

Present-Day Wickedness, Apostasy and Modern Civilization Cannot Prevent Revival

by John R. Rice

The present-day wickedness and unbelief cannot prevent great revivals because the gospel of Jesus Christ is enough for the hardest sinners now as it was in Bible times.

Scripture: Jeremiah 32:17, Luke 10:2, John 5:4, John 16:33, Romans 5:20

Topics: "Faith And Revival", "Gods Sovereignty"

Description

Dr. John R. Rice delivers a powerful sermon emphasizing that throughout history, revivals have occurred in the face of great wickedness, unbelief, and challenging circumstances. He highlights how God's power transcends human conditions and how revivals have transformed nations and societies, even in the darkest of times. Dr. Rice urges believers to have unwavering faith in God's ability to bring about revival, regardless of the prevailing conditions, and to be diligent in soul-winning and fulfilling the Great Commission.

Transcript

THE God whom some people worship is old and tired. The present-day civilization is entirely too much for Him! Maybe He could one time give great revivals, but He cannot any more. Mankind has simply gotten to be worse than that old-fashioned God can handle the God of some people's faith. The only thing that God and the people of little faith and little passion who serve Him can do is to retreat from the world. Such people on every hand can only read the newspaper reports of atomic bombs, hydrogen bombs, the spread of communism, modernism among church leaders, and say, "Jesus is bound to come very, very soon!" These Christians and their gospel are not adequate to face and meet the conditions in this world; so they, in defeated despair, do not "watch" in the Scriptural sense, do not "occupy till I come," as Jesus commanded, but rather they study technical details and speculate upon the Antichrist, and whether Russia is now forming the great northern confederacy (Gog and Magog of Ezekiel).

Christians with belief in that kind of a defeated God can have no great revivals. Rather, they are like the remnant of the British army at Dunkirk, surrounded and hounded and being cut to pieces by the German blitzkrieg, and waiting only to be taken from the beaches by British boats, to escape annihilation! So many Christians look for the rapture as a last resort of a God who cannot cope with the present world, in a Christianity which is more or less out-of-date, very nice for the few who have it, but inadequate to reach

multitudes, to shake and change cities and nations and save millions!

Can you see the wickedness, the near-blasphemy of that kind of an attitude toward God and the gospel? How God must be grieved by our defeated unbelief about revivals!

I thank God that I look for the Saviour's coming. But I look for His coming because He said for me to look for Him, not because I read about the hydrogen bombs in the newspapers! I look for the dear Saviour's coming, and my heart will leap with unmeasured joy to see His face; but I know what will rejoice His heart and I am trying to do that. He wants sinners saved, and left me to do this task while I await His coming. Oh, I long to be pleasing Him, should He come today! And if He does not come for another thousand years, I will serve Him gladly till I die, winning all the souls I can, and then rejoice with Him in the blessed revivals that will continue in this age until the Saviour does come.

Dr. Hyman Appelman, Jewish evangelist, tells how in San Angelo, Texas, in a hotel room he, as a state evangelist under the employ of the Baptist State Convention, discussed revivals with his superior. That godly man tried to comfort Dr. Appelman, saying that he must not expect such great revivals as had occurred in other ages since now people were distracted by radio, by automobiles and other luxuries, by a pleasure-madness, by leisure time and by widespread wickedness. Dr. Appelman should go on and do the best he could but not hope for a return of the revivals of D.L. Moody, said the good man.

Dr. Appelman tells how he bowed his head upon the bed and wept uncontrollably. Then he told his distressed superior that if the Lord Jesus Christ and His gospel and the power of the Holy Spirit were not adequate for this wicked age as well as all other ages, then the gospel was truly out-of-date and Christ was not all He had claimed to be. Dr. Appelman was not willing to make that concession; nor am I.

