

Revival and Prayer

by Michael Haykin

The sermon emphasizes the importance of prayer in revival and the sovereignty of God in all things, highlighting the need for God's people to cry out to Him in prayer for revival to occur.

Duration: 44:52

Scripture: Psalm 147:15

Topics: "Revival", "Prayer"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the power and sovereignty of God over the world and its elements. He highlights the limitations of human beings and our dependence on God for transformation and change. The speaker also discusses the need for prayer and the impact of God's word in melting the hearts of sinners. He warns of the consequences of living in ways that dishonor God and emphasizes the importance of revival for our culture.

Transcript

Acts 18 is where we want to think about tonight. This morning, in the two sessions, we did an overview, really, of the entire book of Acts. We did that in Sunday school, pointing out something of the themes and the structures.

And then we focused on an individual. One of the great things that we need to remember always, is that in the work of God, He works through individual human lives. And we looked at Stephen, and the way that God used this man, in those very, very early years of the church, to point individuals of that day to Christ.

Well, tonight we want to think about an incident that took place in Corinth. Moving here, rather, from looking at a great theme, as it were, in one sense, or an individual, but looking at the way in which God visited a town, a very significant town, the town of Corinth, in the early part of the 50s A.D. As the text was read, we find that Paul has come to Corinth from Athens. Athens, a very well-known city, the center of Greek learning, a place where there was a prominent university, a place that, in the minds of Greek and Romans in the world of Paul's day, would bring to mind this whole idea of learning, a great university town.

Corinth is very, very different. As I alluded to earlier this morning, Corinth was a sink of immorality, if I can use that sort of expression. In fact, there was an expression in Greek, to act like a Corinthian, or to play the Corinthian, which meant to live a sexually immoral lifestyle.

I'm going to imagine how your town was known by the Roman world. This is what the town's like. You get, I think, a snapshot of the town when you turn over to the book of 1 Corinthians, where Paul is describing, and we're going to come back to this verse right at the end of our time together.

Paul is describing what God did in this town when the gospel came into a place of deep darkness. In 1 Corinthians 6 and verse 9, Paul often lists of sinners and sinful activities. And so he says here, Do not know the unrighteous, 1 Corinthians 6 and verse 9, will not inherit the kingdom of God.

Do not be deceived. Neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you.

Paul could look out on that Corinthian congregation, in his mind's eye as he writes the letter to the Corinthians, and he could remember individuals who had been idolaters. They had a prominent place in false worship. The town, like many Greek towns, was filled with temples of idols.

He could look out on that congregation, and he could see men who had engaged in homosexual practices. He could see men who had delighted in adultery. He had seen swindlers.

Men who would be known as drunks in the town. So one gets a kind of snapshot of Corinth as you read those verses. And yet, what's so encouraging about this passage in Acts 18, and we want to go back there now, is that these human problems are not too big for God.

They are too big for us. How do you convince somebody who's addicted to drink that it's not in his best interest or the interest of his family and relatives to give it up? How does a person like that change? How does a person who thinks a certain pattern of immorality is right, and there's nothing wrong with it, how do they change? How do they suddenly get a revulsion for something that God hates? How does a person whose first instinct is to swindle people, how do they change? Well, when it comes to the deep changes that we're talking about, the transformation of human character, we cannot do it. Those of you who have children, know that as your children grow up and you long for things in their lives and you pray for them, and you see areas and patterns developing in their life of in-built sin, you lament and you weep and you pray, but try as you might, it's got to be God who comes in and changes the life.

And if it's true of individual lives, it's true of a nation. It's true of a community. So we think of, where are we heading as North Americans? Where is our culture going? A friend of mine wrote to me a few weeks ago.

He said plainly, it's either revival or ruin. Two choices. We have nothing before us.

If we continue to live in ways that dishonor God, we will incur His judgments. But how to change? It's the Spirit of God bringing revival, changing hearts. I do believe that Christians need to be involved in the political sphere.

We need to pray, and we'll see a little bit of this, for God to raise up godly men and women to be involved in the framing of laws and ruling our nation. But ultimately, the changes that we want to see have to take place as human beings are changed. And who can do that? Who can change the heart? Only God can.

