

Luke 9:51-56 **Revival**

The world is always opposed to anything God tries to do. It opposes Him now, it was opposed to Him when Jesus was here on Earth, and it will always be opposed to Him so long as people continue to live under the influence of themselves and not God.

In the above passage, Jesus was doing God's Will; He was headed for Jerusalem to finish God's Plan of redemption for mankind – namely, His rejection by the elders and the people, and His death to pay the penalty for our sins. He knew *what* was coming (Him taking on the burden of all mankind's sins – past, present and future – and paying for it in his own body, which would mean separation from God the Father for the very first time), *how* it was coming (through crucifixion, perhaps the most brutal and agonizing form of execution known), and that the very people He was sent to would consign Him to something far worse than they could possibly imagine. Even His disciples didn't fully "get it;" every time He tried to tell them what was going to happen, they just kept their mouths shut. They didn't even want to process such a possibility.

On top of all this, Jesus (and His disciples and the crowd that seemed to be always hanging around wherever they went) has to put up with an annoyance as they go through a village of the Samaritans. In those days, the Judeans and the Samaritans did not get along very well; the Judeans (who regarded the Samaritans as "half-breeds" and not true Israelites) destroyed a place of worship the Samaritans built, and the Samaritans refused lodging, food and just about any other form of comfort to weary Judeans on their way to the Temple in Jerusalem for the Passover celebration.

Such was the case in this passage. Despite the fact that Jesus had performed some miracles in Samaria, with the people asking Him to stay and teach them for several days – He's still a Jew, right? *Give Him the cold shoulder!* To which Disciples James and John, after three years of walking with Jesus, hearing Him explain that He's the Messiah, the Anointed One, the Son of Almighty God Himself, probably were thinking, "Who do these people think they are talking to? Something important is about to happen, and these jokers are going to give Him a hard time?" And so, out of their frustration, these followers of Jesus ask for clearance to do a very un-Jesus-like thing: "Let us call down fire from Heaven and wipe 'em out!"

Sound familiar? It should – the situation is not unlike the present day. Take a look around you; doesn't it seem like everything of God is under attack or ridicule? Every time people pray or celebrate Christmas or try to give thanks to God, there's always someone who reacts like a vampire with garlic (Or a crucifix?) and runs for a lawyer. And it doesn't take long to find some judge who will side with him. Occult practices are now raised to the level of the Word of God and, in some cases, higher yet as unbelievers exert every effort to drive even the very mention of God from the public dialogue and try to force belief into the closet. *Do that stuff at home*, believers are told, *but keep it to yourself in public...* while those who would set themselves against God flaunt their behavior at every opportunity.

And God's people – angry, frustrated and alarmed at the direction the country is headed – start to use a word. It's not a particularly *uncommon* word, but frequently underestimated. People pray for it, talk at length about it, use it almost as a magic word but barely scratch the surface as to what is involved.

Revival.

The problem is, we have only the faintest of ideas about what Revival actually involves. We are so accustomed in these modern times to explaining everything through science... because we turn to science to explain *everything* so much that we truly do not believe in miracles anymore... that we think we have to “jump start” revival (like miracles) through human effort. And as recent events should have taught us, human effort doesn’t cut it. And so, we must look at what Revival *is* and what it *is not*; we must sort out the illusions of Revival from its reality.

Revival: The Illusion

In Jesus’ day, Revival meant the coming of the Messiah. And just as in our day, people had many wrong ideas about what the Messiah would do once He got here. The religious leadership of the day was expecting many things, and not necessarily what the Prophets predicted. Most of them were expecting Him to praise them to the skies and point them out, as examples of what everyone else should be like, because they were so zealous for the Law. In short, the Messiah – the Son of Almighty God Himself – was to kiss up to *them*. And once He was done kissing up, He was to do something to kick the Romans out of Israel.

When Jesus not only did *not* kiss up to them, but point out what they were doing wrong, they fell back on some of the other “urban legends” about what the Messiah would do; what I like to call “Stupid Messiah Tricks.” So intent were they, in fact, on the tricks and their own egos that they couldn’t see what Jesus was doing that proved His Messiahship. Jesus heals a mute, for example (When was the last time any of them had done *that?*), and all they want is a show in the sky, an entertainment – proof on *their* terms, not God’s.