The simple truth is that mankind is insatiably wicked, but no more wicked than he has been since the fall. The truth is that there is everywhere a great tendency toward spiritual decline and unbelief, but this is not essentially different from what it has always been. In Bible times it was so. It was so in all the ages of great revival. The wickedness, apostasy and all the distractions in all ages have never been enough to prevent great revivals when God's people paid God's price; and they cannot prevent revival now. If I seem bold in this matter, then let me thank God that I have such a Saviour, such a gospel, such divine resources available for revival, that I know we have the answer to the world's need. This world has not gotten beyond God's power. The atomic bomb, the hydrogen bomb have not razed God. The present civilization is not more complex than the Lord anticipated; and man's wickedness and unbelief have not surprised Him, nor reached a stage for which He made no provision.

In this lecture I want to show that present-day wickedness and unbelief is not worse than in Bible times when God gave great revivals; that all great revivals since were not prevented by the failures of Christianity in Bible times; that the awful Dark Ages could not prevent the Reformation and its marvelous revival; that wickedness and depravity everywhere could not prevent the greatest revivals in modern times. The Christ, the gospel, the Holy Spirit, the promises, which were adequate in other days are adequate now. All of modern wickedness, apostasy and distraction cannot prevent revival.

I. Mankind's Spiritual Conditions and Apostasy Are Not Worse Than in Bible Times When God Gave Great Revivals

Those who believe that men are more wicked and the days are more desperate now than in New Testament times have simply failed to see the picture clearly given in the New Testament of human

wickedness and failure, and have underestimated the power of the New Testament gospel and Spirit-filled New Testament Christians.

First, consider that man was then the unregenerate, depraved sinner--as alien from God then as now. To a leading Pharisee it was that Jesus insisted, "Ye must be born again." He taught Nicodemus that that which is born of the flesh is only flesh, and cannot see the kingdom of God; that the new birth was the only chance to avoid Hell. He told the nicest church people of their time--tithers, praying, law-abiding, religious people--"Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do" (John 8:44). To them He said, "Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?" (Matt. 23:33). He said that all the civilization, all the religious forms and ceremonies they observed were only the whitewash on sepulchres filled with dead men's bones and all uncleanness. He likened the hearts of these outwardly righteous Pharisees to decaying, stinking bodies. The hearts of men in Bible times were no better than the hearts of men today.

Paul wrote to the converts at Ephesus, "And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins." Lost sinners then were not only wicked, they were spiritually dead. They had in them no power to be good or to do good, though they might put on the outward appearance of goodness. It is hard to see how a race that is totally bad can get any worse, or how a man who is dead can get any deader. The Bible clearly pictures that men by nature, in Bible times the same as now--are utterly incapable of saving themselves or of doing good. It would take a miracle of God's grace, the new birth, to make men into the children of God. If you believe the foolish chatter of the Christ-rejecting modernists that all men are by nature the children of God, then you do not believe the Bible, and your conception is fundamentally unchristian and anti-Christian. Men, according to the Bible, are a fallen race, alien from God and enemies of God by nature. But they were so in Bible times the same as now.

Don't you see that if the gospel could reach and save such men in Bible times, it can reach them now? There is nothing in the nature of wicked men that can prevent great revivals. The gospel of Jesus Christ is enough for the hardest sinners now as it was when some of those who crucified Jesus Christ were converted and when Paul the persecutor found Christ on the road to Damascus. The gospel that could save Mary Magdalene, possessed of seven devils, and chief priests who mocked Jesus while He died, is today the gospel which can reach the hardest human heart, if it be preached in the power of the Holy Spirit by men who will pay God's price for revival.