And so what's encouraging about this passage is it speaks of how God can come into a community that is in darkness. In fact, a darkness in terms of depth of sin that we probably really know nothing about. We think things are dark now.

But we live in a world, I'm talking here of a broader society, that has been impacted by the gospel. We do have a North American society and culture that has a Judeo-Christian heritage, especially a Christian heritage. This nation was founded in revival.

You think of the Puritans coming. And then you think of those great works of revival through the 18th century, associated with the names of men like Jonathan Edwards and George Whitefield. And then the Second Great Awakening from 1790 to the 1830s.

It was even deeper for 40 years. Revival. Or you think of the revivals that preceded the American Civil War.

Or the revivals that comes after that period of time with men like D.L. Moody. There is no doubt there's been a rich heritage in this nation. And so despite the fact that there are things that deeply trouble us, there is light here.

But in Corinth, it was only the synagogue. And the paganism, the darkness was deep. Yet, not too much for God.

And if God could do it then, His arm is not withheld. And we need to be encouraged by that. And we need to act on that, as we will see.

And so Paul comes to Corinth. He comes as part of his missionary calling. He is called to be an apostle to the Gentiles.

He has been in Athens. He comes to Corinth by himself. Normally, and this is very important, normally when you look at the Apostle Paul, he is surrounded by individuals, co-laborers.

But on this occasion, he had been with Timothy and Silas, but he had felt it incumbent because a church had been planted in northern Greece, in Thessalonica, to send them back. He had heard problems. And so it was, Paul comes to Athens by himself.

And in the providence of God, he meets people who have the same occupation and skill that he has. He is a leather worker. The word there in verse 3 says tent maker.

But it is probably a little broader than that. It is a leather worker. And a main part of which would be making tents.

By the way, those tents would not be for people camping. As far as we know, people weren't into camping in the Roman Empire. They were tents of the Roman army.

Which gives a lot of insight. Many of those that Paul rubbed shoulders with as he worked on leather, it would mean early mornings, getting up before the daylight came, and working with needle and thread. And if you have ever done work on leather, it is tough work.

He didn't have any of the industrial machines to help him. He had to do all of that by hand. His hands would be calloused.

It would mean bent over a workbench for a good part of the day with an awl and the needle and sewing the leather and cutting the leather and so on. And the workshop, and there are a number of indications of this in Paul's letters, the workshop would have been a place of witness for Paul. As people came in, they

were waiting for things that he was making.

There would have been those opportunities to share the Gospel. And this couple that come, they are expelled from Rome. And that actually gives us a date.

We know that this was 49 AD because that is when the Emperor Claudius passed an edict expelling leaders in the synagogues in Rome, expelled them out of the city, and among them were Christians, and among them this couple Aquila and Priscilla. We don't have time to pursue this couple. They become some of Paul's closest friends.

In fact, at one time in Romans 16 verse 3, Paul will say, Paul greets them and says of them that all the churches loved them because they were willing to lay down their lives for Paul. That's how close their friendship was to him. And so Paul went.

They were Christians. I think, I can't prove this, but I think he probably lodged with them. It says he stayed with them.

I think they actually provided the business. I think that's a good indication. They were a very wealthy couple.

They had, I think, a house church in Rome. There's a number of Paul's letters that indicate that. They come to Corinth.

They have a house church there. They'll actually go on to Ephesus and they'll have a house church there. They had significant wealth.

And you get this interesting arrangement. I think they employed Paul as part of their workshop. And here's the great apostle.

Typical, though, of all Jewish rabbis, always had a trade. Our Lord was a carpenter. Paul's a leather worker, a tent maker.

Incidentally, the Greeks regarded working with your hands as despicable. And that would be a challenge for Paul as he plants the gospel among Greeks and they notice, why is it you work with your hands? Free men don't work with their hands. But the Jews have a very different view of work.

Work is a good thing that God has given. And God can sanctify work. And so Paul is there and he is reasoning in the synagogue on the Sabbath, the Saturdays, and the rest of the week he's working, presumably using his workshop as a vehicle for witness.

