

# John The Baptist Revival

by David Guzik

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## Transcript

Well, good afternoon, everybody. You can tell from my accent that I'm not from around these parts. I come from Southern California, indirectly.

I grew up there and was a pastor for many years in Southern California. And then seven years ago, my wife, myself, our family, we moved out to Germany where I worked with a small international Bible college there. And we've been very, very blessed to be part of that ministry.

It's such a privilege to be part of your wonderful hospitality here, to be here at Mariah Chapel. I can't believe that I'm here. And I can't believe that I get the real privilege of opening up this conference.

Now, at this conference that we have together, we're here because we are interested in the subject of revival. And the subject of revival is a big subject, isn't it? There's two main ways, at least in my mind, that I think of it. I think of it in terms of personal revival, which is a huge subject, is it not? And couldn't you really preach on almost any page of the Bible on the subject of personal revival? And you're going to hear a lot during this conference on this subject because it's essential for each one of us.

We need to be confronted with what we need to do individually to make ourselves right and to be revived by the Spirit of God. But there's another aspect to revival as well. There's the aspect of what you might call a broad revival, whether it be revival breaking out in a church or in a community or in a whole region or in

a nation or across continents.

And that is an amazing phenomenon that has happened time and time again. It's happened in history, of course, but it's also happened within the pages of the Bible. You could go through story after story, account after account, biblically, about seasons of revival.

And we find them very instructive, don't we? Don't we learn something when we study about biblical revival? Because isn't there a lot of ignorance about biblical revival in the world today? And in addition to that, when we understand something about what God wants to do in these broad works of revival, it excites our heart to prayer. It excites our heart to get right with God, to pursue what He would want to do. And so what I want to do in the time that I have with you is I want to talk about a wonderful biblical account of revival centered around the ministry of John the Baptist.

So I'd like you, if you have a Bible, to open it to Matthew 3, and I'll read the text here together. Actually, it's the entire chapter. Matthew 3. Pay close attention as I read the text.

In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, and saying, Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. Now John himself was clothed in camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey.

Then Jerusalem, all Judea, and all the region around the Jordan went out to him, and they were baptized by him in the Jordan, confessing their sins. But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, Brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance. And do not think to say to yourselves, We have Abraham as our father, for I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones.

And even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees, therefore every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.

His winnowing fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly clean out his threshing floor, and gather his wheat into the barn, and he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire. Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan to be baptized by him. And John tried to prevent him, saying, I need to be baptized by you.

And are you coming to me? But Jesus answered and said to him, Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness. Then he allowed him. When he had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water, and behold the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon him.

And suddenly a voice came from heaven saying, This is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased. Lord, bless your word to your people. First of all, we see this as a wonderful example of revival because it used an unlikely man.

Was not John the Baptist an unlikely man to lead a revival? Look at him. In those days, John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea and saying, Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. And then verse 4 tells us that John himself with clothes and camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and his food, locusts and wild honey.

In his personality, in his ministry, John the Baptist was patterned after Elijah. He wasn't patterned after people in his day. He didn't look like a Pharisee.

He didn't look like a Sadducee. He didn't look like a priest. He didn't look like a Levite.

He didn't look like a rabbi. He was his own man. He was an unusual man.

An unlikely man. And God often raises up unusual and unlikely people to be prominent in seasons of revival. John the Baptist was not interested in cultivating a revival image.

And there is that in the church today, is it not? A certain way of speaking, a certain way of acting, a certain way of carrying yourself that sort of communicates to other people a revival image. But this was simply who John the Baptist was. We might say that he was this before he was even created in the womb.

Because this is who God made him to be. If John the Baptist took on the spirit of many today's ministers, he'd be very different, right? He wouldn't start in the wilderness. He wouldn't dress in a strange way.

He wouldn't preach such a straightforward message. He would use marketing surveys and focus groups to hone his message and his presentation. But John the Baptist wasn't interested in that.

The spirit of his age did not motivate John the Baptist. Still less was it the spirit of our age. But he was motivated by the spirit of God.

