

Revival in the Bible

by J. Vernon McGee

Revival is the recovery of life or vigor in believers who have come to a low spiritual condition, and it is possible today through recognizing our condition, confessing our sins, meeting God's conditions, and waiting upon God.

Duration: 34:27

Scripture: Ezra 10:10

Topics: "Revival", "Repentance"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the low spiritual level of the people in Jerusalem upon the return of Ezra and Nehemiah. The conditions were worse than they had anticipated, with the people not separating themselves from the abominations of the surrounding nations. Upon hearing this, Ezra is deeply distressed and shows his anguish by tearing his garments and plucking off his hair. The speaker emphasizes the need for revival, which involves confession, love for one another, and a restoration of joy. He also highlights the importance of putting away evil and overcoming indifference in order to experience true revival.

Transcript

And I'm turning tonight to the ninth chapter of the book of Ezra. There are three great ninth chapters in the Bible. They have to do with post-captivity books.

One is the ninth chapter of Ezra, one is the ninth chapter of Nehemiah, and one is the ninth chapter of Daniel. These are three great nine chapters. They have to do with revival, if you please, great prayers of confession.

I wish tonight I could read all of this, but for the sake of brevity, we streamline it down and begin reading at verse one. And read just a few verses. Now when these things were done, the princess came to me saying, the people of Israel and the priests and the Levites have not separated themselves from the people of the lands, doing according to their abominations, even of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians, and the Amorites.

For they have taken of their daughters for themselves and for their sons, so that the holy seed have mingled themselves with the people of those lands. Yea, the hand of the princes and rulers hath been chief in this trespass. And when I heard this thing, I rent my garment and my mantle, and plucked off the hair of my head and of my beard, and sat down astonished.

Then were assembled unto me every one that tremble at the words of the God of Israel, because of the transgression of those that had been carried away. And I sat astonished until the evening sacrifice. And at the evening sacrifice I rose up from my heaviness, and having rent my garment and my mantle, I fell upon my knees and spread out my hands unto the Lord my God, and said, O my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift up my face to thee, my God, for our iniquities are increased over our head, and our trespass is grown up unto the heavens.

And that prayer of confession continues on through this chapter. I'll not continue to read in order to save time. Now tonight, briefly, we want to speak on revival and survival.

The term revival is not actually a Bible word. You may be surprised to know that the word revival occurs nowhere in the word of God. It's just simply not used in God's word.

Now the principle is here, of course, and it's here but not in the popular meaning of the term. I know that in my ministry I always use the word revival, and I do it from this pulpit oftentimes in the popular sense. I mean by that that there's been a spiritual upsurge.

I mean that sinners have been converted in mass, if you please, and that there have been new interests in the things of the Spirit. Now technically speaking, a revival has nothing in the world to do with the salvation of the lost. Technically speaking, a revival means just simply to recover life or vigor.

It means to return to consciousness. It refers, therefore, to that which has had life, and then that life ebbs away, even sometimes to death, and there's no vitality at all, and then revival comes. You find it used in just that sense.

If you please, over in the 14th chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, the 9th verse, listen to this, "...for to this end Christ both died and rose and revived, that he might be Lord both of the dead and the living." And there, revived means that he was raised from the dead. Now, revival obviously is confined to believers, those that are already God's children, and they have come to a low spiritual condition, and they're brought back to vitality and power. And so tonight I want to change my method just a little, and I'd like to use revival this evening in the technical sense.

I'd like to use it as really the Word of God uses it, relating it tonight just to believers, for that's where it properly belongs. It is a technical term. We have found out, those of us that are amateurs, already in television, that there are a great many terms there that apply to television.

They're just simply technical terms. The producer comes out and he says, we're ready to shoot. Well, the first time I got under the desk, but since then I found out that they don't really mean to shoot as we think of it today at all.

They're really ready to start the program, you see. It seems to be a technical term with them. Now, revival refers to God's people, and in the true sense of the term, that's all that it possibly can mean.