But he cannot give himself fully to preaching. And then, in verse 5, Silas and Timothy arrive from Macedonia. Now let me show you, and this is very important to what I want to talk about this evening, let me show you a text over in 1 Thessalonians, which ties in with this passage here in Acts.

It's 1 Thessalonians chapter 3, and verses 1 to 2. 1 Thessalonians 3 and verses 1 to 2. So Paul is being by himself in Athens. He comes to Corinth. It's a trip of probably about a couple of days because of the Greek roads.

In northern Greece is where Thessalonica is. There is a church that Paul has planted. And there were concerns there.

And Paul had sent Silas and Timothy up there and they then joined him later in Corinth. And Paul says in 1 Timothy 3, Therefore, when we could bear it no longer, we were willing to be left behind at Athens alone. And we sent Timothy, our brother, and God's co-worker in the gospel of Christ, to establish and exhort you in your faith.

And then verse 6, But now Timothy has come to us from you, and has brought us the good news of your faith and love, and reported you always remember us kindly and long to see us as we long to see you. In other words, when did Paul write 1 Thessalonians? He wrote it in the time period of Acts 18, 6 and following. In other words, we can date this letter.

He wrote it around the year 50, the winter of 49 to 50, when he had come to Corinth. And he writes the letter to the Thessalonians, encouraging them in their faith. He writes it from Corinth.

A few weeks later, he writes a second letter, which we know is 2 Thessalonians. That's where my interest tonight lies, because in 2 Thessalonians 3, he does what he often does in his letters. He asks the Christians to pray for him.

2 Thessalonians 3, 1-2 Finally, brothers, 2 Thessalonians 3, 1 Pray for us, that the word of the Lord may speed ahead and be honoured as happened among you, and that we may be delivered from wicked and evil men, for not all have faith. In 1 Thessalonians, chapter 5, Paul had simply said, brothers, pray for us. In other letters, he does the same thing.

In Ephesians, chapter 6, he says, pray for us, that we might be able to speak the word of God boldly. In Colossians 4, verses 3 and 4, pray for us. We've got an open door.

Pray that our words might be effectual. By the way, it's very interesting, Paul doesn't give a list of people he's been witnessing to. He doesn't say, pray for Rufus and Gaius.

I met them in the market today. Or pray for Brutus. He's a Roman soldier whose wife has left him.

And so on and so on. I'm not saying any of that is wrong. There are indications in the Scriptures that that is appropriate.

But the emphasis is always, pray for those who share the Gospel. Pray for the witness of the Gospel. Pray for God's people, that they may open their mouths.

That when a door of opportunity is given them, they might take it. We need those prayers. I remember very vividly in my own life, something that I've sought to rectify over the years.

I was with my two brothers-in-law, who come from a Scottish family. My wife is born in Scotland. And one of her cousins was visiting from Scotland.

And it was around Easter time. And one of my brothers-in-law was driving a car. I was in the front passenger seat.

The other brother-in-law was in the back. And the cousin-in-law was at the other side. And he could see what I was doing.

I was reading a newspaper. And there was a column in the newspaper that was talking about Easter and the resurrection of Christ. I was very absorbed in it.

And I hear this voice in the back, a Scottish accent saying, wouldn't that be great if it were true? He's not a believer. Fabulous opening. Oh, I did.

Oh, yeah. Kept on reading. I can't believe I did that.

And then about half an hour down the road, it hit me what he had said. But the conversation had changed and turned. And the opportunity was lost.

And I prayed the Lord would give me. I don't think I've seen Him since that occasion. But we do go back to Britain from time to time.

I prayed the Lord, give me another opportunity, please. When God gives you opportunities like that, that's an open door. We need to pray for one another.

We would have the strength and boldness to speak at those times. So, Paul prays then. Pray for me.

He's got two prayer requests. And we'll see how these fit in. In other words, what I'm trying to show here is Acts 18, 1-16 takes place at the same time Paul is writing 2 Thessalonians 3, 1-2.