And if you look at the men and the women that God has used in seasons of revival, they are men and women who haven't danced to the tune of the age. They haven't marched to that rhythm. They've been men and women who have sought after God and not so concerned with the spirit of their age.

Secondly, this was a wonderful pattern of revival because it came from an unusual place. Where did the revival come from in the days of John the Baptist? From the wilderness of Judea. Now, wouldn't it be more logical for a revival to come from Jerusalem? Or at the very least a place like Alexandria where there was a large, educated Jewish population in those days.

But no, the wilderness of Judea was an unlikely place but God brought forth revival from there. I think of another great example of an unlikely place that God brought revival from. I think of the place where I'm serving right now in Germany, a little village called Herrnhut.

You know that place, don't you? The marvelous Moravian revival associated with Count Zinzendorf and others. It's out in the middle of nowhere. No big cities, no great universities, no centers of politics or finance.

On the estate of this nobleman, Count Nicholas Ludwig von Zinzendorf, a strange group of refugees gathered from all over Europe. And in this very obscure place they gathered. But Zinzendorf was compelled, determined, to make them into a genuine Christian community.

But all these diverse people from all these different backgrounds, kind of like the kind of gathering we have with us right now, is it not? They argued and they fought all the time. There were the followers of Luther, there were the followers of Hus, there were the followers of Calvin and Zwingli and Schlenkfeld, and they argued all the time. It seems that they were fighting about everything, about predestination, about holiness, about baptism.

And it didn't seem like that community would hang together very long at all. Zinzendorf had a passion to change things in that community, and so he told them to seek one another out, to emphasize the points on which they agreed, instead of emphasizing their differences. And he had a personal interview with every adult resident of Herrnhut.

And then in May of 1727, they entered into a solemn covenant with Zinzendorf, to dedicate their lives, just as he dedicated his life to Jesus Christ, and each one would be dedicated in their own calling and position. The idea was that everybody should be committed to the Lord, not just ministers, not just clergy, not just in a monastic mindset, but every individual fully given over to God. They organized elders to lead in times of Bible study and prayer, and this eventually culminated in a remarkable outpouring of the Holy Spirit on August 13th, 1727.

That day was both preceded and followed by extraordinary prayer, and two days after August 13th, they started a prayer meeting. A prayer meeting that lasted day and night. Twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, for one hundred years.

And from that little obscure community, they sent out missionaries in a day when almost nobody was sending out missionaries. They sent out more than a hundred missionaries from that little village. Now that work started in an unusual place, in that little Saxon village of Herrnhut.

And it spread over the whole world almost, both directly and indirectly. Those notable Moravian believers, they influenced George Whitefield, they influenced John Wesley. It was that great awakening that started back in a little unlikely place like Herrnhut.

I don't know where you come from. I don't know if it's a likely place or an unlikely place, but don't be surprised when God raises up revival from an unlikely place. Number three.

This ministry of John the Baptist, the revival in his day, it was marked by preaching. Did you see that in verse one? In those days, John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea. Now I don't know that you can preach a revival into reality.

It seems more appropriate to say that revival is prayed into reality and that preaching is the fruit of the revival. Yet revival is always associated with preaching. And sometimes it isn't the core of what God is doing in revival, such as very much the 1858-59 work in America.

That was known as the prayer meeting revival because of the amazing work that God did through prayer meetings. Yet preaching is never far away from revival. I think of the great work that God did here in this country, centering right here in Mariah Chapel, right? A little more than a hundred years ago.

And that was a remarkable example. Even though it was not in some ways centered on preaching, it featured preaching in a remarkable way. I'm reminded of the story that came to me through the writings of Dr. J. Edwin Orr.

He described the story of H. J. Galley, who had just graduated from Spurgeon's College in London, and he was in his first pastoring. He read in the newspapers in London about the Welsh revival in the newspapers. And he had a classmate at Spurgeon's College who was there and had a church in Wales.

And he said, well, I'll go and visit him and see what this is all about. And so he visited the man named Williams, who pastored a church in Wales because he wanted to learn about the revival firsthand. He got

off the train, he was greeted by his pastor friend named Williams, and the first question Galley asked him is, he said, is this real revival? And his Welsh friend replied, it is like the gate of heaven open to our souls.