Now, a revival is needed today. And may I say to you, a revival is possible today. I'm not one of these pessimistic primal analysts, and I'm a primal analyst and I'm a pessimist most of the time, but I'm not a pessimistic primal analyst who believes that we've passed the time when you can have revival.

I believe you can have revival, and we can have revival in this day. I believe that if we met the conditions, God would send us revival. Now, I'm turning you tonight to what I believe was the greatest revival in the

history of this world.

I do not think there was anything before it, nor has there been anything since then that compares to this revival. It's the revival that was led by Ezra and Nehemiah when they returned back to the land. It was a revival that came in probably the saddest, darkest day in the history of these people.

You see, they had marked time for 70 years, and when the Babylonian captivity was over, they said, boy, the minute we get back to the land, everything's going to be all right. We'll have great blessing. And they returned to the land.

But did you know that the interesting thing is that there's a period of the greatest failure. And here is the picture that has been given of that era, and I'd like to read this to you. The prophetic voice was silent.

Haggai and Zechariah had long since passed away. Zerubbabel, the last representative of the house of David, in whose person some had looked for a restoration of the Jewish kingdom, was dead. The high priesthood which had been filled by the saintly Jeshua was now occupied by a liesheb who became connected by marriage with two conspicuous enemies of the faith of Israel.

Darius had been succeeded by Xerxes, the story of whose pride, lasciviousness, passion, and feebleness is one of the most ignoble of the records of classical history. And it was in this particular period that this man Ezra and Nehemiah, we'll find when we move into that book, these men returned back to the land. The people were discouraged.

They left off building, and it looked as if everything was gone. Probably no period was quite as dark as that period. And yet God had prepared this man Ezra during those long weary years of the captivity that he might be brought into the place where revival could come.

Now may I say to you that this revival came, and it came and brought great blessing to these people. In fact, it was that which caused the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem. It caused a return, if you please, to the word of God as no other period has witnessed.

Now briefly tonight will you notice these three things we'd like to just mention that characterize this period. First of all, that was a recognition of the low spiritual condition. That's always essential to revival.

Second, requirements were met for the revival. And third, the results of the revival. Now first of all, will you notice the recognition of the low spiritual end.

And you'll find in this ninth chapter that when Ezra returned, that the conditions were actually worse than he thought they were. Reports had been brought to him that things were sad back in Jerusalem. And Nehemiah had also heard that.

And when Ezra the priest and Nehemiah the layman arrived, they were absolutely overwhelmed because although they had been told things were sad, they were not told really how bad they really were. And so we find this man Ezra, when the reports are brought to him and he sees the condition of his people yonder in Jerusalem, will you notice what he did here? And very briefly verse three, when I heard this thing, I rent my garment and my mantle, plucked off the hair of my head and of my beard and sat down astonished. Now a man has to be tremendously affected to do a thing like that.

You can see that this absolutely overwhelmed Ezra. Then will you notice that there was a turning to the word of God. Then were assembled unto me everyone that trembled at the words of the God of Israel because of the transgression of those that had been carried away.

And I sat astonished until the evening sacrifice. Now in the prayer of Ezra, you discover the reason that they tremble. They tremble because as they read the word of God, they saw how they had transgressed it.

And when they saw how they had transgressed the law, they tremble that God had not judged them again and sent them back into Babylonian captivity. Ezra knew now that they deserved it and it caused him and those people who were spiritually minded in that day, absolutely to tremble. May I say to you, my beloved, that one of the evidences at this present hour that we do need revival and that we are not even at this stage yet is the fact that even fundamentalism is spending all of its time criticizing somebody else.

When we begin to study the word of God and turn the light on our own hearts and lives, and instead of saying that it's the other man that needs reviving and it's this fellow here that needs reviving, then my beloved, we're going to be well on the way toward revival. But as long as fundamentalism is continually pointing his finger at the other fellow and said, boy, if you, if I could just get him straightened out, everything would be fine. We've got too much of that today.