We see great things in Acts 18. But where do they come from? They come as God's people pray. Where does revival come from? It doesn't come out of the blue.

It's God's work. There's no doubt about it. Man cannot manufacture it.

Charles Finney was wrong in the early 19th century. He said revivals are easy things. A farmer goes out in the field.

He plants corn. The crop will grow. You just do A, B, C, D. You always get revival.

Well, even farmers don't always get a crop if it doesn't rain. And if the crop doesn't get watered, you're not going to get a harvest. God has to water.

God has to make that crop grow. And likewise, a revival. Revivals are God's work.

But, there's a great principle in the history of the church. It's clear in this text, as we will see, that revival never comes without God's people seriously crying out to Him in prayer. Before God brings revival, He stirs His people up again and shows them, you cannot do this.

You cannot save sinners. You cannot affect the change you want to see in your society or your nation or your community. And you must cry out to Me.

There's a great principle there. And I would say historically, I mean, I haven't had the time or the wherewithal to study every revival that's taken place. But the ones that I've looked at, there has never been a revival without God's people getting serious and coming back to God and beseeching Him and pleading with Him in times of prayer.

I am not saying, and this would be Charles Finney, who would say, well, if you pray, then God will give revival. He is sovereign in this. And He has His own purposes.

And there is a mystery to life in this world. And what God is doing in the life of a community and a nation, there is a mystery there at times. And sometimes God's people plead for revival and it does not come.

And we cannot create it. God is sovereign. But we can say this if we long for revival and we do not pray.

We're fooling ourselves. We're playing a church. And so Paul has got two requests.

Brothers, pray for us. Pray that the Word of the Lord may speed ahead and be honored as happened among you, and that we may be delivered from wicked evil men. Two requests.

First, pray that the Word of the Lord may speed ahead. It's a curious way of talking. It's almost as if the Word of the Lord is a person.

Paul does think of the Word of God as living and active. In fact, at this point, what he's doing is he's quoting from an Old Testament passage. And forgive me for jumping you all around the Scriptures tonight, but keep your finger here in 1 Thessalonians and go back to Psalm 147.

And I want to read from verses 15 to 18. Psalm 147, verse 15. He sends out His command of the earth.

His word runs swiftly. That phrase, Paul quotes it exactly in 2 Thessalonians 3. He gives snow like wool. He scatters hoarfrost like ashes.

He hurls down His crystals of ice like crumbs. Who can stand before His cold? He sends out His word and melts them. He makes His wind blow and the waters flow.

What kind of universe and world do we live in? It's a world that God controls. It's a world in which He is sovereign. In which all the elements of nature are under His control.

And none of them take place without His word. We've lost this perspective to some degree. Even we who are believers.

The description here is of something that rarely took place in Palestine. Snow and winter. And the psalmist is almost reveling in the snow.

We who live in this part of the world. It's not going to meet us outside today. Most likely.

But it's coming. And I have to commute about an hour. I live in Hamilton at the head of Lake Ontario.

About 40 minutes north of Niagara Falls. And I commute into Toronto. We have in the past 3 years gotten rid of our TV in terms of cable.

We can rent movies now and then. But we don't have cable TV. So, the one thing my wife laments, and I too, is we've lost the weather channel.

We never look at the weather channel normally in the summer. But in the winter, we want to know if a storm is coming. And so often we tend to think in terms of... I know I do.

Let me say not we, but me. You may think differently. I tend to think in terms of... There are these various patterns of wind and snow that gather out in the prairies of Canada, Alberta.

And the winds blow them in Ontario and dump all this snow on us because they pick up precipitation from coming across Lake Michigan and Lake Huron. And it gets dumped on us in southern Ontario. And dumped on you because it picks up stuff from Lake Erie and so on.

That's not a biblical way of thinking about these things. It's a sub-biblical way. When the Scripture thinks about weather, it's God.

God speaks. And it snows. And we need to inhabit that world more and more.

We need to have that word dwell in us as we look at life. It's God. It's God who controls all this.

And we think it's natural forces. No, it's not natural forces. It's not Mother Nature.

