

## **Preparing our Hearts for Revival**

(Psalm 85, Habakkuk 3:2, Isaiah 64:1 & 1 John 1: 5-9)

*By the Revd Don Attenborough*

### **The Great Need of the Hour!**

As we look at the state of our world today with its increasing ungodliness, violence, crime, economic difficulties, wars and rumours of wars that may draw world powers into another world war, its not hard to see that the judgement of God hangs over us and the time of our Christ's Second Coming therefore must be very close indeed; but before he is fully seen by all there is of course the rapture of the Church! (1 Thess 4: 15-18) The hour is late, as someone has described the timing of the Second Coming of Jesus, just *'five minutes before midnight'* in the history of the world; the midnight moment of our Lord's return like a *'thief in the night'* who comes unexpectedly; but God is merciful and continues to shake the nations and is, I believe, about to shake our nation bringing the revival we so desperately need!

It has been said that *'When Christianity retreats, evil steps in to fill the gap!'*; that is just what is happening in our nation today, the Church has become generally worldly and lukewarm in its love for Christ and is in great need of hearing and acknowledging the wake up calls God is issuing in many ways. False religions increase all around us and get stronger year on year along with a growth anti religious thinking; I say 'generally' because there are some areas where the church is indeed growing, and I obviously rejoice when I hear of those various communities of believers in this or that part of our country faithfully serving and witnessing for Christ in their communities, and bearing fruit for him.

I am convinced then that the rapture, that time when Jesus takes his Church out of the world just prior to his Second Coming and before the start of the great tribulation, is at hand, but God is faithful and does not want any to perish (2 Peter 3:9); so he waits for his people to pray as never before for an awakening of the Church! Such an awakening will be a time of refreshing, renewal and revival on a scale, I believe, unlike any other before it within our nation! It will be a time when God will pour out the Holy Spirit drawing the Church back to a deeper relationship with him and this will result in a fresh and re energised emphasis on evangelism when thousands upon thousands will be converted to Christ! True God sent revival of the church has always brought not just renewal for the Church, but widespread conversion to Jesus.

What we need today more than anything else is to see God's glory falling on our nation as he fell on many occasions in the life of Israel in the Old Testament, and the Church in the New Testament, to restore them back to where they should be in their relationship with him; they were times when the glory of God descended to the amazement of the people. What we need in the UK today is a mighty manifestation of the glory of God in revival power with signs following! Revival is when God reveals himself in awesome holiness and irresistible power; it is a time, as one Christian writer expressed it,

*“...when he visits the world of men and women to impart a fresh vision of his power and grace, which simultaneously reveals our sinfulness, inadequacy and desperate need of his mercy. During times of revival God's people are restored from backsliding, carelessness and inactivity and they become preoccupied with the things of God; they become intensely prayerful, attending God's house more frequently for fellowship and worship, they develop a hunger for the preached word which illuminates and powerfully penetrates the hearts of its hearers bringing conviction of our sin. Believers develop a new passion for souls and become deeply concerned about the spiritual welfare of the lost.”* Some say *‘It is not revival we need but repentance’*. Study again the history of revival, it begins with repentance and renews and refreshes the souls of spiritually dead believers!

In the Welsh revival of 1905 the nation was changed in a matter of weeks. Thousands upon thousands of unsaved people were, in a short time, moved by a heavenly influence to get right with God. The public houses and places of leisure were almost emptied and work areas were ablaze with talk about salvation; the old hymns were sung on the way to, and down the mines and new ones were composed; the churches over-flowed with the unconverted wanting to get saved from God's coming judgement on the world for its sin and rejection of his Son Jesus Christ.

Revival is a sovereign act of God that renews God's people through repentance and a fresh baptism in the Holy Spirit with major affects on the whole community, or communities where it starts; the fire of the Spirit then spreads out consuming all in its path! For God's people it's a fresh discovery of Jesus and a fresh baptism of Holy Spirit fire, yet it is also God's response to the heart cry of his people in prayer for their nation, their cities, their towns, their villages, their local communities, their neighbours and their unsaved family!

The outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost was, I believe, never meant to end; the Spirit fell and thousands of people were converted to faith in Christ. Yes, it all began at Pentecost 2000 years ago, but time and again God's people have lost their way and in his mercy through the centuries God has stepped in and revived them again and again sending times of refreshing and fulfilling his promise to pour water on the spiritually dry ground; he is still doing so around the world today! In this way God fulfils and keeps his promise in Ezekiel 34:26 *“And I will cause the shower to come down in its season; there shall be showers of blessing.”* I am reminded as I write of an old ‘Sankey’ hymn which has the chorus:

*“Showers of blessing, Showers of blessing we see,*

*Mercy drops round us are falling, but for the showers we plead!”*

Yet there are those that argue there will be no revival and it is therefore useless spending time praying for it. If that were true, then I ask ‘why is it in the scriptures and why did the prophets of old plead with God for it?’ Isaiah cried out to God with the words, *“Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down that the mountains would tremble before you!”* Is that not a cry for renewal and revival? Isn't the

Psalmist cry in Psalm 85: 4 *“Restore us again, O God our Saviour”*, a heart felt plea for revival? Didn't Josiah, Ezra and Nehemiah, among others, see renewal and revival in their day? Yes they did! Why? Because God is merciful and loves his people, and none of us know when we have passed the point whereby judgement on a nation and on a sleeping Church has been reached and cannot be averted, so we here and read of revival throughout the history of the Church! Why has God given revival again and again if there is no promise?

The Gospel is being preached in every corner of the globe and increasing more and more through the internet, Christian television and radio and ever more Christian books being written and with copies of the bible now in almost every language! If we search the internet through Christian news sites we will discover amazing things happening in the Church; like in North Africa from Mauritania to Libya and in particularly in Algeria where Muslims are coming to Christ in large numbers! There is revival in Egypt among Coptic believers where churches are packed out; also in war-torn Iraq and in China where within a few years the nation is set to have the largest population of Christian in the world! We must not forget that the African continent as a whole has risen from 9 million Christians to 541 million in the last century, but as the archbishop of York John Sentamu said earlier this year, *“...it is renewal and revival, both at a personal and corporate level that are necessary today...Christians today must do a regular spiritual workout with honest self examination conducted in the searchlight of Christ's all seeing, ever gracious love.”*

The constant news of growth in the Christian faith and the news of renewal and revival around the world are both amazing and breathtaking; but it also points to the closeness of Christ's Second Coming when the full number of the saints has been gathered in and Jesus comes to collect them. (Romans 11: 25 & Mark 13: 26-27) In the meantime there is constant need to pray for renewal and revival for where there is renewal there can be revival and where there is revival there is always renewal!

In all the revival's I have ever read about, there is at their heart the spirit of prayer! The passage often quoted from the Old Testament when Christians are speaking of prayer about revival is that of 2 Chron 7:14, *“If my who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, the will I hear from heaven and forgive their sin and will heal their land.”* I believe, unlike some, that this text is ever true for us as it was for Israel, as all scripture through all generations is for the believer's instruction! (2 Tim 3:16)

### **How to Prepare our Lives for Revival**

Evan Roberts, a man wonderfully used in the Welsh revival in 1905, continually said that what prepares us for renewal and baptism in the Spirit is firstly confession of sin; I believe the same is true when we pray for revival today! Evan said firstly, *“If there are sins, or sins in the passed not confessed, we cannot have the Spirit. Therefore we must search, and ask the Spirit to search us”*; he went on secondly to say, *“If there is something doubtful in our life it must be removed.”*

Thirdly he said there must be “...total surrender to the Spirit... we must do all and say all he asks.” Fourthly Roberts said there must be among God’s people, “Public confession of Christ.” “These are the four things leading us to the promised blessing.” Even Robert’s initial words about confession of sin and holiness of life echo the Apostle John’s in 1 John 1: 7-9. “But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin. If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.”