What we need to do is men and women like Ezra and this company that gathered with him who trembled at the word of God and who sat astonished and rebuked their own hearts and their own lives. Now, I know that's not popular today, but my friend, that will have to come about before there can be any revival at all. The Moody Revival was a great wave of Bible teaching that swept over this land.

People turning to the word of God, and out of that came, I suppose, one of the greatest movements that America's ever seen. The Bible Institute movement and a movement that needs to be continued today. A Bible Institute movement.

Out of that came all of the institutes that are in America today. Came out of the Moody meetings, if you please. Why? Because it was a revival that brought people to the word of God, my beloved.

And we need today to get back to the word of God. The word of God is a mirror, and it's a mirror not to hold up to the other fellow, but to hold up to ourselves. I watched a lady the other day in a restroom, and I watched her as she took out her makeup and her little mirror.

It couldn't have been much bigger than a dollar. And she must have worked 30 minutes there on her face, and I would say that that was a good place to work because it could stand a great deal of improvement. But my, how she worked on her face with that mirror.

And I thought, oh, if today we could get Christians to take the word of God that is a mirror and work on themselves the same way. That's not what it should be. Look here, the book shows, ooh, look what it shows.

And it's not talking about the other fellow, but it's talking about me. My beloved, may I say, there must be on our part a recognition of our low spiritual condition. And until we recognize that, then there cannot be revival.

The second is here, and it's confession of sin. Will you notice this? Verse five, And at the evening sacrifice I rose up from my heaviness, and having rent my garment my mantle, I fell upon my knees, spread out my

hands unto the Lord my God, and said, O my God, I'm ashamed and blushed to lift up my face to thee. My God, for our iniquities are increased over our head, and our trespass is grown up unto the heavens.

Now will you notice that this man, and you'll find Nehemiah did the same thing, though they were in many ways separated from these people because they just came to town. They had been down yonder in Shushan, and now they just arrived in Jerusalem. But the minute they did, they identified themselves with their people, and they said, We have sinned.

Again, may I say, confession of sin today means confession of sin. Now, I want to be very careful here, because after World War II, we went through a wave of hysteria, and there came into being something that even to this day is popular in certain quarters, and that's public confession of sin. Everywhere that's taken place, there's been bad after-effects.

I personally do not believe that there should be public confession of sin. I think it should be private, that we should confess our sins. This man here confessed his sins.

You'll find that Nehemiah confessed his sins, and you'll find that Daniel confessed his sins. All of these men in the ninth chapter, ninth chapter of Ezra, ninth chapter of Nehemiah, ninth chapter of Daniel, all of these men went to God, identified themselves with the people, and said, We have sinned. It was, as I understand it, it's a private confession of sin, and we need that today, where we, if you please, draw a circle, and we say, Lord, here is where the trouble is, inside the circle, and we want you to begin right inside the circle, Lord.

You see, revival is an individual affair. It's not where a great wave sweeps over a multitude. That's not it at all.

I read Finney several years ago with the idea, when I began, that Finney was some sort of a fanatic, and I made the discovery that he was one of the most sensible men I'd ever read after. Finney said this, A revival is not a miracle. A revival is the appropriation of natural means that God has given you, and that every individual who wants to have a revival can have a revival.

And so tonight, you can't point your finger at the rest of the church and say tonight, boy, do they need revival. What you and I need to do is to draw the circle, get inside of it, and say, Lord, let's do business on the inside of the circle, and let's forget about what's on the outside of the circle. Elijah was a one-man revival, and you will find there have been other men that have been one-man revivals.

God just used one man, and there have been many periods and many times of unknown people to us tonight that God has used in a small way in revival, because any man that'll meet God's conditions can have revival. It was in 1904, a young man in Wales, a young miner, knelt by his bed in prayer and asked God to revive him. That young man went to a prayer meeting in the middle of the week, and there was a deacon there by the name of William Davies speaking.