The disciples also suffered from those same wrong ideas; in fact, it has been argued that Judas Iscariot only betrayed Jesus in an effort to “force His hand,” as it were, and prove that He is the One. Eventually, however, enough of Jesus’ teachings sunk in that they realized that some of those old ideas were wrong. But, still operating under such human driving forces as pride, their thoughts turn toward such high and noble and holy issues as the “pecking order” in this Kingdom He keeps talking about; arguing, in at least one case, over who would be “first” in the Kingdom, not realizing what being “first” actually means.

So, when the Samaritans haul out their “We reserve the right to refuse service to anyone” signs, the Zebedee brothers look for the go-ahead to call down fire from Heaven; not only would this have taken out those “half-breeds” who don’t know who they’re talking to, but give those annoying Pharisees – who, ironically, wanted the same thing from Jesus – something to chew on for awhile. (*You want a sign in the sky? I’ll give you a sign in the sky, Jack!*) In their zeal for their Master, the “Sons of Thunder” forget that He’s the One really in charge – just like the Pharisees, in their zeal for the Law, missed Who the Law was pointing them to.

In our day, we pray and labor for Revival, begging for a move of God in the world... when God's will, sometimes, is actually the *last* thing we want to see happen.

The Church is watching "the heathen run amok," as one cartoonist put it, in many cases rather vociferously. In the 1960s, many of this generation that is just coming into political power – running "the system," if you will – began by fierce opposition to that same system. I was born in 1959, and have come to think of the 60s as a time of national adolescence, challenging long-held ideas about everything and asking why things are what they are... as every generation is prone to do, in one way or another. Out of this came some good things; the civil rights movement being chief among them. One of my favorites is a technical triumph, the effort that landed men on the Moon. But at the same time came an attitude of brashness and insolence that fed on the fruits of its labors, like moving the political system to bring an end to U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War. With that success (regardless of what your feelings were on the "rightness" or "wrongness" of the war), this generation carried on further with the same basic tactics to get what it wanted, while each succeeding generation took their cue from the previous one and added their own contributions.

I am a member of a generation whose chief distinguishing characteristic is that of arrogance. And since one of the things we in our arrogance questioned (and, in many cases, rejected) was the role of the church – indeed, the very existence of God Himself – we did not have the collective tempering effects of humility and submission to Him that our energies might be harnessed for His glory and for the good of mankind. Our parents and grandparents learned these things by hardship, The Great Depression and World War II, for example, but we were running off the material prosperity they created once all that was over. Meanwhile, as we asserted our arrogance and rejected our parents' ways of raising kids, we bred sons and daughters who were even more so, losing whatever altruistic motives we had, and acting more like spoiled children, worshipping at the altar of self.

This is not to say that all rejected God; some who had gone the sex/drugs/rock and roll route, or "dropped out" of society in one of the numerous ways available at the time, came back to the Lord after finding that what they had indulged in wasn't "all that." Others turned to God in revulsion at the excesses of their peers; rebelling against the rebellion, you might say. Some of these folks now find themselves in positions of authority in the church, but are traveling down two diverging paths, neither of which necessarily leads the way to God.

Some preach Revival as a way of circumventing God's sovereign injunction that "Vengeance is Mine... I will repay." Instead of remembering that God loves the "obvious" sinner as well as the one who kept it hidden – and forgetting that they themselves are either one or the other – these folks hope that when Revival comes, God's going to bring the big stick with Him to whack those who still won't come to Him... and, like the Pharisees of old, give an *attaboy* to themselves; His faithful ones, who left all that (or never got into it) and tried to warn others about how bad the world is. (*You out there – they have it right! Quit making fun of them, shape up and be like them!*) Vengeance

may be the Lord's, but these folks are looking forward to having some serious *fun* cheering Him on from the gallery in the courtroom.

Or else, still believing God's no longer doing miracles, the others try to "jump-start" Revival by dressing it up like the world. This leads to sermons and programs dressed up like old TV shows (recently in the news was a church doing a sermon series based on the characters of *Gilligan's Island*), repackaging the message of Christ with some New Age philosophies thrown in to make it more appealing, or tapping into people's basic materialism with the message of the "prosperity gospel" – give and you get back more stuff – or marrying the Gospel with the world in some way, shape or form.