Galley said, well, look, I've come a long distance. I want to hear Evan Roberts preach. Where is Evan Roberts preaching? And he said, well, I don't know.

He doesn't tell anyone. And Galley wondered at this, because I thought he was the leader of the revival. Oh, no, he's not the leader of the revival.

Well, are you telling me that the newspapers have it all wrong? Well, God specially uses Evan Roberts, but the Holy Spirit is the leader of the revival. Galley replied the way I probably would. Galley said, don't we always say that? Brother Galley, Williams replied, we mean that.

He said, listen, brother, there are about a thousand churches in South Wales, and Evan Roberts might show up at any one of those churches tonight, but if he doesn't, God will be there in mighty power. And then Galley asked his friend Williams, he said, so you're having special meetings. He said, Brother Galley, my church has been packed for six weeks.

He said, oh, you mean the other churches in town are using your church for united meetings. He said, Brother Galley, every church in town from Anglican to Salvation Army is packed. He said, well, when do you have the meetings? He said, from six to midnight.

Well, what do you mean from six to midnight? He said, I mean from six in the morning to midnight. And he said, well, surely it's not the same people the entire time. And he said, no, first we get the minors before they go on shift, and then mid-morning we have the housekeepers, at noon there's a united meeting, mid-afternoon we have the school children, but from six in the evening until midnight, the place will be packed with everyone.

Then, and this gets to the point about preaching, Galley asked him, how do you ever keep up with the preaching? And Williams said, what do you mean? He said, how do you keep up with the preaching? How can you preach for six hours every evening? And this is what Brother Williams, he said, he said, I haven't preached for six weeks. He said, well, who preached last night? And he said, well, I think about 17 people, including a granny of 78 and a boy of 12. And look, that was unusual preaching! But it was preaching nonetheless, and preaching is associated with revival.

It may be unusual preaching, but it's preaching nonetheless, and we might say that preaching is emphasized to the degree to which the people of God already possess a scriptural understanding. In some places, the people of God, they know their Bibles, they just don't put them into action. Perhaps the revival will have a different character then, but there are other places where the people of God are woefully ignorant of their Bibles, and that would have more of an instructive element.

The preaching of John the Baptist in this revival is quite instructive, is it not? Look at verse 7. But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, Brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? That's quite a way to begin your sermon, is it not? To speak to the esteemed religious leaders in your presence, and to look them square in the eye, and to call them a bunch of snakes, and then to tell them who, or to ask them who warned them to flee from the wrath to come. I think we can learn a lot just from that one little line in John the Baptist's message. To flee from the wrath to come.

Doesn't that tell you something? What wrath is that that's to come? It's the wrath of God, is it not? Isn't that something for every Christian heart to take seriously? That the wrath of God is revealed. It's revealed right now in the world. It's revealed in the way that God allows the sinner to continue on in their sin.

The sinner thinks that that's God looking away, that that's God ignoring. No, God is allowing the sinner in his wrath to heap up condemnation upon themselves. But then we think of the wrath of God that is to come in the final judgment, do we not? And we think about these things.

We think about them in a season of revival. We think that the wrath to come is fair, and it's well-deserved. And we realize that the wrath to come is often ignored or disregarded because it's not immediate in the sense of the sinner.

It is the wrath to come. And so they don't sense it immediately, and they despise it. But listen, this wrath is not any less certain just because it's delayed and because it is to come.

And this wrath is terrible when it does come because it is God's wrath. This wrath cannot be stood against. You cannot hope to stand against the wrath of God.

Not you, not me, not anyone. So what is our solution? John told you. Flee! Flee from the wrath that is to come and flee unto your Savior, Jesus Christ.

He took the wrath of God on His part. That is the gospel we preach, is it not? That on the cross, our crucified Savior was bearing within Himself the wrath of God that we deserve. As we put our trust in Him, that is our payment for sin.

So he told them to flee. You know, when you say flee, it implies immediate action, right? You don't flee slowly over time. You flee right now.

