

(Revival) Revival Presupposes Declension - Part 1

by Michael L. Brown

Revival presupposes declension, and it is only when we acknowledge our falling away from God that we can experience a true and powerful move of God.

Duration: 27:25

Scripture: Judges 6:6, Habakkuk 3:2, Matthew 6:33, 1 Corinthians 10:11, Revelation 3:1

Topics: "Spiritual Decline", "Revival Ministry"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the need for revival when the acts of God become only a memory. He refers to the book of Judges, specifically chapter six, to illustrate his point. The Israelites, who had been delivered from Egypt, were experiencing oppression from the Midianites for seven years. They were living in fear, hiding in mountain cliffs, caves, and strongholds, while their crops were constantly destroyed by the invaders. The preacher emphasizes the cycle of skepticism and unbelief that arises when people do not see the miraculous works of God in their lives. He concludes by highlighting Gideon's question to the angel of the Lord, expressing the Israelites' confusion and feeling of abandonment by God.

Transcript

The third chapter, Habakkuk chapter 3. I mentioned earlier that this is the most famous verse in the entire Bible on revival. The Hebrew Scriptures contain a good number of accounts of revivals where God stirred the people out of immorality, where he stirred them out of idolatry, where he stirred them out of dead religion, where their hearts turned back to seek him, and when they destroyed idols out of the land. There's an element of revival which is always prophetic.

What do I mean? It's always idol smashing. It's always iconoclastic. You say, what's iconoclastic? Iconoclastic means you destroy all the images, okay? It's not that you say, well, this temple to Baal is very nice, really, and that image to Asherah is so pretty, if we could just kind of paint over it or change it, we could use it.

No, the prophetic mentality is destroy it, smash it, pulverize it, beat it into fine dust so that it can never be used again. So in the Old Testament revivals, there was a prophetic idol smashing, cult destroying mentality. There's not that much that you read about in the New Covenant Scriptures about revival simply because, as you read the book of Acts, they were in a pattern of revival.

And Paul writes to the congregations that were founded in the midst of revival. So maybe by the time you get to the book of Revelation and Yeshua is exhorting the people to turn back, to get back to the beginning, to their first love, that they have a reputation for being alive and yet they're dead, then you can see that by the end of that first century there was a lot of backsliding that had crept in and there was need for revival again in many of the bodies. But Habakkuk chapter 3 verse 2 is recognized as the classic verse in the Scriptures on revival.

And I want to use that as a foundation for what we'll be teaching on tonight. So Habakkuk the prophet says, Lord, I have heard of your fame. I stand in awe of your deeds, O Lord.

Renew them in our day. In our time, make them known. In wrath, remember mercy.

Habakkuk lived towards the end of the seventh century, so he lived and ministered up towards the end of the 600s. We don't know his whole lifespan, but we know when he ministered the things written in this book. There was not a whole lot good that was happening.

What was the last great act that God performed for his people? Well, it was when God miraculously delivered the children of Israel from the Assyrians. So within less than 100 years of Habakkuk's time, there had been this great supernatural act of God. And he had heard about things like this.

But in his own day, Josiah renewed the covenant, smashed the idols out of the land. There was a purging. There was a purifying.

But a few more years go by and the people are starting to fall away again and national weakness is setting in. And then the people are on the verge of captivity. So Habakkuk says, I heard about your deeds.

I heard about the great things you did. Part of the Israelite confession of faith is to constantly make reference to the great acts of God, to the things he did in the past. When I was first saved, the rabbi said to me, it's because the people in your congregation are very weak.

They need to constantly have testimonies to reinforce their faith. But we don't need that. Our faith is much stronger.

We'll just read the Hebrew prayer book. Half of it, I'm not giving an exact figure, but so much of it is just recounting the acts of God, continual testimonies. It's not a matter of weak faith.

It's a matter of having a living faith. You need to continually remind yourself of what God has done. But what happens when it's just something that you heard about? Well, the first thing we want to discuss tonight is that revival presupposes declension.

Those are Finney's own words that a revival presupposes that there has been some type of a falling away. And just to quote a few lines from Finney as a foundation, Finney says the revival of religion by religion, he means faith. He means the gospel.

A revival of religion presupposes a declension. Almost all the religion in the world has been produced by revivals. God has found it necessary to take advantage of the excitability there is in mankind to produce powerful excitements among them before he can lead them to obey.

Men are so sluggish. There are so many things to leave their minds off from religion to oppose the influence of God that it is necessary to raise an excitement among them to the tide rises so high as to

sweep away the opposing obstacles. They must be so aroused that they will break over these counteracting influences before they will obey God.