Some, really embracing "the system," are trying to legislate the Kingdom into existence. Some of the leaders of the Moral Majority movement now admit it didn't work, but others are still slugging away at this option. We forget that when the Founding Fathers did their founding, the whole point of government was to watch over folks who could already pretty much govern themselves. Government was never meant to be a *substitute* for the relationship between God and the people.

For example, praying for the Supreme Court is good, as is praying for all in authority, but we sometimes fall into the same trap as those who think of Godliness as a means to wealth – that prayer is some magic formula we use to put things "right" in *our* eyes. That if we pray long enough or hard enough that our desires will automatically occur; with the Supreme Court, how often has *that* worked? In another example, the Pope recently sent letters to Catholic bishops on strategies for opposing laws that would have the effect of promoting homosexual behavior as legitimate; this is fine, if one is willing to *listen* to the Pope, as some U.S. bishops and *many* U.S. Catholics are not quite willing to do in all matters.

We must realize, once and for all, that the Kingdom of God cannot be brought to earth through human efforts. So, let us take a look at the *reality* of Revival.

Revival: The Reality

Back to Jesus' day. His message was, "The time has come... The Kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!" (Mark 1:15, NIV) In short, surrender to God and change your ways. O.K., good so far – but then Jesus does other things that set Judean eyebrows up so high they practically merge with the hairline. He tells stories where Samaritans are the heroes (instead of the punch line), then talks with those "half-breeds" and performs miracles among them – does miracles for Gentiles, too. He not only makes a (spit) tax collector one of His disciples, He lets his (spit) tax collector buddies throw a party for Him! He tells prostitutes their sins are forgiven – and did you *see* what he let that one woman *do* to Him? Her hair, His feet and the perfume? Who does this guy think He *is*, anyway?

The problem is, God wanted the prostitutes, the tax collectors, the Gentiles and the Samaritans (collectively known as *them*) saved, too; not just the Israelites. They prayed for the Messiah to come, and He did – and let the chaos begin as God comes to town and corrects their ideas about what a Messiah is supposed to do. Be careful what you pray for, because God may just do what you don't anticipate because He operates on His own agenda, not yours.

This Messiah of God's (Who, remember, was supposed to kiss up to the religious leaders and boot out the Romans) then lets the disciples in on the game plan once they recognize, however imperfectly, that He is the One. "Okay, Peter, you're right. I'm the Messiah, the Son of God. Now – here's what's going to happen. We're going to go to Jerusalem, where I will be betrayed, arrested, rejected, beat up, spat upon, flogged, and finally crucified. Three days later, I will rise from the dead." You remember Peter's response – he couldn't even process this idea. (Imagine how Isaiah must have felt seeing what was to come in the 53 chapter of his book). Even after His Resurrection, Jesus had to open the disciples' minds to the Scriptures and go through every prophecy that He had to suffer and die and be raised from the dead in order to accomplish God's plan of salvation. Even the *manner* of His death was shown in prophecy, and people did not even recognize it when it was happening.

And after the Resurrection, Jesus still has to set His own followers straight. His instructions are to go to Jerusalem – and wait for Him to send the Holy Spirit, which will empower the disciples to go into the world and tell all nations about Him. Jesus is still getting asked, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6) I used to think that some of His disciples *still* didn't get it, but I'm more inclined to think now that they had a dim understanding that there was more at stake than just Israel and the Jewish people, but *them*... the Samaritans, the Romans, the Greeks, all the *other* Gentiles – in short, all the folks that had been dumping on Israel for centuries were to be offered salvation through Jesus' sacrifice. This knowledge would be made perfect once the Holy Spirit was given on the day of Pentecost, but until then that nagging "urban legend" was still in the back of their minds – and *someone* had to ask.