But it also implies swift action. You do it quickly. But it also implies straight movement with no diversions.

And that's our message to anybody here who is not right with God. Flee. Come to Jesus immediately.

Come to Him quickly. And come with a straight movement with no diversions. Preaching marks true revival.

Next I would say that this was a genuine revival because it was marked by the message of repentance. You saw it there in verse 2, right? What did he say? And saying repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. John's message was really a call to repentance.

Some people think that repentance is mostly about feelings. Especially feeling sorry for your sin. Now it's wonderful to feel sorry for your sin.

I would hope that we would all feel sorry and that you would feel even sorrier about your sin than you feel right now. But that isn't repentance. Repent is not a feelings word.

It's an action word. And John told his listeners to make a change of mind and a change of life. Not merely to feel sorry about what they had done.

Repentance speaks of a change of direction. Not a sorrow in the heart. This call to repentance is important and it must never be neglected.

It's entirely accurate to say it's the first word of the gospel. Again, if I could reference this man who's had such a big impact on me and my understanding and education about revival, it would be the late Dr. J. Edwin Orr. And he has a marvelous message on this subject called The First Word of the Gospel.

I've enjoyed that message so much that I won't say that I've stolen it because that implies a moral fault. I won't say that I borrowed the message because I'm keeping it. Let's just say I've appropriated that message.

Not in the words, but certainly in the thoughts. Where in that message Dr. Orr points out so powerfully that repent was the first word of John the Baptist's gospel. And it was the first word of Jesus' gospel.

And it was the first word of the gospel when the 70 were sent out. And it was the first word of the gospel after his resurrection. And the first word of exhortation in what Peter gave to the people on the day of Pentecost.

And it was the first word in the mouth of the Apostle Paul through his ministry. Friends, isn't it fair to say that without repentance there is no revival? You can have all kinds of strange phenomenon without repentance. You can have all kinds of miraculous works, even wonderful miraculous works, without repentance.

You can have significant spiritual excitement without repentance. Isn't it not fair to say that without repentance there is no revival? I'll give you another aspect of John's work. It was marked by the sense and the recognition of the nearness of God.

Look at verse 2 again. He said, And repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. Now you know what that means, right? How close is your hand to you? It's pretty close, I believe, right? To say that something is at hand means it's as close to you as your hand is.

And to say this with power and to say it the way that John the Baptist said it meant that there must have been a spiritual reality behind it. People knew that he wasn't talking about the kingdom of heaven in a dreamy or in an imaginary sense. The kingdom of heaven was there and people had to get ready now.

That's what makes revival magnetic. People sense the nearness of God. But people sense it just as something that Brother Yore told me just right before I went up.

He told me about a time when he had a meeting that he was preaching at many years ago and experienced such an outpouring of the Spirit of God that some people fled the room. They didn't want to be under it. But the Spirit of God was there.

There was a powerful sense of the presence of God. Some people reveled in it. They loved it.

It was delicious to them. Other people, it was like darkness to them because their hearts were so dark. Again, this idea that it draws multitudes magnetically or repels them magnetically because there's such a powerful sense of the presence of God.

And people put away other things, right? What they're interested in is what God is doing. You don't have to compel people to come to church. The churches are full because people know that God is present and those who want God, they're coming to find Him.

It's kind of like, and I can use this illustration because I said before I come from Southern California. And one of the things that I would do in Southern California when I lived there, and it was a long time ago, but I did, I used to surf on occasion. And I noticed something about surfers, the real hardcore surfers, the surfers that were really into it.

That when a swell came in, when the waves came in good, nothing else mattered in their life but getting out to the beach and surfing. Well, they might have a job. They might be in college.

It wouldn't matter. Classes, I won't go to them. My job, I won't show up.

There's some great big waves in, and I'm going to go catch them down at the shore. That's the attitude. And listen, something analogous to that happens among Christians when the Spirit of God is being poured out, right? Well, you might go to work, but you're not so interested because you're interested in what the Spirit of God is doing.

Your normal obligations, they're just not the same because you care about what God is doing. I want you to notice something. I believe that John's main message was not you're a sinner and you need to repent.