William Davies said that night, he says, God may send us a revival. And remember, Thomas was not there, and if God should send us a revival, you be sure and be here. And that young man said, my, I want to be there.

That's what I've been praying for. That young man was Evan Roberts. He tells about how on Sunday morning that he'd start out for the church, and he'd go by, and how he did love sailboats.

And he said that he'd go by and he'd almost, he'd almost go out on Sunday morning. Then these words of William Davies would come to him. Remember Thomas.

Thomas was not there. You be there. And Evan Roberts would leave reluctantly his boat there that, oh, he wanted to go out in.

And he'd go on to church. He'd do the same thing in the middle of the week. He'd say, oh, I want to do something else.

And then he'd remember. And one night in a midweek service, it came. It was a revival, my beloved.

And the one man that had met the condition was Evan Roberts. And God brought a tremendous, wonderful movement into Wales. It was a time of refreshing, because one man, he drew the circle, and he got on the inside of it.

So don't you point the finger tonight at anybody else you have no right to. Will you notice briefly the requirements that were met for revival? Israel had a revival, and it wasn't much of one. It's not what a lot of people are talking about today, worldwide revival.

But it was a little revival. Notice what this man Ezra said, and now for a little space, grace hath been showed from the Lord our God to leave us a remnant to escape and to give us a nail in his holy place, that our God may lighten our eyes and give us a little reviving in our bondage. And a little reviving came to that little group, if you please, that were willing to meet these conditions.

I say to you tonight that a great many people today have grandiose ideas. In fact, they have delusions of grandeur, talking about worldwide revival when even our own hearts are not revived. We need to bring this thing down and meet the conditions in our own hearts and lives.

May I say to you that after all the human elements and efforts have entered into the preparation, there must always be not the forcing of God, not the demanding of God, no commanding of him, but just a waiting upon him. Because even in revival, God is sovereign, and the Holy Spirit is sovereign. Always think of Elijah.

I wish I had a picture of him as he stood before that drenched altar and the water running down around it and not a spark any ways near it. That man stands there and he looks up to heaven. He prays a very brief prayer.

He says, Oh God, if fire doesn't come from you, nothing's going to happen here. It's all in your hand. It's all in your hand.

We need today to remember that the Holy Spirit is not God's Western Union boy. You don't ask him to take a message. You don't call him when you want him.

He's sovereign, and we need today to wait upon God. This business today that we're going to force God to do something, you're not going to force him to do anything. He's sovereign.

He's not commanding. You don't give him orders. You meet his conditions.

We're the ones that are to be obedient unto him. We need that. This is the thing that Isaiah said, Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts.

Let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. Well, you notice the results of revival, and I must be brief. And believe me, when you have revival, you do not have to call in a fingerprint expert to find out whether revival had been around the place or not.

You'll know it. First of all, there is a putting away of evil. You will find in the tenth chapter of Ezra that these things that were wrong in Israel were dealt with and dealt with smartly.

They were put away. The things that were wrong, even up to the home of the high priest, things were wrong, and they were made right. There must be a putting away of evil.

It was David who, after committing the awful sin he did, said, Create in me a clean heart, O God. And though I walk in the midst of evil, revive me is the plea and the prayer of the Psalmist, if you please. And then, my beloved, there will not only be a putting away of evil, it will remedy the sin of indifference that is abroad today.

I'm firmly convinced that we're living in the time that John spoke of as the church of Laodicea, a church that our Lord said, You're neither hot nor cold. I wish you were either hot or cold, but you're lukewarm. We're living in a time of indifference, and a revival will cure indifference.

It was Dr. Lyman Abbott who said this years ago. He says, When a boy, I heard my father say that if by some miracle God would change every cold, indifferent Christian into ten blatant infidels, the church might well celebrate a day of thanksgiving and praise. Did you know tonight the thing that helps the cause of Satan more than anything else is not the atheist in our midst, but the indifferent Christian tonight.