Revival starts in the heart of God and I believe his heart today is to send a revival on our land such as the nation has never seen before; but our hearts have to be made ready through confession of sin and a return to holy living; this makes us ready for our prayers to be heard for such a fresh move of God. When sin is not confessed and repented of, heaven remains silent on pouring out forgiveness from God. (Matt 6:14-15) Sin in us must be dealt with and the need in our day in the Church is repentance and a determination to walk in the way of the Lord empowered by his Spirit! We must confess our sin and determine to ‘walk in the light as he is in the light’! We must pray “Create in me a clean heart O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.” (Psalm 51:10)

If we are honest with ourselves we will know that our lives do not shine out with enough evidence of the faith we say we profess. Sometimes our hearts even desperately desire a deeper relationship with Jesus, yet we remain nervous of the consequences and demands that such a new relationship requires. We desire that new relationship with Jesus, but whilst the desire is strong the flesh remains weak! This must change for us all, or we may never hear the words of our Lord when we stand before him, “Well done my good and faithful servant!” I am constantly being challenged about the depth of my own relationship with Jesus and my availability for him!

There are enemies in our soul and God wants to deal with them. There are secret sins, habits and even ways of living we have never seen as being offensive to God. The honest person will face the light that is our God and wants to get sin in their lives dealt with, sorted out, once and for all. You probably know already what God wants to deal with in your life and you have been holding back in dealing with it. Right now the Spirit of conviction may be rising within you and that conviction reveals God’s love for you and his desire to further bless you life in his service; his heart is to take you deeper into his love! How much more we love our Saviour when we have truly seen the depth of our sin and recognised again the wonder of the love that has dealt with it on the Cross! To love Christ more, to go deeper into the light, is to root out every sin the light shows up and receive the forgiveness of the one who loves us and gave himself for us on that Cross! If we doubt that our particular sin and failure can be forgiven, then we need to remember that the blood Jesus shed at the Cross cleanses us from every sin! (1 John 1: 9)

Many of us may have been incorrectly counselled over the years. We have been told to confess our sins and believe in Jesus and then count ourselves forgiven and okay with God; yet we may still be in agony

of soul over our sin and its consequences; why is this? It is because we have not yet received the Holy Spirit in our lives bringing new birth and assurance of salvation! We must know deep within that our sin has been forgiven and that we have obtained the assurance of it! Faith then moves on to involve our feelings as we feel the born again from above experience! The fruit of Spirit is love, joy, peace. These are feelings? We must not let go of God until we know for certain we are forgiven and saved from God's coming judgement on the world; we must discover in our innermost being that we are indeed forgiven. We must have the experience, as a friend of mine has many times preached, of '*knowing in our knower*' that we are right with God and heaven bound!

Duncan Campbell once said, "*The greatest emotional upset is when a person is born again!*" It is in that emotional upset we discover the great joy and peace of heaven that touches our emotions! We can only be saved by faith in Jesus, and we live from faith to faith, but we must move through faith into an encounter with the Holy Spirit who fulfils the promise that Jesus made that he and the Father would make themselves known to us! (John 14:21) In that move we will find the Spirit touching our emotions and feelings; the words of Jesus have no meaning unless they mean a 'feelings' encounter with him and his Father! We must have the witness of the Holy Spirit within us for he is the guarantee of peace with God; he brings the assurance of faith that motivates and empowers our life in Christ Jesus. (2 Corinthians 1:21-22) When the Spirit of Jesus comes into our lives we cannot fail to know his coming!