I believe John's main message was Messiah, the king, is coming, and the call to repentance flowed out of that reality. Listen, the call to repentance was the response to the news that the king and his kingdom were coming, and in some sense they were already present, so we have to get right with God. I'll give you another way that the work of John the Baptist is very much like a glorious revival.

It's that it was marked by remarkable, surprising response. Did you notice that in verse 5? Look at verse 5 with me. Then Jerusalem, all Judea, and all the region around the Jordan went out to him.

Now wouldn't you agree with me that that was a surprising response? Nobody could have expected such a remarkable crowd coming from such a far distance coming to such a desolate place. The response was so great that later on, decades after this, we find that there are still followers of John the Baptist in the book of Acts. Do we not? And again, this happens, does it not? This happens in a powerful way that there is a surprising response in these seasons where God pours out His Spirit in a broad way.

Dr. Orr records of the mid-19th century awakening in the United Kingdom, for example, in West Bromwich, England, that the first revival sermon was preached to eight people. And there was such an outpouring of the Holy Spirit that soon a thousand people crowded the hall and hundreds were turned away. In the first three months, a hundred people were converted and joined the church.

And in another nearby town, there was such a work of God that they had to have the meetings in the biggest hall in the community, and that was a theater. But at the first meeting at the theater, there were so many people and so many hundreds of people pressing in that they had to chain the doors shut so that no more would come in. I can imagine that a fire marshal would be aghast at such a thing.

But can you imagine having to chain the doors shut so that no more can come in? Orr also wrote about the Irish evangelist named Groton Guinness, the most popular evangelist in Northern Ireland during that 1859 revival. And on one occasion, Guinness addressed 20,000 people speaking from the top of a cab. And 50 years later, this is how he remembered this great outpouring of the Spirit of God.

He says, quote, The predominating feature was the conversion of people of all ranks and positions in ways sudden, startling, and amazing. Before that time, I had seen tens or scores brought to Christ under gospel

preaching, but this new movement of 1859 was something quite different. Ministers were occupied until midnight or even two or three o'clock in the morning conversing with crowds of inquirers who were crying, What shall we do to be saved? That's the remarkable response.

It's been well said that in such seasons of revival, it's turned around. You know, in normal evangelism, evangelism as we know it, the evangelist seeks the sinner, and that's a good thing. In such seasons of revival, the sinner seeks the evangelist because there's such an outpouring of the Spirit of God.

I must also add that another remarkable feature of John's work was the confession of sin. Did you see that in verse 6? And they were baptized by him in the Jordan confessing their sins. This was another very important aspect, and it's a partner to the call to repentance.

These Jewish people were very serious about getting right with God. You know what it's like to have an assembly of people and work together for prayer, right? We've all experienced this. It would be in such a gathering like that that people would speak, and they wouldn't be speaking primarily to God.

They would be speaking to everybody confessing their sin and repenting publicly before others. You would hear their voice oftentimes choke through tears saying what a hypocrite they've been or what immorality has been in their life always said in a dignified way or at least supposedly. That's how it should be, right? The confession of sin does not have to be an occasion for thoughts about sin, but rather a tasteful and a dignified way to cleanse a person, to confess, to make oneself real before God and others.

And the confession of sin would break out during a time of prayer. You couldn't restrain it. This was a mark of John the Baptist's revival.

It says very plainly there that they did this confessing their sins. And this, I believe, this sort of trauma of the confession of sin that happens among people because it's somewhat traumatic, is it not? Is it not a powerful cleansing? Is it not almost a burning of sin from among the people of God? Is it not God dealing first with his people in revival before he might deal more broadly with the community in awakening? And it's somewhat traumatic, friends. We often think of these seasons of revival as just wonderful times when it's just a beautiful sense of spiritual excitement.

It's all like we're at a wonderful spiritual amusement park where everybody has the beautiful Holy Ghost goosebumps, and I'm all in favor of those. Friends, that's not the mark of real revival. Real revival is a cleansing work, at least in its beginning stages, is it not? And this, my friends, is one reason why I believe that many sincere prayers for revival are never heard by God.

