

Revival: How Bad Do You Want It?

Last summer, the Religion section of our local newspaper carried a story on a call to area churches to set aside at least 15 minutes of service time on October 1 to pray for revival.

Fifteen minutes in a one-time event; maybe this could become an annual occurrence, if people seem to like it enough. And there's about 50 churches on board with this project, all seeking (if the story's emphasis is correct) unity among Christians. A laudable enough goal by itself, and organizers also cite references to previous revivals where crime rates drop and, in Columbia, the power of evil forces like drug cartels is weakened.

And all this is going to be accomplished... with a one-shot prayer of 15 minutes. Among 50 out of hundreds (perhaps thousands) of churches in the eighth-largest city in the United States. *Wow.*

Let me ask one question: Just how bad *do* you want Revival?

Don't get me wrong – I'm all for true Revival, where the Holy Spirit knocks down the barriers that keep believers apart; race, ethnicity, minor doctrinal differences, etc. And so I pray that the event is the beginning of a hunger for God that brings Revival. But let's get real; unless the focus is truly on and the desire truly for God and something begins that goes beyond *one* organized prayer of 15 minutes, this is not going to be true Revival, where people reach the point where they leave their sins, their desires, their ambition and their *flesh* behind, where they want more than the blessings of God but God Himself. Instead, this will be *revival*; a feel-good, nice-sounding thing that you do because it seems right, somehow, and it makes you look spiritual in the eyes of the world. Playing at Revival because it looks religious and you come out smelling like the proverbial rose, and yet nothing is changed – inside you or outside in your community.

In the first place consider the idea that (if you're like most Americans) fifteen minutes is all that will be invested in the actual prayer effort... assuming, of course, that one is able to devote the *full* fifteen minutes to prayer for Revival. Maybe about five will be spent in actual prayer for Revival; the other ten will be spent between the person's mind wandering to other things and trying to rope his brain back in to the matter at hand. At least 20 total seconds of that will be spent (off and on) checking watches to see if the fifteen minutes have passed, and the person can go back to letting his or her mind wander during the service.

How do I know? Simple – I've been guilty of it, too.

In the second place, even if people are able to discipline their minds to the point of devoting the full fifteen minutes to prayer for Revival, consider this. One day is generally regarded as 24 hours, give or take a few seconds. With 60 minutes in each hour, that comes out to 1,440 minutes per day. Multiply *that* times 365 days, and you get 525,600 minutes in a given year. And you're going to set aside... how much was it again? A whole 15 minutes asking God for something that can do nothing but benefit your city?

We have just completed celebrating the 100th anniversary of the great Azusa Street Revival in Los Angeles, California, which is generally regarded as the beginning of the Pentecostal movement. All a person needs to do is read the account of the Revival and how it began to realize that praying for, maybe, 15 minutes, frankly, isn't going to cut it. I won't go into the full story here, but I will share an excerpt from *The Revival Begins* at www.azusastreet.org to give the reader an idea of what does:

Los Angeles was ripe for revival in the spring of 1906! Christians throughout the city were praying for an outpouring of the Holy Spirit. The previous summer, a Holiness group hungered for a revival during their camp meeting. One of the speakers warned that if they didn't "dig in" God was going to pass them by and "raise up a people who would."

Frank Bartleman, a Holiness evangelist was literally filling the city with Gospel literature. Bartleman, excited about the revival in Wales, was distributing a tract by G. Campbell Morgan and The Great Revival in Wales by S.B. Shaw. Bartleman had also written Evan Roberts (Welsh revival preacher) to get instructions on how to experience a move of God in Los Angeles. Roberts wrote back, "Congregate the people who are willing to make a total surrender. Pray and wait. Believe God's Promises. Hold daily meetings. May God bless you is my earnest prayer."

Further details on the period leading up to the outbreak of not only the Azusa Street, but other great revivals throughout history, speak of people gathered daily in churches, often with the churches open 24 hours a day, packed standing room only with people from all walks of life on their faces, crying out to God for – indeed, *hungry* and desperate for – revival.

Is that where we are? I think not. The church of today has lost its hunger for God. It labors under the delusion that the Kingdom of Heaven can be brought to Earth by human effort; if enough money is raised so that we can broadcast by Internet, satellite, television or radio, if we elect the "right people" to political office (one other story in the same day's edition of the newspaper dealt with the "religious left" politically gearing up to fight the "religious right"), if we package and promote the Gospel of Jesus Christ like we do deodorant and automobiles and hair color. We no longer take The Bible to be the Word of Almighty God; we treat it like a trip to a cafeteria restaurant, where we can pick and choose what we want. We "spin" and split hairs over what remains so that we can keep our sins and still be members in good standing. We dare to think we can reduce faith to a formula and manipulate God to get wealth or power or whatever else we want. *We want the world's approval, and not God's.*

Revival is not a one-time event; it is a process where we let go of control of our life completely and give it to God to do with – and with us – as He pleases. Remember the old saying, *God is my co-pilot?* Revival is where you realize you aren't even qualified to take a peek inside the cockpit. You give God the controls and exit, close the door behind you and take your place

with the other passengers. Revival is where you come to the end of yourself, your abilities, your talents (that God put into you in the *first* place, anyway) and say to Almighty God, "I don't care anymore what You can do for me; whether or not You bless or heal me ever again is irrelevant. *I want You!*"

Revival is where you bring your life into line with God's Will. One of the recurring themes of the Bible, which shows up time and again in the Law, the Prophets, the Gospels and the Letters is that of humility before God:

- *If My people, who are called by My Name, will humble themselves and pray and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from Heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land.* (2 Chron, 7:14)
- *He mocks proud mockers, but gives grace to the humble.* (Prov. 3:34/James 4:6/1 Peter 5:5)
- *This is the one I esteem: He who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at My Word.* (Isaiah 66:2)
- *Humble yourselves before the Lord, and He will lift you up.* (James 4:10)
- *Seek first His Kingdom and His Righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.* (Matthew 6:33)

I know that last entry isn't worded the same, but the meaning is identical. And it is important to keep in mind, because of what is being sought by the churches involved in this project.