And then he says revival presupposes that the church is sunk down in a backslidden state and a revival consists in the return of the church from her backsliding and in the conversion of sinners. So let's understand right up front that something which is alive and flourishing does not need to be revived. Someone that has died needs to be revived from the dead.

Some plant that you have you go on vacation. It wasn't water. The thing is wilting.

You don't know if it can make it. It's all dried out. The thing needs to be revived and brought back from the dead or a state of near death.

So revival presupposes declension. If we're going to say that we need revival in our midst, then it's presupposing that there is a major problem, that there is death, that there is backsliding, that there is sluggishness, that there is a falling away from what previously was. So I want to give us three basic points under this heading tonight that revival presupposes declension.

The first thing is that when revival is needed, it's at a time when the acts of God, the workings of God, have become only a memory. Let me say that again. Revival is needed when the acts of God become only a memory.

Turn over to Judges, the sixth chapter. Judges chapter six. Now, remember, if you're an Israelite, just if you grew up in the family of those that have been delivered from Egypt and they talk about their family traditions and the things that God had done and on and on and you go back and you look back and you think you have this history, you have these stories and the further back in time it gets, the more glorious and supernatural and wonderful and impossible it would seem.

And you look around at your own life and you say, hey, something's wrong here because we're not experiencing any of these things we've heard about. So you go over to the sixth chapter of Judges and it says in verse one again, the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord and for seven years he gave them into the hands of the Midianites because the power of Midian was so oppressive the Israelites prepared shelters for themselves in mountain clefts, caves and strongholds. Whenever the Israelites planted their crops, the Midianites, Amalekites and other Eastern peoples invaded the country.

They camped on the land and ruined the crops all the way to Gaza and did not spare a living thing for Israel, neither sheep nor cattle or donkeys. They came up with their livestock in their tents like swarms of locusts. It was impossible to count the men and their camels.

They invaded the land to ravage it. Midian so impoverished the Israelites that they cried out to the Lord for help. You have to understand that Israel was now in a position where they were the tail and not the head.

The exact opposite of what God ordained, and you might say, look, it's bringing reproach to the Lord. God's name is being blasphemed. God is being mocked.

These Midianites think that their gods are more powerful than the God of Israel. Why doesn't he act and do something? Because he's not just going to do something because things aren't going right because his name is being blasphemed. Finally, at a certain point in time, he will work based on that.

But otherwise we say, well, what about your reputation? If we're sitting around doing nothing, if we're sitting in his sight, his name will be blaspheme. You must understand that God's reputation is hurt because of our backsliding, because of our sin, because of our immaturity, because of our lukewarmness. God's name and reputation are blaspheme.

The reputation of Jesus is brought low because of our sin, and it's just going to be like that until we get up and do something about it. Well, anyhow, God said, word of rebuke through a prophet In verse 11, the angel of the Lord came and sat down under the oak in Ulphra that belonged to Joash the Abiezrite, where his son Gideon was threshing wheat in a wine press to keep it from the Midianites. That's basically like cooking in the closet, because if anybody else sees you cooking, they'll come in and steal your food.

The angel of the Lord appeared to Gideon, and he said, The Lord is with you, mighty warrior. Now Gideon nails it perfectly. He says, But, sir, if the Lord is with us, why has all this happened to us? Where are all his wonders that our fathers told us about when they said, Surely, the Lord brought us up out of Egypt.

But now the Lord has abandoned us and put us into the hand of Midian. If God's really with me, then why am I in the closet? So to say, if God's really with us, why are we under the oppression of our enemy? Where are the acts of God that we've heard about? There is no living experience of them in our generation. And notice, it's not where are the wonders that we experienced when we were younger.

Real declension sets in when it's not the people who are living who've experienced it, but they've just heard of it by way of mouth. And many of us that have been saved 10, 15, 20 years have come to realization and said something honestly. We have never seen the things that our fathers in the faith told us about.

We've heard about them. We've experienced many things. We've seen God do many things, but the things that they talked about in the past, we haven't experienced.

It's one thing to say, man, the things I used to experience. I don't have anymore, because then you know you can do something about it. You've touched it.

You've tasted it. You can be stirred to pursue God. But if you just heard about it, it's not reality to you.

Where are all his wonders that our fathers told us about? And the Lord turned to him and said, Go in this your strength and save Israel at a millions hand. I am surely sending you go in what strength, the strength that you realize that if God is truly with you, you want not to be under the oppression of the Midianites. The strength that you understand that this is not the way it's supposed to be.

If God is really in your midst, this is really a key revival text. This concept in Judges six to ask the big question. If it's real, if it's true, then where is it? God says, I can use you because you've asked the right question.