It's a sovereign God who controls all this. For His glory and for His purposes, He speaks. And various things take place in the weather.

And who can stop it? We've been thinking immediately of this text in Scripture of snow. But one thinks of the horrors that have unfolded in the last few weeks in New Orleans. Who could stop that hurricane? We're a very sophisticated culture technologically.

Far more sophisticated than the world in which the Apostle Paul lived. Think of what we can do. What Paul would have done with the Internet and email and what's called blogging.

And let alone television and satellite. How he would have seen it as a vehicle for spreading the Gospel. But how much we are in His world.

We are so puny and helpless in this world that God has made and He controls. And there's no way you could have gone out and stood in front of Katrina and said, Halt! That's what Paul asks. He's got this image in his mind.

His word runs swiftly. Pray. You believers in Thessalonica, pray that when I share the Word that the Word, not my words, not my human, feeble words that I speak in their mere breath and they may move a little bit of air and drop down to the ground, but pray that the Word of God that comes from my feeble lips might do its great invincible power.

Pray that sinners who are cold to the Gospel, who have hearts of stone, that God's Word might melt them. Not me. I cannot do it.

But pray that God's Word might go home and strike into the hearts of men and women and cause life to flourish and bring them to the Savior and give them a love for God and His Word. Pray that His Word might run swiftly. He's praying for revival.

Or He's asking them to pray for revival. Pray that the Word may speed ahead and be honored, He says. Pray that these people immersed in paganism, which grieved Paul.

You only have to read Acts 17 and verses 17 and following when he's in Athens. And Paul saw all the idols and he was grieved in his spirit. One of the things that has been most distressing in my own personal family is my sister in recent years who married a man who claimed to be a Christian about 25 years ago.

A man who had a conversion experience in a meeting. Who actually came out of a Hindu background and for about five years was zealous it appeared for the Lord Jesus. And then rejected Christ in the early 80's.

And for about 15 years has been a vacuum there in that household. And then in recent years to my wife's horror, when they go over there, there are idols in the house. Hindu gods.

And the Word of God is not only not ignored, it's not honored there. These things. That's what Paul's situation was.

There was a grieving in his spirit. There was no concern for the Word of God. Pray though that the Word might run swiftly and these people might come to love God's Holy Word.

And then secondly, he says, pray that we might be delivered from the wicked. Wherever God does a great work, wherever God is at work, there's opposition. That always surprises us.

Aren't we nice people? I'm not sure it's a Christian virtue to simply be a nice person in one sense. God calls us to be men and women of love and compassion. But not necessarily to be liked by everybody we meet.

This may not be a problem that you wrestle with. Canadians wrestle with it big time. And it's affected the church.

And it's hampered us at times. We're afraid to speak out plainly and boldly because we want everybody to like us. But wherever God does a great work and opens the mouths of His servants, there'll be opposition.

And Satan will be disturbed. And he'll raise up enemies to the Gospel. Paul says, pray that these people might not stop the free course of the Gospel.

Well, now let's go back to Acts 18 and see how those prayers were answered. What you need to picture in your mind's eye is Paul writing to the Thessalonians, asking them to pray. And these men and women praying.

Praying together corporately. Praying individually in their homes. And we see how God answers the prayers.

In Acts 18, I take the second request first. Pray that the wicked here who would like to stop the Gospel will then themselves be prevented from doing so. In Acts 18, verse 12, we find that the Jewish synagogue leaders who did not want to hear Paul's preaching, finally, they couldn't do anything about it themselves.

They didn't have any legal recourse. Unlike Palestine. Unlike Jerusalem, where the Roman government had given the Sanhedrin.

If the Temple is threatened, you have the power to carry out legal execution. And that's what they took into their own hands, the killing of Stephen. The Jews here in Corinth had no such power.

So how are they going to get rid of this guy? He had the nerve to come into the synagogue and preach a crucified Messiah, which they objected to and rejected. And then when they kicked him out, he went right next door to the synagogue in the house of a man named Justice. You can imagine the anger of these people.

They're going into the synagogue and there's that guy, Paul. He's next door. How are we going to get rid of him? The Romans will do it for us.

