire, consult”** and here as BDB has it, **“seek God in prayer and worship.”** It carries the idea of learning and studying also. Figuratively, it means that Josiah applied himself to know God. He then dealt with the idolatry plaguing the nation. He was twenty when he began to deal with the sins of Judah.

That is seen in the word **“purge”** in **vs. 3**. Here the word has the idea of cleansing the land, of purifying it of all false idols and places of idol worship. It is an action word. We must be willing to do what is necessary to rid ourselves of idols in our life. It focuses on dealing with our attitudes, our motives.

In **vss. 4-7** we see that Josiah left no stone unturned and he dealt directly with the idolatry problem in Judah. And I have no doubt that some in the nation did not like what he was doing but it did not stop him from doing what was right. We must do the same personally.

**Point:** This may mean an attitude adjustment, a decision to let God control every area of our life, recalibrating our priorities, tearing down the things that control us that are not godly. For some it may mean less TV time. For others, it is cutting back on hobbies that are controlling our lives. Or putting up boundaries with some people to keep ourselves from forgetting the Lord’s prominence in our life.

Also, as a king he was actively involved **(vss. 4, 7)** in dealing with idolatry. We must actively pursue dealing with the things God shows us in our life. This leads to a third and very important point,

**3) Renewal requires us not being passive, but active, in our pursuit to do what is right and God honoring.** Others helped Josiah to carry out this cleansing of idolatry, but as noted, he took part in it. He was active in getting rid of anything that would draw the people back to idolatry.

It is true that we have to allow the Holy Spirit to work in our lives and to help us experience revival. But as **Phil. 2:12-13** reminds us, there is a part we must play while allowing God to chisel away the things in our life that are not good, and to help us grow into the image of Jesus **(Rom. 8:29)**.

We cannot sit idly by and expect to grow in our faith. We need God, every minute of every day. Unless we are willing to do our part, our spiritual growth will wane or go backwards. Again, this is not about being legalistic. We will miss devotions some days because of things happening. We just must never become complacent or settle for where we are spiritually. We must be active in our growth. A fourth point is,

**4) There must be a desire to be open to God working.** This means setting aside time to get to know Him through the Word and prayer. This means seeking Him by study and worship. It also means allowing the Word of God to show us where we need to improve in our life, to give us wisdom about how to live. The nation of Judah was a mess and Josiah, as he sought the Lord, knew that action had to be taken. Fifth,

**5) Renewal requires dealing with sin (repentance).** This is tied to our second point. We cannot take God’s convicting work of the Holy Spirit lightly. A key word, “repentance” is a change of direction, not just a change of mind. In other words, when Josiah looked around and saw the sin in Judah, he knew he had to do something about it.

When God puts His finger on something in our life that is wrong and sinful, are we willing to allow Him to touch our lives, to bring us to repentance or are we too stubborn and proud to allow Him to work? Are we willing to do business with God when it comes to our spiritual life.

Now, there is something that happens as things progress in Judah. As temple repairs begin on the house of the Lord a discovery is made - the Word of God is found. This leads to our final thought this morning,

**6) The Word of God must be at center of renewal.** We have already mentioned some things that revival is not. But one thing that leads to revival and is the centerpiece of it is the Word of God. It is the Scriptures that God uses to connect with us, to give us direction, to teach us theology.

As the temple is being repaired, Hilkiah the priest discovered the Book of the Law given through Moses. The Word of God as we know it was found. He gave it to Shaphan, a leader in Josiah’s government, who in turn brought it to the king **(2 Chron. 34:14-18)**.

Note what happens as God’s Word is read to the king. Now, keep in mind that this is just the first five books of the Bible, but God’s Word is soul searching and it is God’s communicating to us His will, His ways. When the king heard the Word being read in **vs. 19**, he tore his clothes, a sign of mourning and humility. Josiah realized that Judah had suffered because of its disobedience to God and His Word.

This book is the inspired, inerrant, Word of God. God speaks to us through His Word. When we speak of the Word being the source book for revival, our response, obviously, to what we read and hear, is crucial. Josiah sent a group of men to the prophetess Huldah to hear from her. She told them that the people would be judged for their disobedience but regarding Josiah, note what she says in **2 Chron. 34:26-28**. This is because of his willingness to respond properly to the Word of God.

Note that Josiah wanted to hear from God **(vs. 26)**. That is why he sent trusted men to Huldah. Despite the judgment to come on Judah (since God knew what they would be like down the road), Josiah was given different words.

**Vss. 27** gives us a list of attitudes needed for revival to happen as it did in the life of Josiah. **“Because” or “on account of”** what is said in this verse, God would not deal with Judah during Josiah’s lifetime, but He knew where they would head after Josiah was gone. That is why we noted earlier that the fruit or evidence of revival is crucial to the reality of renewal.

**First**, we need to have a **“tender”** heart. **2 Kings 22:19** has the word **“penitent.”** But let’s stick with **“tender.”** Josiah’s heart was **“soft, responsive.”** This does not mean he was weak, for he was far from that. He was responsive to the Lord; his life was open to what God wanted to do. He made no excuses.

**Second**, we need to be **“humble”**, a word that we have already mentioned. As Josiah looked at the Lord, he saw himself in need of God. Just like the prophet Isaiah in **Isa. 6**, Josiah saw God for Who He was and bowed before Him. He did not compare himself to others, he saw himself before God.

We literally need to bow before the Lord as we consider His greatness, His amazing love and Who He is. As **Gesenius said, the word here means “to submit oneself, to behave submissively” before God.** There is no place for pride and arrogance when it comes to revival. We must bow before the Creator of the universe and take seriously what He expects of us.

**Third**, we must take sin seriously. We have mentioned this, but it is reiterated regarding Josiah in **vs. 27**. He humbled himself, he wept and tore his clothes, a sign of mourning over sin. His heart was tender to what needed to be dealt with for his nation and himself. If we want to experience spiritual growth, these things must also be a part of our life. This is not just about renewal or revival. It is about God leading us every day.