So revival is needed when the acts of God become only a memory. I read the account of one young man during the Welsh revival of eighteen fifty nine, where he says he says, you know, we had heard about things and had questions because our fathers used to tell us about the reality of the presence of God and we ourselves had never experienced it. And then he talked about a service where God supernaturally came down and they couldn't leave it.

He said, from that point on, we never questioned the reality from that point on. We never questioned. So what happens when the acts of God become only a memory and understand this? God does not make covenants with dead people.

God does not make covenants with people that are not yet born. Every person, every child of God must have a face to face experience with God. In other words, a personal experience with him.

You can't go based on the experience of your father and you can't have it for your child. So what happens in this case? Well, the first thing that's produced when the acts of God become only a memory are skepticism. Skeptical attitudes is the first thing that's produced.

So how do I mean it? When someone claims to have experienced the real thing, our first reaction is skeptical because there's hardness that's come in. You would think our first reaction would be thank God. That's wonderful.

Glory to God. It's just what I need. Instead, it's the opposite.

When someone comes in, generally because there's been a lot of counterfeits, because there's been a lot of talk and the reality that when someone comes along and says, I've got the real thing, maybe we were first saved. We ran around. Oh boy, this is the real thing.

We're going to have it. This guy's going to pray for us and miracles are going to happen after enough going from meeting to meeting. You begin to say something's wrong here.

Something's wrong. Something's missing. A lot of talk, but no action.

So the first attitude that comes in people's hearts is they're skeptical. Like the man when Elisha prophesied that famine in one day would turn to absolute abundance. This man said, if the Lord opened the windows of heaven, it couldn't be.

And Elisha said to him, you'll see it with your eyes, but you won't partake. Skeptical unbelief totally cut him out of the blessing of God. You've got to realize that skepticism comes from a hardened heart.

And I would dare say that most of us, unless there has been supernatural preparation by the Holy Spirit, have somewhat hardened hearts to the reality of the working of God, have somewhat skeptical attitudes. It's one thing to test something. It's another thing to challenge it.

In other words, to say, well, thank God you were really healed. Yeah, the doctors gave me ten seconds to live. What happened? Well, I fell down in front of the train and my head was cut off and I don't know how I did it, but I ran quick and stuck it back on.

And well, it's okay to say, well, that's wonderful, but let me get all the facts. It's another thing to say if there are twenty gods in heaven, it couldn't happen. So skepticism is first and then what comes next? That skeptical attitude, that critical attitude, which cuts you off from receiving anything.

You see, it's a self-destructive cycle. It's a vicious cycle. You don't see anything.

You begin to get skeptical. The real thing begins to come. You react against it.

Now you don't receive it. You become even more skeptical, which leads to a hardened state of unbelief. Skepticism leading to hardened unbelief where people are actually set in their hearts that they don't believe that you give them reports and they have already made quality decisions that these things are not really taking place.

And then what happens after that? Hardened unbelief leads to rationalistic doctrine. What do I mean? If you are going to walk around in hardened unbelief and be a child of God or claim to be a child of God, when I say hardened unbelief, I don't mean to the point of absolute backsliding, but I mean to the point of spiritual ineffectiveness. If you were going to claim to be a child of God and have a hardened, unbelieving state, then somehow you have to rewrite the Bible because the Bible counteracts hardened unbelief with constant challenges to faith and to believe for the impossible, with constant challenges of what God can do if you only believe him.

You have to rewrite your Bible somehow to say that God doesn't do the miraculous anymore, that miracles are for the past, that signs and wonders are for the past, that supernatural intervention of God doesn't happen anymore, and that justifies your unbelieving position. If someone said, you're a believer. Yeah.

Oh, man, I just read the Bible and I asked Jesus to come into my heart and tell me what he's done. Tell me the miracles you've seen because he's just read it. No one's told him that these things don't happen.

As someone said, no one, you know, thank God for new believers because no one's taught him what God can't do. You know, they come in and just believe it. Then we have to tell them, well, no, it's really not so simple and it really just doesn't happen the way it's written.

So what we do is we rationalize our doctrines rather than saying we're missing it. Something's wrong. We better fall on our faces and repent.

So new doctrines are created. Listen, nobody in the heat of a move of God as a recipient of the miracles of God, as a channel of the supernatural blessings of God, comes up with doctrine that the days of miracles have ceased. Do they? The ones who come up with that doctrine are the ones who are living in a mindset and in an atmosphere where nothing supernatural is taking place.

So that rationalistic doctrine now does one other subtle thing. These people say, I believe that God did these things in the past. I just don't believe he's doing them today.

Today. It's all by faith and no signs, no wonders, no experience, no verification, no confirmation. So their doctrine changes.

But now what happens is their whole faith becomes a mere religious form. And I'll expand on that in a minute. So rationalistic doctrine leads to mere religious forms.