And this is what I mean by that. It's that the person praying has no conception of what revival really is. They pray, Oh, God, send us a season of spiritual excitement.

Now, they pray for revival, but that's what they mean. God knows their heart. God knows that if they were really praying for this deep, as I said before, somewhat traumatic cleansing of God's people, that the real cry of that person's heart is no, God, please keep revival away from me.

I do not want it. I don't want to be in the presence of such a cleansing. Now again, this was characteristic, this radical confession of sin was characteristic of John the Baptist's revival.

I should also mark as well, it says it in verse 6, that it was marked by the public demonstration of repentance. Right? I mean, something happened. And what happened in the case of John the Baptist and

his work then? The public demonstration of repentance was baptism.

Now you and I say, well, baptism, that's nice. Many of our churches have wonderful baptistries, and it's a wonderful occasion of joy and celebration. And that is Christian baptism as we know it today.

That was not the same idea behind the baptism that John offered. Because baptism, or ceremonial washings, or washings similar to this, were not unknown in Judaism at this time. But in this context, in the way that John the Baptist presented it, you were basically saying, I am going to do something that's reserved for Gentiles who want to come to the living God.

A Jew basically had to say, I'm as bad as a Gentile. Baptize me. That is a radical demonstration of repentance, is it not? And in revival, people do something.

It affects the way they live. As I said before, we're not talking about a mere season of spiritual excitement, but it's a deep cleansing within the church. But beyond that as well, it prompts people to do something.

There is a change in the way that they live. It affects the business of the taverns. It affects the business of the law courts.

It affects businesses. I remember reading about this, reading about it in the ripple effect, if you could say, from the great work that God did here in Wales, right? Matter of fact, when I teach on this subject, I don't call it the Welsh revival. I call it the Welsh and worldwide revival because it really did spark something that spread all over the globe virtually in a remarkable way.

And it spread to America. People don't understand this today. They don't understand what a remarkable outpouring came in America after the Welsh revival.

For example, in Atlantic City, in these years after 1904, in Atlantic City, such a revival happened that it was claimed that not more than 50 unconverted people were in the entire population of 60,000 people. In Atlanta, in November of 1904, factories and stores and offices closed for a day of prayer and thousands gathered for prayer. In Louisville, there were more than 4,000 conversions and 58 leading businesses closed at noon for an hour of prayer in that city.

In Denver, January the 4th, 1905, was declared a day of prayer for the city. At 10 a.m., the churches were filled. At 11.30, almost all the stores and businesses were closed.

And at 12 noon, 12,000 people crowded into the largest theaters in the city for combined prayer meetings. Every school in the city was closed for prayer. In Portland, Oregon, more than 200 major stores signed an agreement to close between 11 and 2 so that their customers and employees could attend prayer meetings.

Now that's a change, is it not? Is that not a demonstration of repentance? When the shopkeeper says, we're going to close for business because of prayer, that is a demonstration of something remarkable from the spirit of God. Next I would say, about John the Baptist's work, it was the object of curiosity to the religious leaders who were hesitant to approve of the work. Isn't this true? We read this in verse 7. Do you see this? But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Oh, the Pharisees and the Sadducees.

By the way, you may know that these two different religious groups, very different kinds of men, were they not the Pharisees and the Sadducees? Isn't it wonderful? They come together in unity at the preaching of John the Baptist. I wish we could say they came together for good purpose. But it was a unity of evil, so to speak.

And John the Baptist senses they came, that they came with critical and censorious spirits. The religious leadership was very suspicious and they were hesitant to approve of the work that John the Baptist did. In the same day, often works of revival in our own day have been rejected by religious leaders, been rejected by denominational officials.

It's not hard to sympathize with those people who are suspicious of revival. With all the false and bizarre things that go on under the name of revival today. Here's my fear.

My fear is that when real revival does come, many of us will miss it. Because maybe it won't look just like we expected it to look. Or maybe it'll come from a place we weren't expecting it to come from.