So after a number of months, they go to Gallio, the Roman governor. Gallio was probably the most important Roman Paul had met to this point in his life. He was the younger brother of the tutor to the emperor.

A man named Seneca, who was the emperor Nero's tutor. This man was a man who had power. He had power in an earthly sense.

So they take the case before him. And Gallio looks at this. He's got these Jews claiming this man, this other Jew, is a disturber of the peace.

He's teaching people to worship contrary to the law. Obviously, other things are said. Probably these Jews said, this man says that Jesus is the Christos, or anointed one, or Messiah.

Now Gallio would have heard the name Christos, and he would have understood it. It means anointed one, but it wouldn't have meant anything to him. There was nothing, no frame of reference.

And this man, obviously Paul, would have said, Jesus is the Christos. As far as he's concerned, it's a bunch of Jews. Just internal arguments.

It's got nothing to do with the Roman state. And he kicks the case out of court. Now from one surface, when Gallio came into that courtroom, he would come in with all the power of the Roman Empire.

The mightiest empire this world had known to that point in time. An empire that did last nearly a thousand years. The Romans had conquered one-fifth of the world's population at the time.

Seventy to eighty million people lived under Rome. Here is Gallio, the representative of the empire. When he speaks, things happen.

But remember, you've got a group of men and women praying. It's not Gallio. It's never the Gallios of this world.

It's God who is sovereign. God will do His purposes. And the marvelous thing is He enlists us, weak, weak Christians, to engage in that great work of seeing the gospel go forward.

And how? First of all, by our prayers. As these Thessalonians pray and beseech the Lord of heaven and earth, help Paul. They may not have known Gallio's name.

They didn't know exactly what he was facing. Help him. Stop those who oppose the gospel.

And the Lord of history moves. And Gallio, the great Roman governor, is being used by God for His great purposes. And Paul is free to preach in that city for a year and a half.

The other request, may the gospel run swiftly. And may all opposition, as it were, be overcome by it. And may sinners be saved.

Well, look at Acts 18 and verse 7. And he left there. Paul left the synagogue and went to the house of a man named Justus, a worshipper of God. His house was next door to the synagogue.

Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed. Together with the entire household. And many of the Corinthians hearing Paul believed.

Many of them. And were baptized. In the middle of all this, Paul is afraid.

Very interesting when it goes on. The Lord comes to Paul in a vision and says to him, do not be afraid. And there are two ways of putting that kind of command in the original language.

One is, don't start being afraid. Or stop being afraid. And this one is, stop being afraid.

Paul's afraid. We tend to think of the great Paul as, you know, here's the invincible Paul. Nothing fazes him.

No, this is the Paul who says in 1 Corinthians 2, I came to you in fear and trembling. What's going to happen in this city? He's here among the ungodly who have no fear of God. Remember Abraham.

The things that, how Abraham fell into sin because he was in the household of Abimelech. They don't fear God. No, Paul's afraid.

And the Lord comes to him and says, be encouraged, Paul. I have many people in this city. In other words, I'm going to draw many to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Even the ruler of the synagogue, Christmas, is converted. And as I said, if you want to see the impact of the gospel, you turn over to 1 Corinthians 6. I purposely didn't read all of verse 11. 1 Corinthians 6, 9, Do you not know the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived, neither sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.

And such were some of you. But, one of those great words of Scripture, but human sin cannot stop the Lord of heaven and earth. He can transform human lives and change things that were evil into good.

But you were washed. You were cleansed of the shame and filth of sin. You were sanctified.

You were set apart for the gospel and for the Lord Jesus. You were justified. You were made right with God.

And peace was established between you and the living God, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by the Spirit of our God. And here you see what God did in that town. And why? Well, for the glory of His name.

Why? Because He is sovereign. Why? Because He drew a group of believers in Thessalonica to follow Paul's command and to pray. There is a great principle here, as I said.

We do not have the resources to change the hearts of men and women. We long for it to happen. We cannot do it.

As we look out on our world in North America here, are satisfied with things, there is something seriously wrong with us spiritually. We should be grieved, deeply grieved, by what men and women think is normal lifestyle, that God looks on with abomination. And how are things ever going to change? We must pray.