And consider, please, how in New Testament times flood tides of persecution rose everywhere that the gospel was preached in power. If you think that opposition to the gospel is stronger now than in Bible times, you have very carelessly read your New Testament. The inhabitants of Christ's own home village in Galilee knew and honored Jesus for years, until He was filled with the Spirit and began His public ministry. Then the first day He spoke in the power of God in their synagogue they "rose up, and thrust him out of the city, and led him unto the brow of the hill whereon their city was built, that they might cast him down headlong" (Luke 4:29). John the Baptist had his head cut off. The Lord Jesus Himself was crucified. Stephen, one of the first seven deacons, was martyred for the faith. Right in the midst of the blessed revival which began at Pentecost was much persecution, and Peter and John were arrested and thrown in jail. Early church traditions say that every one of the twelve apostles save John the beloved died a martyr's death. We know that Paul barely escaped from Damascus with his life, that he was stoned at Lystra and left for dead, that he spent some years in jail and finally was taken in chains to Rome. After years as a prisoner, Paul seems to have been released for a little while, then arrested again and finally was beheaded under Nero.

Do you think there is opposition today to the gospel? Why, it was a customary thing for Paul and his companions to be run out of town! In Acts 13:50 we are told, "But the Jews stirred up the devout and honorable women, and the chief men of the city, and raised persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them out of their coasts." That was after the Jews were filled with envy and there was much contradiction and blaspheming, and Paul had said to them, "Lo, we turn to the Gentiles" (Acts 13:45,46). At Philippi, Paul and Silas had their clothes torn off, were beaten and placed in jail in stocks. In answer to prayer, God shook the jail, doors opened and the jailer was wonderfully saved. But the officers and people "besought them, and brought them out, and desired them to depart out of the city" (Acts 16:39). Paul and Silas had to slip out of Thessalonica by night to save their skins; then when the tumult reached Berea, Paul had to slip away, pretending to go to the sea. At cultured Athens they mocked Paul. In the synagogue at Corinth they opposed and blasphemed, and Paul said, "From henceforth I will go unto the Gentiles" (Acts 18:6). Paul was seized by a mob in a riot, and another riot filled Ephesus with confusion when Paul went there!

The simple truth is that we can have revival today if we are willing to preach the gospel as they did and suffer persecution as they did. If there were a few people willing to be martyrs for Christ, then the blood of the martyrs would be the seed of the church now, as it has always been.

We hear on every hand foolish statements like, "The foreign mission fields are closing." What do men mean by such statements? They simply mean that there are some nations in the world where the government will not protect a missionary, and someone may hit him in the head with a stone. There are some nations in which soul winners may be persecuted. Well, in that sense, then, the whole world was a closed mission field when Paul began his missionary journeys. If men will not be missionaries unless they can have their whole family with them, have every comfort of life, have regular support of a certain amount of money, and have a guarantee that no one will ever stone them or burn down their house, then of course there will be some places where men cannot preach the gospel with such ease and protection. But in Bible times men expected to suffer for Christ when they went out to have a revival. We should expect the same kind of opposition now.

Actually the opposition in Bible times did not stop revivals. Neither does the opposition today stop revivals. What hinders revival is that God's people are not willing to pay God's price to win souls. We have the same Great Commission. We meet the same kind of sinners. We would have the same kind of opposition if we pressed the battle to the gates for the Lord as they did. But we could have the same kind of results.

Consider, thirdly, that the tendency of backsliding and spiritual decline in Bible times did not prevent revival then and cannot prevent revival now.

There is one sad fact that all of us must recognize when we consider this matter of revivals, that is, that even born-again people have still the old nature, and have a tendency to wander, to grow spiritually cold, to lose soul-winning power and Christian joy. This tendency to backsliding and to spiritual decline was exactly the same in Bible times as it is now. Those who are Christians have a tendency to grow less spiritual. All parents bring children into the world who are unsaved, and even Christian parents have a tendency to let them grow up unconverted. The tendency in churches everywhere is to grow more formal and less spiritual. The preaching tends to degenerate from clear, plain reproof of sin and a demand for repentance, to comforting messages to the saved, and moral essays.

The first chapter of Romans tells us how a race of men who once knew God, a race descended from Noah and his sons, spared from the flood in the ark, became heathen and idolatrous. That chapter tells us how the ancestors of heathen people, "when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened" (Rom. 1:21). When they began to make images in worship, "wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness" (vs. 24), and "... God gave them up unto vile affections" (vs. 26). Then "even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind ..." (vs. 28).