Who are *them* in *our* day? O.K., we don't have Romans anymore (and, outside of North Korea, Cuba and possibly Venezuela, those in my generation don't even have many of the old-style Communists left), but we *do* have Osama Bin Laden and all his followers who don't particularly like us. And, of course, there are our own personal persecutors. Maybe it's the bully or bullies that made school such a miserable experience for you. Perhaps you have a neighbor who, knowing you to be a believer, cranks the death metal or gangsta rap to full volume at every opportunity... especially if they know what time you like to read your Bible and pray. How about a boss who, every Christmas, repeatedly offers you booze at the office party, knowing full well you're not going to drink it, always giving you that (slurred) *Aw, c'mon, loosen up! Jesus turned water into wine, didn't He? It's in the* (belch) *Bible*. And if it isn't the boss, it might be the co-worker who just *cannot* have a nice day unless he or she takes the "Happy" out of the Holidays by engaging you at every opportunity in fierce debate over a church/state issue or a minor point of the Bible, like where Cain got his wife. (You know the kind – not really interested in *answers*, just an *argument*.) People may not have a sword at your throat nowadays demanding that you renounce Jesus, but there's always someone out there that is quite willing – indeed, *eager* – to be the "thorn" in *your* flesh.

But, guess what? God wants *them* saved, too: "...not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance." (2 Peter 3:9). God loves those people and is willing to offer them the same chance that He gave you – even if they urinate on the Bible and

spit on the cross. This is the point where we have to empty ourselves *of ourselves* – preferences, likes and dislikes that get in the way – and ask God for Revival, letting Him do what He likes... even if you don't get it.

You Can't Handle Revival!

For most believers, reading the previous section is nothing new; every Christian knows in the back of their heads that God loves all of us, and can see the point of the last paragraph coming a mile away. But when we're asked to look not at the harvest, but at what's *inside of us* that hinders the Kingdom, that's when things really start to get uncomfortable. The truth is, we're actually afraid of a full-scale, Holy Ghost-driven Revival... because, in most cases, it means *we've got to change first*.

In the 58th chapter of the Book of Isaiah, God is instructing His prophet to address the people's complaint of, *Hey, we're fasting and bowing down and doing all the stuff the law of Moses said to do – why haven't You seen it?* Yet God says, *Yes – for one day. And you can't even do that right, because you're still doing wrong things on top of your observances.* “Your fasting ends in quarreling and strife and in striking each other with wicked fists. You cannot fast as you do today and expect your voice to be heard on high.” (Isaiah 58: 4) The entire chapter deals with the *attitude* of the people; doing what God told them to do, yet approaching the task like it's the biggest chore in the world – still ignoring the poor, exploiting their workers and acting dishonorably toward one another – and having the gall to ask God, *Well? Where's our blessing?*

Now, while there are those who do tend to view God as some great cosmic “claw machine” (Drop in your change/prayers, do a little work manipulating the controls and you get a prize!), most of us believe we know better. The fact of the matter is that we're more subtle; we want to have it both ways. We're unhappy with the way things are, but we still like to... *remind ourselves of* (indulge) our sinful nature when we “get the urge,” so to speak, so we keep all that Revival stuff on the sidelines. *When things really get bad, we tell the Holy Spirit, we'll call you into the game.*

When we refuse to let go of our sin(s), when we try to keep the Lord at bay, when we try to hang on to the control of our lives that is rightfully His, this hinders even sincere efforts at revival. You've seen what happens – a preacher comes in for a week, a few souls get saved, maybe a handful more rededicate themselves... but not much else happens. And the evils of the world are outside the church door (some even inside the building) waiting for “fresh meat” (infant Christians) and use every trick in the book with new believers to either turn them back or negate their effectiveness for the Kingdom. Sometimes, other believers are demons' best accomplices; when new converts see that there's really not much difference between “the church” and “the world,” often they don't even bother with the hypocrisy of staying in the church – they leave, head right back into the world, telling everyone within earshot how the Gospel is all a big racket, and doing a “cannonball” into the same mire Jesus gave His life to pull them out of. And as the Lord Himself said in Matthew 12: 43 – 45, **“And the final condition of that man is worse than the first.”**

Somewhere, we remember stories of revivals that took in entire cities. Revivals where the Holy Spirit was so powerful that the saloons and “red light districts” closed down; first for lack of customers, then for lack of staff as *they* got saved as well. Revivals where the mules of the miners stopped working because the miners didn't cuss at them anymore to get them going, and they didn't know better. We've all heard the stories and wonder where such revivals are today.