I have no idea, and I don't want to know, what your midweek prayer meeting is like. But I remember in a church in Ontario, a fairly large church, about 400 on Sunday morning, and I spoke on Revival and the issue of praying for Revival, and somebody came to me after the service and said, how many people do you actually think we get out to midweek prayer meeting? Well, I thought, it's a big church. I thought, well, 400, probably about 80.

So I said 80, and no, lower than that, and well, 60. Ended up around 20 to 25. There is something deeply spiritually wrong when God's people do not see the necessity of prayer.

I'm not trying to lay a guilt trip on you, but we need to be serious with God. As I said, we have a choice before us. It is either ruin or revival.

Things are not going to get better. If we do not engage in the arduous task of prayer, we cannot effect the change, but we need an almighty God to change. It could be the case that God has different plans for us in this generation.

We don't know that. What we do know is God has called us to be faithful at this point in history. He has put us in this situation.

We may long to have lived in the 1950s, our mature years then, or the 40s, or the last century when there were revivals, but He has put us in this day, and we must be found faithful as His stewards and His people. And a great part of that faithfulness is gathering together in corporate prayer to beseech His grace and mercy, and pour out His Spirit upon our congregations, to revive His people, to stir up those who are in the ministry of the gospel, in preaching it, to raise up other laborers for the gospel, and to save sinners, and to bring us back to God. When you look at history, you see this time and again, and I could give you a number of fabulous examples in history of Baptists doing this.

I think of the time in the 1780s when Baptist churches in England had gotten to the point, Andrew Fuller, one of the Baptist leaders of the time said, he was a farmer, and you'll excuse his language in this regard, he said, if things had continued with us much longer, we would have become a mere dunghill in society. And finally, in 1784, a man named John Sutcliffe, one of Fuller's friends, said, we need to pray. And they established that on the first Monday evening of every month, for one hour, one hour, they would gather to pray for one thing, revival.

It didn't happen right away. But if you look at the record, over the next 20 to 30 years, God honored those prayers. And one of the great figures in Baptist history came out of that period, William Carey.

He came out of John Sutcliffe's church, and the gospel began to go overseas in what we call the missionary movement. One of the men who lived at that time, he wasn't a Baptist, but he said words I think are so important for us today. England, in the midst of all this, the challenge was also in the midst of great war with the dictator Napoleon.

And there were great fears that England would be taken over by the French and so on. And a man named William Wilberforce, who played a great role in ending the slave trade, said these words, My only hopes for the well-being of my country depend not so much on our fleets and armies, not so much on the wisdom of our rulers, or the spirit of our people, but on this persuasion, that she still contains many who love and obey the gospel of Jesus Christ, that their prayers may yet prevail, and that for the sake of these, heaven will look upon us with an eye of favor. And God kept Great Britain during those tumultuous years, 20 years of war with France.

And God kept Great Britain because of the prayers of many. Those men, those Baptists that I alluded to, and Britain became a great conduit of spiritual blessing in the 19th century. Wherever she may stand today, God honored the prayers of many.

I urge you, as a Christian congregation, to take these things seriously. And the privilege is given you, that you can freely gather to pray. Do not let them go.

God will hold us responsible. And there is a great mystery of divine sovereignty and human responsibility. Oh, that you might fulfill your part and be courageous in this day and begin with prayer together that God would have mercy on us and turn the tide and we might see His name and His Word honored in our day and sinners saved.

Let us pray. Our Father, we pray that as we have been reflecting on these great things, that you would enable us in the days to come to be your people, not only in word, but in deed. In our lives to exhibit the glory of the Gospel.

In our lives to exhibit what it means to love the Lord Jesus Christ. And enable us, O Lord, please, to be a people of prayer. And have mercy on us.

Have mercy on this nation. Pour out your Spirit again in revival. And cause the name of Christ to be honored and glorified.

Lift it up. And fill your churches. We ask this not for our sakes ultimately, but for the sake of Jesus Christ.

For His glory and His honor. Amen.

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