The foolish idea that man descended from brute ancestry and that man has climbed up from an animal-like state through savagery, barbarism, and civilization to enlightenment is a theory made in the imagination of men. It is not taught in the Bible, and it is not verified by history. The idea that man came through an old stone age, a new stone age, an age of metals, and so forth to the present civilization is belied by facts uncovered by archeologists and ethnologists everywhere. Heathen people did not reach their present state by ascending from brute beasts; they reached their present state of heathen darkness by apostasy and declension, going away from a knowledge of God and light and truth. That is the constant tendency of the human heart everywhere, a tendency toward straying from God, turning away from the light. God said, "My people are bent to backsliding from me" (Hos.11:7).

Of this constant tendency of people who are enlightened and blessed of God to fall into spiritual decline, false doctrine, unbelief and wickedness, Matthew Henry has the following to say in his comment upon II Thessalonians 2:3-12:

"And let us observe that no sooner was Christianity planted and rooted in the world than there began to be a defection in the Christian church. It was so in the Old-Testament church; presently after any considerable advance made in religion there followed a defection: soon after the promise there was revolting; for example, soon after men began to call upon the name of the Lord all flesh corrupted their way,--soon after the covenant with Noah the Babel-builders bade defiance to heaven,--soon after the covenant with Abraham his seed degenerated in Egypt,--soon after the Israelites were planted in Canaan, when the first generation was worn off, they forsook God and served Baal,--soon after God's covenant with David his seed revolted, and served other gods,---soon after the return out of captivity there was a general decay of piety, as appears by the story of Ezra and Nehemiah; and therefore it was no strange thing that after the planting of Christianity there should come a falling away."

What became of all the converts of John the Baptist? We remember that when John was preaching by Jordan, "Then went out to him Jerusalem, and all Judaea, and all the region round about Jordan, And were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins" (Matt. 3:5,6). Some would lightly smile at John the Baptist's revival, and scoff at his converts. But I remind you that he preached exactly the same gospel as Jesus did, as we see from John 3:36 which quotes his words, that Jesus Himself said there was never a greater prophet born of woman; and that the impact of His ministry was so powerful that multitudes thought he was the Messiah. Not only Jesus but all of the twelve apostles were baptized by John the Baptist, it is inferred. The revival under John the Baptist was powerful. John the Baptist was great in the sight of the Lord, was filled with the Holy Ghost even from his mother's womb and "turned many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God," as the angel plainly revealed to Zacharias before his birth (Luke 1:15,16). But what had happened to these many converts of John the Baptist when Jesus was crucified some three or four years later? Doubtless many of them were truly converted people, but they did not have much faith in the resurrection of Christ; they did not stand by Him when He was arrested and crucified. The frailty of the best Christians in the world is here illustrated. Yet a mighty revival could be had

at Pentecost despite their failure and the failure of the disciples whom Jesus had won Himself.

If you think that revivals are not possible when Christian people grow cold, or fall into false doctrine, or bicker and divide and sin, then you should remember what Paul said to the elders of the church at Ephesus, gathered to meet him at Miletus:

"Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them."--Acts 20:28-30. Paul had a mighty revival among fickle, immature Christians, and he knew that after his departure some of these very same elders would arise to speak perverse things and draw away disciples, and grievous wolves would enter the flock. Christians then were the same kind of frail creatures that they are today. Backsliding and apostasy were the constant tendency.

Paul, in deadly urgency, wrote to Timothy about this very thing. In II Timothy 4:1-5 he said:

"I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables. But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry."

Paul was ready to be offered. He knew that the apostasy prevailed everywhere, then as now. Yet Timothy was enjoined to watch, to endure afflictions, to do the work of an evangelist. Then good Christians might have sung that old hymn which says:

"Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it, Prone to leave the God I love."