But listen, it should fit the biblical description of revival, but maybe it won't fit our personal and cultural expectations. Perhaps there will be a lot of this. God, you'd never use them in revival, would you? Well, maybe he would, right? He used a guy like John the Baptist.

You can be sure that those kind of things upset the Pharisees and the Sadducees as they cast a very wary eye upon the work of John the Baptist. I find a great example of this connected with the work in South Africa. Again, connected with this great 1859 revival.

You see, they heard about God's work there in America from missionaries, but they weren't very impressed by the news. They thought, well, listen, those kind of things happened very easily in America, but not in other places. But when missionaries began to arrive from Scotland telling that God was working there, well, then they were deeply impressed and they began to have hope for South Africa and they began to pray.

And so there was a conference of 137 ministers and they heard the reports of revival in other places and they said, God, bring it here, and they made a great commitment to prayer. Fifty days later on Pentecost Sunday, the young people in a Reformed church in their youth meeting in a prayer hall near the Dutch Reformed church of Worcester, in that very meeting, a black girl asked if she might give her testimony. And the young man in charge of the meeting gave his permission and the young man and she gave us such a sweet testimony, kind of like Flory Evans some 50 years later, she gave such a sweet testimony that it brought a hush of the sense of the presence of God over the meeting.

The leader of the meeting said that he heard what he described as the sound of an approaching tornado and he thought they felt the whole prayer hall shaking and all the young people sprang to their feet and they started praying out loud at the same time. Now this is quite unusual among Dutch Reformed people. One person has described the Dutch Reformed as being like Presbyterians with a little extra starch.

But the youth meeting was completely overwhelmed by the spirit of spontaneous prayer and crying out to God and an elder of the church was walking by and he saw the meeting and he heard the meeting and he heard the commotion and decided that he had to report it to the minister right away. And so the minister who was new to the church and new to the ministry, he came to the youth meeting right away and he asked the youth pastor in charge of the meeting what's happening here? The youth minister said

something about the presence of God. The minister told the youth leader young man, I hold you responsible for all of this.

And then the minister spoke directly to the young people. He said, now listen, be quiet young people but they were all too busy to notice. And then he said, I am your minister sent by God.

Will you be quiet? But it was like they didn't even see him. Then the minister went back to the youth leader and they said let's sing a hymn and you know sort of get back control of this. But they didn't even do this and so finally the minister stomped out of the meeting and he said, God is a God of order.

This is nothing but confusion. That Dutch reform minister was Andrew Murray. And it is said that when Andrew Murray was a mellow old saint famous as a speaker and an author and a preacher his friends used to tease him by saying, tell us Dr. Murray about how you tried to stop the revival.

It's said that Andrew Murray always used to smile when they asked him that question. But listen, Andrew Murray got it right. He understood afterwards God was doing something.

And so he called for a special prayer meeting the following Saturday at a school room and more than a thousand people packed the room and hundreds were standing outside and he read a passage of scripture gave a short commentary and then he said, now the meeting is open for prayer. And again they heard what they thought was the sound of an approaching tornado and all thousand people leapt to their feet and they prayed simultaneously and out loud and a visitor forced his way to the front he touched Andrew Murray on the arm and he told him, this is the outpouring of the Holy Spirit be careful what you do. And that was the beginning of the greatest revival that South Africa ever saw.

I would say another aspect to this work of John the Baptist is that it challenged their prior experience. Do you see this? It says there in verses 5 and 6 that all Jerusalem, Judea and all the regions surrounding the Jordan went out and were baptized by him in the Jordan confessing their sins. This was a new thing.

And then it says in verses 13 and 14 that Jesus himself came to be baptized. Listen, there was enough in this revival of John the Baptist not only to challenge the Pharisees and Sadducees there was enough to challenge people who were supportive of the revival. Can I say? There was enough to challenge John the Baptist himself.

Because when Jesus came to him and said it's time for me to be baptized by you what did John the Baptist do? No, Lord, no. Not now. It isn't for me to do this.

And Jesus had to compel him to do this. I would also say that this revival like historical revival was marked by unusual phenomenon. What's the unusual phenomenon? Friends, it's not every day that the Holy Spirit descends like a dove and the Father speaks from heaven saying this is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.