He's the one that's holding back tonight the power of God. Sin of indifference would be cured. Third, bitterness would disappear from our midst.

Remember the writer to the Hebrews tells about a little root of bitterness, that awful thing that sometimes rises up and does rise up today. I tell you that would be cured if we had revival today. That's the thing that Paul said to the Ephesians after he said, Grieve not the Holy Spirit.

Somebody says, How do you grieve the Holy Spirit? Listen to him. Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and evil speaking be put away from you with all malice. The very first thing that he mentions that grieves the Holy Spirit is bitterness, my beloved.

And as long as there's bitterness in our hearts, revival cannot come. A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump. Lives are wrecked today by bitterness.

And he said that Schopenhauer became the skeptic that he became, the cynical philosopher that he was, because of bitterness that had entered his life. He worshiped his mother. When his father died, he idolized her.

And he walked in one day and saw her sitting in another man's lap. He walked out filled with bitterness the rest of his life. He never got over that.

Joe Stalin was a student in a seminary, and he was put out. He never got over it. Bitterness in the human heart.

May I say that it can wreck any individual and it can hold back revival. By this shall all men know that you're my disciples. You have love one for another.

We know that we pass from death unto life because we love the brethren. There's another evidence. There would be new joy, my beloved.

Nehemiah had to go around among the people after they heard the word of God. They had never, some of those people had never heard it before. And they began to weep.

And Nehemiah said to them, don't weep. This is a day of joy. And he says, remember the joy of the Lord is your strength.

And then the psalmist says, will thou not revive us that we might rejoice again? David said, restore unto me the joy of my salvation. He never did lose his salvation, but he lost his joy. And my friend today, we need a new joy among believers.

And then the last thing I mentioned, it would lead to a walk in humbleness, a walk in humility. And again, that is something that's needed today. Will you notice Isaiah 57, 15, for thus saith the high and lofty one that inhabited eternity, whose name is holy.

I dwell in the high and holy place with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit to revive the spirit of the humble and to revive the heart of the contrite ones. God says, I'm high and I'm lifted up. God says, I'm way above you.

But God says, when I look down at little man, I'm not looking for the big fella. I'm not looking for the prominent one. I'm not looking for the rich one.

God says, I'm looking for that heart that's humble. That heart that is contrite before me. That fella that knows that he has a need.

That fella that recognizes that he hasn't anything to offer me. And he comes to me in his great need. And when he comes to me in his great need, then God says, though I'm high and lifted up, I love to come down and walk with that fella.

And I'll bypass the proud man every time. My beloved, we need today a revival. We need it so desperately that if America does not get it, many are telling us that we shall not survive.

I'm no alarmist. I'm merely tonight quoting to you what literally hundreds of leaders have told us since World War II. Revival has not come yet.

Obvious why it hasn't. We have not yet met the condition. When we do, it will come.

Shall we pray? I'm not going to ask tonight for any show or public demonstration at all, but I trust those of you that are here and those of you that have listened in tonight that you not be pointing your finger at somebody else and say, oh, if so-and-so or a certain church or a certain individual or a certain group could only get straightened out, we'd have revival. I wonder if you'd just take it to yourself and draw the little circle and get in it and say, oh God, the trouble as far as I'm concerned and the only one over whom I have control is the fellow in the circle, and I'd like for you to begin it in the circle. I'm wondering if we might bow our heads in just a moment of silent prayer.

Tell the Lord what's on your heart. Our gracious, loving Father God, we truly thank thee tonight for this record that has been given to us for our example. It's for our admonition.

It's for our instruction. It's for our help. We do pray that we might see that it's not the day in which we live, it's not the condition of this day, and it's not somebody else.

But, oh God, tonight the condition and the day and the other fellow may enter in that the problem is with us, and that we, oh God, that we might be revived, bring in new joy, new humility, and a new usefulness, for we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

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