But that did not prevent revivals. God can have revivals with poor, frail, human instruments. He can revive His saints. He can use them in soul-winning. The declension and backsliding are so natural to men that they never surprise God, and we may be sure they never make powerless His gospel, if a few Christians will pay God's price for the revival.

II. Failures in New Testament Times Could Not Prevent All Great Revivals Since

We had as well admit that Christians often failed God in New Testament times. Critics might well have said then, as they sometimes say now, "Christianity has failed."

After Paul warned Timothy, "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables," then Paul spoke to Timothy about his own strait. He was in jail at Rome, about to be executed. Rather sadly he said, "Do thy diligence to come shortly unto me: For Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world, and is departed unto Thessalonica; Crescens to Galatia, Titus unto Dalmatia. Only Luke is with me" (II Tim. 4:9-11). He said, "Alexander the coppersmith did me much evil: the Lord reward him according to his works: Of whom be thou ware also; for he hath greatly withstood our words. At my first answer no man stood with me, but all men forsook me: I pray God that it may not be laid to their charge. Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me, and

strengthened me; that by me the preaching might be fully known, and that all the Gentiles might hear: and I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion" (II Tim. 4:14-17).

We might suppose that Paul was writing in 1950. Alexander the coppersmith hated Paul and opposed him, just as people turn against evangelists today. When Paul was tried for his life and stood to answer for himself, there was not a single witness who would stand up for Paul! All men forsook him! There was not a Christian who would risk his life to stand with Paul. Alone he gave his testimony and was delivered temporarily. But a little later he was taken out to the executioner's block and his head was chopped off.

The worldliness and unspiritual state of Christians became so bad that even John the beloved disciple, the only apostle left alive, was not allowed to speak in some of the churches. He writes in the Third Epistle of John, "I wrote unto the church: but Diotrephes, who loveth to have the preeminence among them, receiveth us not. Wherefore, if I come, I will remember his deeds which he doeth, prating against us with malicious words: and not content therewith, neither doth he himself receive the brethren, and forbiddeth them that would, and casteth them out of the church."

Does not that sound much like some churches and Christians today, where godly soul-winning evangelists are kept out, and where there are divisions and strife? Does not that remind you of worldly-minded church officers who hound the pastors in some churches today, and limit the power of God? The decline in spirituality, the increase of worldliness and selfishness among Christians is a normal thing that has happened in all the ages.

Does someone tell me that churches are failing in these days? Well, then, consider that every single church that was known to New Testament times has utterly disappeared! Where is the church at Jerusalem, filled with Spirit-filled disciples, at the birthplace of Christianity? It is gone! Long centuries ago, longer than even history has any record of, that church disappeared. Likely it happened in A.D. 70 when Jerusalem was taken by Titus and much of it destroyed.

Where are the seven churches of Asia? Even the church of Philadelphia, so greatly commended, has disappeared, as well as all the other churches in Asia Minor.

Where are the churches established in Paul's ministry? Where is the mighty church of Ephesus? Where is the church at Corinth? Where is the Christianity which flamed so brightly all around the Mediterranean Sea, established by Paul's journeys? Gone! All gone!

Paul wrote to the Christians at Rome, "Your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world." And at Rome the Christianity so greatly favored of God drifted more and more into formalism and ritualism, and became what is now Roman Catholic apostasy. Roman Catholicism with the papacy, with worship of Mary, with prayers to saints, with the idolatry of images, with purchased masses, with confession to priests instead of to God, offering at best a dubious purgatory instead of outright regeneration and assurance of salvation, is a constant witness to the frailty of human nature, the constant tendency to spiritual decline and false doctrine, unbelief and worldliness.

Don't you see that if cold churches, formal churches, modernistic churches, if unbelief in pulpit and pew in these modern days could prevent revival, they would have prevented all the great revivals since New Testament times! For in all Bible ages Christ has not failed, but the church has failed. Christianity has not failed, but the preachers, the Christians, the teachers, have failed.

Thank God that He is able to revive backslidden saints! Thank God that He is able to save cold, formalistic unconverted church members! Thank God that all the wickedness, all the false cults, all the worldliness, all the sin of these days cannot prevent revival if a few of God's people pay God's price for power and blessing!