If we have no sense of Christ in us, which was the great secret of scripture revealed in Jesus, (Colossians 1:27) then it is a strong possibility that we have only intellectually accepted the gospel message, but have never known the assurance of faith that being born again of the Spirit brings; therefore we may not yet be fully saved at all and remain unconverted and still in our sin. This is partly why repentance starts in the house of God; it is to bring conviction of sin to the saint and conviction of sin on those who think they are saved and are not, and on those who know they are not saved at all! In the Hebrides awakening there was conviction and repentance in the home, at work, in the fields and on the roadside for many before even coming under the sound of the gospel or hearing the words of a preacher, such was the presence of God experienced during that period. We must know the Spirit of God is in us! We must be able to say with Job, "*I know my redeemer lives*". We must go on to know without a shadow of doubt that we have been baptised in the Holy Spirit and that Jesus lives in us by the presence of the same Holy Spirit! We must be Spirit empowered for service and the receivers of spiritual gifts or else we are just like earthly soldiers facing an enemy with no weapons to fight with!

Many of our churches are preaching a soft gospel these days; they teach so much of the love of God to comfort when there is sin to root out so that God can bless us more! These churches are often the ones packed out! This generation seems to refuse to accept the grim reality of sin! We must again preach the full Gospel! All sin must be rooted out of our lives!

In 1 John 1:7 we are told, "*But if we walk in the light as he (God) is in the light*" this indicates our calling; it repeats other scriptures like Romans 13: 14 "*...clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ...*" and 1 Peter 1: 15-16 "*But just as he who has called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for*

*it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy."* God is light and his light consists of purity, righteousness, truthfulness love and much more; in him there is no darkness at all and there must be none in us! This process of sin being rooted out and a new life of holiness continually being put on is called, as many of you will know already, sanctification, that which transforms us by the Holy Spirit's power working in us, into the image of Christ; a process only completed the day we pass from this world to the next! But it's not automatic! We have to work with the Holy Spirit in the changing process by doing the walking in the purity of life! "*His (God's) divine power*", writes the Apostle Peter, "*...has given us everything we need for life and godliness...*" There is no excuse!

Are we so walking in the light of God and are we acknowledging what that light is revealing and repenting of it? Is sin being rooted out in us by the Holy Spirit day by day so that we may go deeper with Jesus? I say again without apology that there needs to be fresh repentance in the church if we are to see revival! Too much of the world is in us and we need to cry out with the Palmist, "*Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.*" (Psalm 139:23-24) This is a constant challenge to me, and I ask myself again and again, am I more like Jesus than last month, last year; am I growing in grace and love like him? I should be!

Duncan Campbell, a man used in the Scottish Hebrides Islands revival of 1949 to 1952 said, "*Revival must be related to holiness and salvation.....There must be a hunger for holiness.*" We must give ourselves a spiritual check-up and ask the question, '*Do we hunger for holiness? Do we hunger for more of Jesus?*'

When we walk in the light as he (God) is in the light, then we have true fellowship with Jesus and one another; then we rediscovered again that the ever present blood of Jesus is ready to cover our sin, place our feet on solid rock again and fill us afresh with the Holy Spirit. (1 John 1:7) This constantly revolutionises and refreshes our spiritual lives; it brings personal renewal and revival! Let's walk in the light however uncomfortable at first it makes us feel, for renewal and revival depend upon it! The world waits to see the holiness of the living Jesus, revealed in us!

Obedience must also follow faith, genuine repentance and walking in holiness of life! We are commanded to live as Jesus lived in John's letter. (1 John 2:6) Are we walking in obedience? Are we walking in God's plan for our lives? Are we in the centre of that plan where the greater joy and peace can be found to sustain us in the trials of life and in our conflict with Satan, the world, and our sinful nature? (Eph 2:10) Is our desire to be always available for Jesus? Is he the first in our life and are we faithfully talking about him to others?