One of the stated goals of the effort is Christian unity. At that phrase, most people roll their eyes and say, *Oh, trying for that again? There's nothing more fragmented than the Church.* And they're right. The Body of Christ is at war with itself; in medical terms, you might say it is experiencing an auto-immune disorder, where the body's immune system attacks its own tissue, instead of invading viruses or bacteria. Efforts at correcting the problem in the past have failed to bring the Body of Christ under the Lordship of the Head – Christ Himself. Ecumenical movements have, for the most part, been a joke because people will not humble themselves under the Lordship of Christ Himself.

In previous years, this was merely an annoyance (like having a limp from a mild case of rheumatoid arthritis) as denominations ignored what united them and sniped at each other over minor doctrinal differences. Nowadays, it has reached the point of being debilitating as denominations argue and threaten to split over whether or not clearly Biblically-defined sin really *is* sin at all, and whether or not people who engage in such practices can still be in positions of authority within the church.

A longer-term example is that of communion (or, if you prefer, the Eucharist). Much has been made and said over the years over whether the bread/wafer and wine/grape juice used in the sacrament are merely symbolic or the actual Presence of Jesus in the ceremony. A great deal of sniping

between Roman Catholics and major Protestant denominations has taken place over just what a person takes in during the sacrament.

But if you take a look at the context in which the Eucharist was instituted – the events of the Last Supper – you learn that it's more than what you take in... it's what you give out.

In three of the four Gospels, the use of the bread and wine, and what they represented in Jesus, is listed. But in the Gospel of John, bread and wine are not mentioned but one event is; Jesus washing the feet of the Disciples. This would be the final lesson Jesus would give His followers before His Passion, and it was somewhat shocking to see the Messiah, the Son of God, the Anointed One performing the duties of the lowliest of servants. Jesus then told the Disciples that they were to wash one another's feet – they were to adopt a lifestyle of service to others – and this would climax Jesus' teachings about service. Some denominations miss the deeper meaning and do ceremonies of foot washing; usually once a year, around Good Friday. But Jesus' teachings stressed service with the motivation being God's love as a lifestyle.

When you put this incident together with His statements in the other three Gospels regarding the bread and wine being His Body and Blood, we see that communion was to be a further illustration of the point of service. Jesus was offering Himself in service to His Father... even to the point of death in the nastiest way possible for that time. Serve to the point of being living sacrifices for the Kingdom of God. You are no longer your own, you were bought with a price; honor God by making yourself available.

Oswald Chambers' classic devotional *My Utmost for His Highest* stresses this point. Jesus became broken bread and poured-out wine for all mankind; we have to become the same. Unless we are willing to offer ourselves to God, become broken bread and poured-out wine in the lives of others as a part of the Body of Christ, *unless we stop merely taking in the Eucharist and start pouring it out*, we have missed the point of being Christians.

I believe that's why we don't see Revival on the scale we used to during the Great Awakenings this nation has experienced. Believers have jumped on the *What's in it for me?* bandwagon. Our lives have become so occupied with our careers, our families, our own pleasures, even the stuff we do for church, that we neglect the one relationship that matters – our relationship to God. And God wants us to spend ourselves for Him, so that others may be brought into the Kingdom through what they see us doing.

What *does* the world see us doing, anyway? They see huge churches (that at first glance could be mistaken for office buildings), some with little mini-malls below the sanctuary, where you have your choice of serving in areas such as the praise and worship team, the bookstore and the drama department, but very little effort is spent outside the walls of the church. Feed the hungry? *Oh, yeah – we collect canned goods for the Food Bank; I don't know what happens from there.* Read the Bible and pray? *Well, don't we do that here? Isn't that what Sunday School is for?* Witnessing? *Yeah, we do that; we go out about once a week or so, knocking on doors... we wish it were more productive, but, hey – whaddya gonna do?*

Really? I wonder why? Could it be that cult movements that try to represent themselves as true Christianity rely so heavily on that tactic, that *anyone* coming to the door nowadays is instantly viewed with suspicion? You ring the bell and you're not wearing a Post Office or delivery service uniform and the defenses immediately go up: *Oh, geez – what do these people want?* And even if the effort is made in all sincerity, the fact that the method has been abused so badly means that sincere believers go out there with the proverbial "one hand tied behind their backs." Sometimes both.

God wants us to be the best kind of witness for Him; He wants our lives to shine before others so that they will know that it is God at work, and are attracted to Him. He wants our "walk" to match – indeed, be *better* than – our "talk." In order to do this, God must be so infused in our lives that it is "no longer I that live, but Christ that lives in me." For *that* to happen, He will put the believer – if he or she is willing – through a period of refinement. He wants to burn away the impurities of laziness, materialism and selfishness until the gold of His Presence shines unhindered through our lives.

Have you ever noticed that Jesus never had to persuade the crowds to come to Him? As soon as He began to do the works of His Father, they came; *how* they came. By the thousands they came. And this is the same Jesus who said that those who believe in Him will do the same things that He did; greater works, in fact. Imagine for a moment the impact believers could have on their city, on their country, on the world if we just did what He told us to do in the first place. We wouldn't need seminars and "experts" to tell us how to jump-start Revival in our own strength; we already have Jesus and the Great Commission, starting right where you are now. When we do what God calls us to do, and let Him do with us what He wants, Revival will naturally follow.

It's only a matter of the question I asked earlier: *How bad do you want it?*