**If/Then: Prayer and Revival**

**8-29-21**

When you read these verses, what word comes to mind for you?

*Then shall your light break forth like the dawn,*

*and your healing shall spring up speedily;*

*[Then] your righteousness shall go before you;*

*the glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard.*

*Then shall your light rise in the darkness*

*and your gloom be as the noonday.*

*11 And the Lord will guide you continually*

*[Then] you shall be like a watered garden,*

*like a spring of water,*

*whose waters do not fail.*

*12 [Then] you shall raise up the foundations of many generations; you shall be called the repairer of the breach,*

*the restorer of streets to dwell in.*

* What is this? What is the word that describes it all? Revival!
  + The revival of God’s people
  + The revival of God’s joy within His people
  + The revival of God’s presence among His people.
  + The revival of God’s power working through His people.

But there’s another prominent word that we find throughout this passage – a key word; a word that helps us understand how we enter into such a revival.

* This word actually occurs multiple times throughout the passage and is implied multiple more times.
  + In fact, it is the foundation of nearly every phrase.
  + The word is THEN

*THEN your light shall break forth*

*[THEN] your righteousness shall go before you*

*THEN you light shall rise in the darkness*

*[THEN] you shall be like a watered garden*

*[THEN] you shall raise up the foundations of many*

* + Do you know what this means?
* It means that Revival is the payoff, the result of, the natural consequence of some great IF.
  + Specifically, the IF we have been talking about for the last several weeks which is defined succinctly in 2 Chronicles 7:14 and is illustrated more fully here in Isaiah 58.

*14 IF my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways…*

*THEN I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land.*

* + THEN, I will revive them!
* For the last few weeks we have been examining the significance of this great IF/THEN statement for followers of Jesus today.
  + As with any good Bible study practice, we began by looking at what it would have meant to the to the *people identified with the name of God* to whom it was originally given – Israel.
    - The passage still spoke of the revival of the people of God,
      * But being that Israel was an actual geo-political people-group to whom God had given a specific tract of land, their revival would be closely tied to God’s blessing on that land and the spiritual formation of that people.
      * But the promise of God was that out of that people – the Jews – would come One who would bring revival to the whole world.
        + The restoration of a relationship between God and humanity for all who would believe by the sacrifice of the Jewish Messiah, Jesus – God’s own Son.
  + In Christ, a whole new people were formed, taken out of every ethnicity and race, language and nation on Earth.
    - A new people belonging to God who are called by His name; or as the Apostle Peter described it (1 Pet 2:9-10):

*9 But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. 10 Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God.*

* + And as God’s newly formed people – the people who bear His name – we have discovered that this great IF/THEN statement of 2 Chronicles 7:14 still holds true.
    - The conditions of revival for God’s people remain the same, even though parameters of revival are no longer limited to a narrow geographic region.
* So, for the last several weeks, without knowing it, we have been looking at the conditions necessary for Revival in the Church – the IF part of this great IF/THEN statement.
  + What does it mean to be a people who are called by the name of God.
    - Who can pray with Jesus, saying, *Our Father*?
    - And to whom is given the privilege and responsibility as His children to bear both His name and His will *on earth as it is in heaven.*
  + We have examined what it means to humble ourselves before God in prayer by seeking His will and aligning ourselves with it.
    - And have discovered that our wicked ways include seeking to accomplish our will by our means rather than turning toward God and submitting to His plans and methods.
  + I urge you, if you’ve missed any of these messages to go back and listen to them on the app or the Rock web site.
    - For the THEN of today’s message is inextricably tied to the IF found in those messages.

But today, we finally come to the THEN, and this THEN is nothing less than Revival.