III. The Dark Ages Could Not Prevent the Reformation Revival

Few people realize how black was the midnight of spiritual darkness, spiritual ignorance, in the Dark Ages. Never in the world was the "failure of Christianity" so obvious to unbelievers as in the Dark Ages when Rome had stifled opposition, when there was a famine of the Word of God, when in all the world there were only a little handful of spiritually-intelligent believers. Here and there, like a tiny candle gleaming in the dark, was a group of "heretics" who still read the Scriptures copied by hand, who believed in individual regeneration by faith in Christ and who could be called New Testament Christians.

Practically every town of ten thousand or twenty thousand people in America today has more gospel preaching true to the Word of God than a nation of millions had during the Dark Ages. Sunday school scholars know more Bible usually than priests and monks usually knew in those days. What chance was there for revival when indulgences to sin were openly sold; when salvation was not put on the basis of faith in Christ, but on the basis of confession to a Roman priest and payment for masses in the church? What chance was there for revival when not only kings, but often the popes themselves were licentious and immoral?

Yet out of the welter of those Dark Ages God gave, in the Reformation, one of the greatest revivals the world has ever seen. God raised up Luther, Calvin and others and turned literally millions of people to personal faith in Christ and to a knowledge of salvation by faith, in Germany, the Scandinavian countries, Scotland and England, and parts of many other countries. There was really a counter-Reformation in the Catholic church that profoundly moved the whole corrupt organization. Protestantism as we know it in the main, particularly with reference to Lutheran, Reformed, Presbyterian and Anglican churches, came out of the mighty revival of the Reformation.

Thank God, no such spiritual darkness as that of the Middle Ages is on the world today, not in America, not in England, not in any English-speaking country! If world conditions, if spiritual decline, if false doctrine could not prevent revival in the Dark Ages, surely world conditions today cannot stop the power of God, the progress of the gospel, and the salvation of multitudes of sinners, if some of God's people will pay God's price for soul-winning power.

IV. Wickedness and Unbelief Could Not Prevent the Great Modern Revivals

All through recorded history one truth stands out forever the same. God has given revivals in spite of man's wickedness, in spite of man's unworthiness, his unbelief and unfaithfulness.

Consider England in Wesley's day. In the book, *This Freedom Whence*, by John Wesley Brady, you would do well to read of the alarming state of England when Wesley began preaching. The complete breakdown of government and morals which took place in France and brought about the French Revolution bade fair to bring a similar convulsion in England.

The established church, the Anglican church, was unutterably corrupt. The church was, of course, supported by taxation and church leaders appointed as something like political patronage, by government

leaders. Bishops had estates with enormous incomes, had them by appointment of political leaders and kept them by subservience to political ends. The clergy were everywhere simply political appointees, without any reference to spiritual fitness, and generally did not even profess to be converted, born-again men. Gambling was everywhere prevalent among the clergy. Drinking, even drunkenness, was very common. Most of the clergy were Deists. They believed in a supreme being but did not believe the Bible, did not believe in the deity of Christ, the new birth. The church ceremonies were simply a stiff form. People in the parish were sprinkled as babies, "christened," and were counted members of the church. We have no record of anybody in the Anglican church at the time doing revival preaching, preaching the new birth, calling sinners to repentance. Puritan pastors had been barred from preaching in principal towns and had often been fined and jailed, and worse, for simply preaching the gospel. We remember that John Bunyan was kept twelve years in Bedford jail simply to keep him from preaching.

English vessels carried on the slave trade for most of the world. Armed thugs would land in Africa, raid villages, murder those who opposed them and carry off slaves. With brutality, herded in pens and holds like animals, the slaves were carried to the West Indies, to the American colonies, to England and elsewhere. Many died and were pitched overboard enroute. Smuggling, gambling, thieving, licentiousness were everywhere common. The Shakespeare plays give an idea of how common was adultery. Thousands were jailed for debt. A man could be jailed or hanged for catching a wild rabbit on an earl's estate. Little children slaved in mines and mills as much as twelve or fourteen hours a day.