Did you know we can walk in the second best for years through living for self and not for Jesus? I know that from personal experience, but God waits to "*...restore the years the locusts have eaten.*" This is his promise to us always, and this text has been much on my mind of recent! (Joel 2:25)

I have served in the Church since I was 15 years old and have preached many sermons. I have undertaken almost every leadership role that Church life requires. I have been a youth leader, worship leader, home group leader, deacon, Sunday school teacher and Sunday school superintendent, a pastor for a number of years, and more! I have seen spiritual renewal with my own eyes and God moving powerfully in many people; at times I have so felt the presence of God that I desired not to leave that moment and like Duncan Campbell during the Hebrides awakening I have prayed that I might be taken then and there to glory; but I now see a lot of this activity for God as second best for my life because I was not walking in total obedience, yet nonetheless by his grace that activity was blessed; I believe things could have been so different if I had lived as close to Jesus as I should have been! You may be feeling the same, yet remember the text just quoted and draw near to God so he can draw near to you and thus you can find the years restored to you for further service for the kingdom!

As I have said already, I believe Jesus is coming soon and because I know he loves his Church I believe God will not forget our country and will have mercy upon us before judgement day arrives; he will send the rain of spiritual revival. This is what I constantly pray for and I long to see in my lifetime!

Some years ago I had a vision along with many others from around the Christian community in this country; it was of a map of the UK with lights reflecting God's glory in various parts of our land; suddenly those lights came together all around our coastline and God's glory shone everywhere! Was this just a dream of revival or was it the reality of things to come? I cannot say, but God is merciful!

Many of you have been prepared by God to hear this message today. Your spirit may be leaping within you as you read these words. God wants to take you deeper and use you in ways that will amaze you! He is waiting for you to say, *'O Lord, will you meet with me, will you bend me to your will!* He wants to root out sin so that your spiritual life may advance; he wants to see your love for him, your spiritual life and your prayer life, reach new depths!

When the prayer meetings in our churches and homes become the most well attended meetings, we will probably be in the midst of revival and yet not realise it; I often think we only know revival retrospectively, when we look back and remember the great things the Holy Spirit did in those times.

I heard one dear saint say, *"I think God wants us to live all the time in revival."* That person is probably right as I indicated earlier. I believe the church falls behind in its relationship with God, and that renewal and revival happen suddenly bringing us up dramatically to where we should be in our spiritual lives!

We need to get into a deeper prayer mode and plead with God to root out our sin, and when we have got right with the Lord and assurance of salvation has come again, plus refreshing new joy in Christ has been restored to us, we will need to go on to remind the Lord that he does not want any lost, that he promised to pour water on the dry ground. It is time to shed tears for the nations lost, our neighbours, our friends our loved ones before God's coming judgement on this world for its sinfulness and

rejection Christ Jesus. God waits to hear our cries for our land that he might pour out his Spirit again in mighty revival!

Those of you who have faithfully prayed over the years for revival are, I believe, about to have your prayers answered, but more prayer is needed! The prayer of faith never gives up! *“Call to me and I will answer you and I will tell you unsearchable things you do not know.”* The cost of revival is absolute surrender to God!

### **What to Expect in Revival**

Lastly, let me say that in revival, or any move of the Spirit of God, there will be an overflow of emotions. There is always great weeping over sin and great joy over forgiveness and assurance of it during revival; there will always be many different visible signs of the Holy Spirit at work, and of course there will the inevitable counterfeit of Satan ever present to spoil and destroy, but let God do his work as he wants to do it and be careful not to be in a hurry to speak out against what he is doing in case you find your self resisting the Spirit and being rebuked for it! (Acts 5: 39) If God is working the devil will be working as well, therefore watch out for the counterfeit, but be understanding of the effects of a holy God working his will as he moves in the lives of the saved and unsaved! As Jesus moves afresh by his Spirit in revival some manifestations may seem strange as he deals with sin , as he deals with demonic strongholds that have been holding people captive and as he sets people free. Hearts will melt with gratitude and emotions will run wild with indescribable joy, so let God do it his way!

Revival depends on God alone, but the Lord will respond to his people’s heart felt prayer for his Church to be renewed and revived and for the unsaved to find salvation! God also uses those in revival who are ready and willing to be his instruments! Are we ready?