* But before we can talk about it, we have to agree on two major questions: First, what is Revival?; and second, is Revival needed in the Church today?
* Now to many of us, we may think that the answer to the first question is self-evident.
  + After all, if you have been a part of Evangelicalism for any significant amount of time, then you have probably been called upon to pray for revival on multiple occasions.
    - I know I grew up being taught to pray for revival.
      * And revival, at least in my setting, was defined as great movement of God where the Gospel was proclaimed and tens of thousands, if not millions, would turns their lives over to Christ and be saved.
    - So, we would host revival services in our churches or organize city-wide crusades to which we would be encouraged to invite our unbelieving neighbors and friends and in which gifted Evangelists like Billy Graham, Luis Palau, or Greg Laurie would come and proclaim the Gospel.
    - Or we would organize door to door campaigns or carry out phone tree calls, or massive youth events all with the purpose of starting a “revival” in our land.
      * And as we prayed for these services or events we would pray for “revival”.
      * In fact, in many instances we would even quote 2 Chronicles 7:14 as we did it.
  + But that is not the kind of “revival” that 2 Chronicles 7:14 is talking today.
    - In fact, such a movement of God – a great harvest of souls –doesn’t usually take place until AFTER a revival occurs.
      * And this is where the confusion sets in.
    - You see, what the church often calls “revival” is actually what has historically been known as an “Awakening”.
      * So, for example, back in the 1730’s to the 1770’s both Great Britain and the American Colonies experienced what has been called the First Great Awakening.
        + During that time, thousands of people responded to the proclamation of the Gospel through the preaching of men like Jonathan Edwards in the Colonies, the Wycliff brothers in Great Britain and George Whitfield on both sides of the Atlantic.
      * Then again, during the first third of the 19th Century a Second Great Awakening came upon America.
        + Once again there was a great response to the Gospel message that began out on the Western frontier of Kentucky and moved its way back to the East and North to New England.
        + Men like James McGready, Lyman Beecher, and evangelist Charles Finney brought the Gospel message and people responded.
      * Since that time, awakenings have been more limited in scope or tied to particular people or para-church organizations.
        + So, for example, our own Alliance was formed as a part of an awakening of a World-Wide Missions movement in the latter half of the 19th century where thousands of missionaries were sent around to bring the Gospel to the unreached peoples of the world.
        + While in our own nation, awakenings became increasingly associated with particular evangelists and organizations, like Billy Graham or Campus Crusade for Christ.
      * Perhaps the most recent, old-style, Awakening in America was the “Jesus” movement of the 1960’s and ‘70’s.
        + Where the ministries of men like John Wimber of the Vineyard Movement and Chuck Smith of the Calvary Chapel arose out of California bringing the Gospel mostly to young people and those involved in the “hippy” culture.
    - My point is simply that these great movements of Evangelism and harvest were not the kind of revival spoken of in 2 Chronicles 7 or Isaiah 58.
      * Rather, these Great Awakenings were the result revival, not revival itself.
        + Or to put it another way, awakenings come only AFTER the church’s light *breaks forth like the dawn.*
      * It seems in the old days of the first and second great awakenings the Church understood this, and you can see it in the transformation and passion of the Church itself before the Awakenings occurred.
        + But today, we have sought to bypass that part of Awakenings; even going so far as referring to them as the “revival”.

In many cases we’ve gone so far as to by-pass the church entirely and relegate the work of Awakenings to para-church organizations.

Not that the church won’t pray for revival and give toward revival.

We do and we will, but we simply don’t seem to understand that revival begins with us.

* + - * What the Scriptures tell us in this great IF/THEN statement is this:
        + IF the church experiences revival, THEN there will be a great awakening in the world.
        + So, if we want to see awakening, then pray and work for the revival of the Church.
    - A work that, we have discovered, arises out of our humbly aligning ourselves with the will of God in prayer and committing ourselves to carrying out His will on earth as it is in heaven.
* Of course, the second question we all need to agree on before we can move forward is this: does the Church, at least in America, NEED revival?
  + Now let me be brief as I suggest that the answer to this question is simply self-evident today.
    - Never in my life-time has the Church been floundering in division and discord as much as it is today.
      * Granted, divisions are nothing new to the church – after all there are hundreds of different denominations dotting the landscape.
      * But today, the divisions seem to run deeper than theological disagreements and there seems to be a factious spirit permeating in the church.
    - In fact, at times the church has looked a bit like Israel in the time of the Judges where we read in both Judges 17:6 and 21:25

*In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.*

* + - * In other words, no one submitted to anyone so they fractured and fractured and fractured some more.
  + I believe in many ways we are seeing the same kind of fracturing of the people of God today, as if there was no King in the church.
    - But there is – and we bear His name.
      * And we are called to humble ourselves before Him and, together, pray His will and seek His will on earth as it is in heaven.
      * It is only as we submit ourselves together before our King that we will be able to live into the miracle that is the Church.
      * And it is only as we pray His will together with one heart that our unity will be restored.
        + And how does the rest of that old song go, *And they’ll know we are Christians by our love, by our love, yes they’ll know we are Christians by our love.*
  + The Church needs revival today as much as during any other time in our history.
    - And our God promises that He will revive us if we will but humble ourselves and pray and seek His face and turn from our wicked ways.

Look again at the images of the revived people of God listed in Isaiah 58.