There were no Sunday schools of any kind, no free day schools, and most people could not read nor write. When Wesley would preach he was often assaulted physically just for preaching the gospel. Mobs were raised again and again against him and his fellow preachers. Occasionally a Methodist meeting house would be utterly destroyed and the officers often favored the culprits.

England was as unlikely a place for a great revival as one could imagine. The Puritan revival had been suppressed with great violence. Independent-minded and Bible-believing preachers were everywhere abused, jailed, run out of the country, or their property confiscated. England was hardly civilized, utterly foreign to what we now know as England. Yet God breathed upon John and Charles Wesley, on Whitefield and the preachers whom God raised up with them, and a mighty revival transformed England. Besides leading to the salvation of millions of souls, the Wesleyan revival indirectly started a Sunday school movement, caused prison reforms, stopped the slave trade, caused immense reforms in government, and largely created what we know as traditional English character, justice and society.

The unbelief, the lewdness, the immorality and dishonesty among the people and among church and government leaders when the Wesleyan revival began were far more discouraging than is true in America today. In view of the mighty revival God gave in Wesley's day, it is foolish and faithless to believe that God could not now stir America and England and anywhere else in the world where men shake God and pay God's price for revival, as mightily as He did in Wesley's day. The trouble is not with the hardness of world conditions and wicked hearts. The trouble is with the laborers. "The harvest truly is great, but the labourers are few."

The Wesleyan revival came to America through Whitefield, Coke, Asbury and others. But you will remember that in America, Tom Paine, one of the leaders of the American Revolution, was at the height of his popularity. He wrote *The Age of Reason* in which he set out to prove the Bible false. The multitudes read his books and pamphlets with enthusiasm. At one time his popularity rivaled that of Washington, Jefferson and Franklin. Leaders of thought in early America were also Deists, denying the inspiration of

the Bible, the deity of Christ, and the need for regeneration. Yet Benjamin Franklin heard Whitefield preach and was profoundly moved. He did not make a public profession of faith, but Franklin's Autobiography shows that Franklin in his later years believed in the God of the Bible, that he earnestly urged people to pray and to read the Bible. George Washington himself became an earnest man of prayer and was, we believe, a believing Christian. God brought a revival in early America in spite of infidelity and flagrant wickedness. Why would the Almighty God be hindered by human conditions now if His people meet His requirements for revival?

Consider the revival from 1857-1859, which began outwardly in the Fulton Street prayer meeting in New York City. It began only three years before the Civil War, and the flames of hate, strife and every wicked passion were rising high. That marvelous revival came in the midst of all the agitation for and against war, and it did not prevent the mighty Civil War.

Consider the state of America in the days of D.L. Moody. Robert Ingersoll, an infidel, was at the height of his popularity following the Civil War in which he had a distinguished military record. He came near being governor of Indiana, and many think he would have been president but for his position as an outspoken infidel. All over America he lectured to great crowds against the Bible and the Christian religion. Infidel clubs were formed all over America. Unbelief has never been more arrogant, more outspoken than it was in America when D.L. Moody began his great ministry.

Moody worked among soldiers during the Civil War. He did not become widely-known until after the war. All the aftermath of the war, with its hatred, its economic dislocation, with the oppression of southern states and flaming sectional hatred, did not prevent a revival. American frontiers were pushed westward with lawlessness and bloodshed, crimes against Indians, and whole communities were often kept in terror by murdering outlaws.

When Moody went to England, infidels, openly scoffing at the Bible and God and Christ, were so bold that infidel clubs were more popular and active than lodges are today. In fact, Mr. Soltau, in *The Sword Book of Treasures*, published by Sword of the Lord Publishers, tells how Moody preached one night to five thousand infidels in a service advertised especially for them. And they came, on order of their infidel leader, as a joke and to put the evangelists, Moody and Sankey, to shame. They knew no gospel hymns. Aside from a few Christian workers, no one was invited but infidels. Yet God's mighty power came upon them and some five hundred turned to the Lord, and the infidel clubs were broken.