Guess what? God wants this, too – but He wants even more. God has in mind a great revival, bigger than even those ones your grandparents used to talk about. One that will sweep this nation until every law that has been passed forbidding organized prayer in the public schools is rendered moot because most every child, every family and every teacher is praying before they get to school and after they leave for the day. Where every law passed or imposed equating the God-Ordained institution of marriage with relationships between individuals bound by varying perversions is ignored and finally not renewed because of lack of use. Where no one argues over whether to put a crèche or a menorah on courthouse property during Christmas or Chanukah because every privately owned building has got one staring publicly-owned property right in the face, as it were. Where drug cartels go broke and leave the business because the demand for their junk has dried up to nothing. Where even the most lenient of the cable channels no longer broadcast filth, vulgarity and foul language 24/7 nor use the ways of the Lord as the butt of jokes because they learned – quickly – that if the public doesn't get what it wants, they just won't watch, and the channels go off the air. God has a revival in mind that will make the citywide crusades of old look like a sandlot baseball game.

BUT – This time, it's going to be done His way. God is not going to rely on any one single personality to handle the job, because personalities are too easily transformed into cults these days. This revival is going to work at the grass-roots level, as believers stop turning the job over to organizations and just be... believers, sharing their faith with others on a day-in, day-out basis. You will not see this on any news broadcast as an emerging trend; the work will even slip under the radar of "Christian Media." God is going to take His people back to the basics of the faith. As believers realize the responsibility – and the privilege – of sharing their faith, the church will be the witness Jesus intended for His Body to be.

You want revival? Check yourself first.

Revival is not a one-time event, but a *continual process* of turning the controls of your life *completely* over to God. King David knew this when he penned Psalm 139, writing in verses 23 and 24, *Search me, oh 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.* Jesus reinforced and expanded the concept when He told of how foolish it was to try and remove a speck out of your brother's eye when all the while you've got a plank in your own. You have to deal with your own problems first before you can effectively help someone else.

Far too often, we treat revival as a kind of "vacation" from the world. We spend a week focusing on God, we hear sermons telling us to turn back to Him and we feel like we've done something good for ourselves but then heading right back into the world, partaking of everything it offers. It's kind of like spending a week at a spa, exercising and eating healthy stuff – and then heading straight for the donut shop once you get home. Revival is not a vacation from the world, then you come back into it; it's a *denial* of the world. It's rejecting the world as your chief focus for what you *know* is better; the Kingdom of God and His righteousness. Not becoming a hermit and rejecting the day-to-day stuff we have come to use, but rejecting the philosophies that are tied to it. It's telling the world, *I won't go your way!*

Peter wrote in his first letter (chapter 4, verse 17) that judgment begins with the House of God. We normally think of this in the negative; that it's like getting the final performance evaluation before the boss decides whether or not to keep you or cut you

loose. We don't realize that with God, we can *ask Him* for a check. He has no plans whatsoever to "fire" believers; we can lose our rewards after we die for poor service, but not our salvation. (Nothing can take us out of His hand, remember?) In this case, we can ask him for judgment now, while we still have a chance to correct it *voluntarily*... because this pleases Him.

And that's what this is all about, isn't it? Pleasing Him. Because He did something for us that we could never do for ourselves. Because with the blood of His only Son, he made a way for us to come back to Him and be freed from all the things that bind us and destroy us, little by little. Because we are so grateful for His salvation that we are willing to give our lives back to Him so that He can use us – and that we can have the fulfillment in our lives that can *only* be found in Him.

"Seek first His Kingdom and His Righteousness, and all these things will be given to you, as well," is what Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 6:33). The problem is that we are so accustomed to striving and struggle – here in America, especially – that we have forgotten that the whole point of Revival is to yield ourselves to God in everything. The late Christian artist Rich Mullins put it very well in his song, *Hold Me, Jesus*: "Surrender don't come natural to me. I'd rather fight you for something I don't even want than take what you give that I need."

God has heard our cries. God wants to send Revival. But this time, He wants to entrust Revival to all believers, because each believer *being* a believer is how it's going to happen. And before *that* can take place, before we can be vessels fit to hold this precious substance, we must go "back to the basics," as it were, of the faith: Christ Jesus, Salvation, the work of the Holy Spirit... and service. The type of service that draws people to God naturally, that is more eloquent than the finest sermon ever preached. The good works that God prepared for us in advance to do, before we ever heard of Jesus.

The type of Christianity that spread throughout the known world because people heard the Word, saw believers' lives... and they *wanted* to taste and see that the Lord was good.