*8 Then shall* ***your light*** *break forth like the dawn,*

*and* ***your healing*** *shall spring up speedily;*

***your righteousness*** *shall go before you;*

***the glory of the Lord*** *shall be your rear guard.*

*9 Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer;*

*you shall cry, and he will say, ‘Here I am.’…*

*…then shall* ***your light*** *rise in the darkness*

*and your gloom be as the noonday.*

*11 And the Lord will guide you continually*

*and satisfy your desire in scorched places*

*and* ***make your bones strong****;*

*and you shall be like a watered garden,*

*like a spring of water,*

***whose waters do not fail****.*

*12 And your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt;*

***you shall raise up the foundations*** *of many generations;*

***you shall be called the repairer*** *of the breach,*

*the restorer of streets to dwell in.*

* Is this our desire, Church?
  + Is this how we want our Lord to describe us?
    - As light in darkness?
    - As an eternal spring in the desert?
    - As the repairers of the breach?
  + Is this the relationship we desire to have with the Lord?
    - His righteousness going before us?
    - His glory following in our wake?
    - His answering to our cry?
    - His guidance through dry places?
    - His strengthening our bones?
* This is the picture of a revived Church.
  + A Church poised to awaken the world around us.
    - But how do we get there from here?

We gather and pray.

* If My people (plural) humble themselves (plural) and pray (the Hebrew is plural) and seek my face (plural) and turn from their wicked ways (plural).
  + The Church is not revived by a few prayer warriors praying for the rest of us.
    - The Church is revived as the Church prays, seeks, and turns together.
    - So, please join me in bowing before the Lord even now as we are joined together.

We Humble Ourselves.

* Submitting to God and to each other out of reverence for Christ.
  + Seeking His will, not our own.
    - This means leaning into His Word and Spirit with an attitude of disinterest in our own opinions or plans.
      * Setting our ideas and plans before Him and discerning with Him whether they are aligned with His heart, His mind, His priorities and His plan.
      * And if not then laying them aside and instead taking up His will on Earth as it is in heaven.
  + Committing ourselves to His Kingdom under our common King, who is Jesus.
    - This means making His Kingdom and its unity our personal priority.
      * Recognizing that a house divided against itself cannot stand.
    - A Kingdom not based in the power of arms or oppression, but a Kingdom knit together by love.
      * And love requires humility, deference, sacrifice, and honor.
  + And recognizing that none of this can be accomplished by us, in humility we throw ourselves upon the mercy of God and ask for His Spirit to infuse us with His love and empower us for humility.
* And then we humble ourselves by turning – repenting – of our wicked ways; taking on God’s ways in their place.
  + So we turn from the way of the rogue self, the arrogant “I”, the indispensable “me”.
    - In humility, we choose to exchange rugged individualism for robust and resolute community in Christ’s Church.
    - Seeking to take on the same attitude as that of Christ Jesus, who though being God set aside His Divine prerogatives and took on the form of a servant in order to become an acceptable sacrifice for our sin.
  + Let us turn away the notion that all our blessings are for us alone, and step into our Father’s joy in blessing others, giving away both life and stuff.
  + Let us repent of being so obsessed with our own lives and our own families and our own activities that we don’t even see those in need of our support or our voice or our hand.
    - Or worse yet, actually blame them for the lack of blessing in their lives, as if we have earned our blessings apart from God’s gracious hand.
  + Let us grieve that we have allowed Christ’s church to be defined by what we are against as opposed to holding up the ONE Who is for us and for everyone who will turn to Him.
  + And let us turn away from an attitude of victimhood that sees us as a poor and oppressed people.
    - But again, let us take upon ourselves the attitude of Christ, Himself, who boldly and intentionally laid down His own life – no one took it from Him.
      * Though victimized, He was never the victim.
      * But rather, He made a victim of Satan Himself, whom Jesus brutalized by His death and emasculated by His resurrection.
    - Yes, the Church is persecuted in this world, but we are not ultimately victims of the enemy.
      * His victims are dying all around us, headed for an eternity of living death, oppression, and separation from Love.
      * We, on the other hand, are “more than conquerors”.

Revive your Church, Oh God.

* Let us walk in humility before you and with each other, that we might reflect your will and lean into your Kingdom.
  + Release us from the wicked ways of this world.
  + And set us free so that all might see only Jesus as they look upon us.
  + And may that lead to a Great Awakening in the lives of the people around us; where they might come to Jesus and find life.

**Benediction:**

*5 Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, 6 who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. 8 And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.*

Revive us, Oh Lord.