It was marked by unusual phenomenon. Let me say this and just a few points in closing now. This revival of John the Baptist is familiar to us who know anything about revival and its truth.

It was marked by the presence of Jesus. Should we not notice that in verse 13? What kind of revival would this have been if Jesus never came? But verse 13 tells us then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan to be baptized by him. Friends, if Jesus doesn't show up it's not revival.

If the man on the platform gets more attention than the Savior I question it. And is this what we've come to now? Have we come to Christless revivals? Where Jesus is perhaps introduced or is mentioned from time to time but he isn't the center of what happens. No, may it never be so for us.

No, in fact you could say that this was a mark of a true revival because Jesus was glorified. Right? He was glorified. He was glorified by John because John recognized who he was but he was also glorified by the Father from heaven.

Oh, but notice John deliberately went out of his way to glorify Jesus and have you ever thought of that? Here's John. Let's be honest. In the height of his ministry thousands of people are paying attention to him.

He's got such crowds, such fame, such notoriety and he can't wait to put the attention upon Jesus. That's how it should be. Not only that Jesus is present but that Jesus is glorified and when somebody who's gaining as much attention in the ministry as John the Baptist was and when they're that successful the great temptation is to take some of the glory to oneself.

The temptation is to use the revival work of God to promote and to advance self, to advance career or to advance fame but John would have none of it. His heart was as you know I must decrease but he must increase. One final point.

This was a wonderful true revival because it prepared for a future work. Do you remember what it said there in verse 3? For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah saying the voice of one crying in the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord make his path straight. Now listen as glorious as the work of John the Baptist was and would you not agree from our reading of Matthew 3 it was a glorious work.

As glorious as the work of John the Baptist was it was preparatory for something even more glorious. Is that not true? The real ministry was yet to come and of course John's revival prepared the way for the greater and the more glorious and the superlative work of Jesus himself. And this is true for many works of revival.

Is it any accident that God sent the great outpouring of the Welsh and worldwide revival in the years before the cataclysm of the great war? Is it any accident that the great outpouring in the United States of 1858, 1859 came just a few years of their own disaster of the civil war? That was a great harvest of souls. A million people out of a population of perhaps 30 million and it happened just a few years before the civil war. You see we see that in times past God sent seasons of revival to raise up a whole new generation of pastors and leaders and workers for the future.

In these senses we can say that God uses revival to prepare for a future war. That brings it back to you. Remember how I started talking in the beginning about personal revival and then broader revival.

I think that principle is true in both cases. Is it not? God wants to give you personal revival as a preparation for more that he wants to do through you. And he wants to send forth broad revival, a wide revival to prepare his work in coming generations and in distant places.

So what do we do? Well listen, for your personal revival you pray and pay attention to these sessions. God will lead you into it. He will lead all of us into it.

For a broad work, listen, I know of no technology that can lay hold of the spirit of God for a broad work. Look, I primarily am a Bible teacher. I love teaching the word of God.

And I'm fascinating at how technology can help in teaching the word of God, right? You can put up things on a screen behind a person. You can use a microphone. You can use the internet and webcams and MP3 files and podcasts and whiteboards and all kinds of technology to help with the power of the word of God.

But friends, friends, there's no technology to lay hold of the spirit of God. Say one thing, we can pray. This is not the one thing God has given us to do, to lay hold of the spirit of God in his outpouring.

And so shall we now conclude with prayer? Father, that is our prayer. We think of the great works of God, Lord, standing in this place at this pulpit in Moriah Chapel. We think of the great works that you've done in history.

But Lord, opening up your word, we think of great works that you've done in biblical history. And through all that, Lord, we say, do it again, Lord. It is time for you to act, Lord God.

Act in our lives on a personal level but in prayer now and in coming days and persistently, we want to add our prayers to the millions that go forth pleading with you to send forth another great outpouring of your Holy Spirit. Send a remarkable time of advance for your kingdom. Do it, Lord.

Not because we deserve it, but because it will bring you glory. Do it for that purpose. In Jesus' name.

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