Those who imagine that revivals are simply the product of certain happy circumstances are foolish. They ignore the teaching of the Word of God and ignore the facts back of all great revivals. The moral and spiritual conditions when the D.L. Moody revival came to America and England were tremendously bad, even in many ways worse than conditions today. Conditions did not deter the power of God then, and cannot prevent His blessing now, if His people pay the price for revival.

God must feel it as an insult to His power and grace that people think revivals can only be had in propitious circumstances! On the verge of the destruction of Jerusalem and the captivity of Judah, about which Jeremiah had been forewarned and which he had faithfully preached, God instructed Jeremiah to buy a field and do it openly and officially as an evidence that "houses and fields and vineyards shall be possessed again in this land" (Jer. 32:15). In view of the wasting and the utter destruction which was even then taking place, when the temple would be destroyed, the gates of the city burned with fire, the walls torn down, the people slaughtered or dispersed to Babylon, revival of the nation seemed impossible. But

Jeremiah said, "Ah Lord God! behold, thou hast made the heaven and the earth by thy great power and stretched out arm, and there is nothing too hard for thee." God answered back, "Behold, I am the Lord, the God of all flesh: is there any thing too hard for me?" (Jer. 32:17, 27).

Elijah had people pour twelve barrels of water over the sacrifice on Mount Carmel before he called on God to send a fire from Heaven. He knew that God could start a fire with wet wood as well as with dry. He knew that God could give a revival in the midst of the awful depravity and idolatry and sin of Samaria. And God's believing people know that God can do the same thing today.

What kind of a God is this we worship? Can puny men block the power of God when His people trust Him? Are sinners so strong and impervious to God's call that the Spirit of God cannot bring conviction, cannot pale the sinner's cheek, cannot put tears in the sinner's eye, cannot set a burning in the sinner's conscience? What kind of a God is this we preach and serve? Is He so weak that the weather, the competition of radio and sports and television and business and vacationing, has left Him helpless? Can God not compete in this brave modern world of which we boast? Shame on us for the thought! Down through the centuries God has proved Himself the God over all the circumstances, over all the people. He is the God above all human rulers. "Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound" (Rom. 5:20). Man proposes, but God disposes. Man's extremity is God's opportunity.

If I had a God who could not save a drunkard, I would never preach Him to little children. If I had a God who could not cleanse the harlot, I would never preach Him to a chaste wife and mother. If Jesus Christ cannot save Catholics and Jews, criminals and infidels, then I would never risk my own soul into His hand. If God cannot give great city-wide revivals with mighty results and thousands saved from the public preaching of the Word in mass evangelism, I would never preach Him in a class in child evangelism, or a class of Junior boys and girls!

What sin, what reproach upon God, what a mark of our unbelief, when we indicate that conditions are too hard for God, that conditions prevent a revival! History down through all the ages cries that it is a lie! All the revivals in Bible times, the great Reformation revival with Luther and Calvin and others, the Wesleyan revival that saved England from its French Revolution and made English and American civilization and freedom what it is today, the Moody revivals and more--these were all brought about in the face of horrible, widespread and flagrant sin, in the face of spiritual decline and unbelief in the churches and out.

Are you impressed with all the power and might and wickedness and the bent away from God of this present modern world? Then listen to the words of Jesus Christ, "In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). The world? Remember that "this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith" (1 John 5:4).

World conditions have never yet stopped a revival when God's people met God's requirements and had His mighty power for soul-winning. World conditions cannot stop a revival now. "The harvest truly is great, but the labourers are few: pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he would send forth labourers into his harvest" (Luke 10:2).

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/john-r-rice/present-day-wickedness-apostasy-and-modern-civilization-cannot-prevent-revival/>

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