Nobody who denies the present moving of God and the ongoing miraculous acts of God in the present tense. No one in that state truly believes that God ever moved. They may say, oh, I know he did it in the past.

It's a deceit. It's a pure and simple deceit. If they don't believe that he is breaking it in history today, it's because they're at the end of that process of skepticism and hardened belief in rationalistic doctrine.

So they've come to the point where they'll say, oh, it's over. Oh, God did this and Jesus rose from the dead. They don't really believe it.

They give mental ascent to it. But in their heart of hearts, if God worked a miracle in front of them, they'd be absolutely, totally shocked. Because anyone, anyone who believes this Bible literally and has experienced in their own heart, forget outwardly, but has experienced in their own heart the reality of faith in this word, they have to.

They have to believe in the present miracles of God. Because their whole mindset is a miraculous mindset. So skepticism, hardened belief, rationalistic doctrine, mere religious form, the past miracle stories just become stories, nice religious stories.

And people who are soulish and who get caught up intellectually and who are into religious forms do not realize that they have totally backslidden into those very things without the reality of the ongoing experience of God. So that's one result of a state where the acts of God have become only a memory. But there's another alternate result.

There's another possibility because not everybody backslides into dead religion. You say that's right. Yeah, most of us have backslidden into cheap secondary.

Well, I don't want to call him counterfeits, but let's just call him a cheapening of the real thing. Now, I'll be fair with us. Most of us have never front slid.

So it might be wrong to say backslidden. But what I mean is. If you don't go the way of dead religious form, then the other possible way you can go is this.

You experience a little revival. You experience a little drop of rain, like somebody spitting on you on occasion. You read in the Bible about the floods and the outpourings.

OK, you hear people talking about the great moves of God in the past, the great revivals, and you experience something instead of like somebody spitting on you. It's like somebody pouring a little cup of water over your head. And when you get the cup of water, you say it's revival.

When they talked about revival, I meant that a tidal wave swept them off their feet and swept huge buildings off their foundations and move them 50 miles across the country. When they talked about revival here, someone pours a cup of water on my head. We say it's revival.

We cheapen the real thing. We call meat. We call milk rather meat.

We say, oh, this is it. This is this is the real meat. Why? Because what we've read about it in the Bible, the Bible talks about meat and we've heard our forefathers talk about the great meat of what God's done.

And all we're experiencing is milk, but we're doing the best we can. So this milk must be me. And somebody gets mad when you come along and tell them, excuse me, brother, but that milk that you are chewing on and cutting with a knife and fork is not meat.

It's milk. And the reason it's not read. The reason it's white is because it's milk, not meat.

They get mad at you. They're insulted. A lot of people would rather have their cheapen experience and their half baked religious life.

They'd rather have that than have someone come along and tell him, do you realize you're half dead? You realize you're more wrong than right. You realize there's more God outside of you trying to get in than inside of you trying to get out. People would rather that you pat him on the back and say, man, this is real revival.

I've said it before, but I'd be greatly encouraged if the Lord came to me and said to me, listen, kid, you don't know anything that would bless me as opposed to you have now achieved the ultimate height of spiritual maturity and you have attained your ultimate limit in God. That would be discouraging. I was praying about something last year while I was ministering in Memphis, had a lot of time to get along with God and pray before ministering.

And as I was seeking the face of the Lord, God spoke something very encouraging to me. I had been praying about something in my life where I had in a big situation, not done something exactly the way I wanted to and just made a couple of mistakes. And I was a little discouraged and I was praying about it.

And God spoke to me and said, all it was was a false start on the marathon of your life. I said, what an encouraging, wonderful, life giving word. If he said, oh, he just fell short of the ultimate finishing line and that's it forever, that would be tough.

But people want to believe that Bible days are here again. Well, I mean, let me ask you a question. How many accounts in the scriptures do you read where somebody was ministered to for healing and 19 years later they were still believing for it? I'm not saying God doesn't do that.

And if that's where we are, then let's fight with all our minds. But how many accounts to read about that in the Bible or how many accounts to read about where they took him by the hand and pulled him up off his mat and he still looked crippled and it was horrible. But thank God his eyesight was a little better.

You don't read about that in the Bible. What to me says Bible days aren't here yet. We're in the right direction.

We're moving towards it, but there's got to be a total breaking through. And yet people say it's revival. We're experiencing revival.

We're not experiencing revival. Maybe some parts of the world are some parts of Messiah's body are growing rapidly and supernaturally. You say, yeah, but I know this guy.

He just started some work and in less than five years, he's got 10,000 people. Well, excellent. How many can he get to fast for a week with him? How many could he get to endure persecution? Some of the questions we asked last time.

How many can he get to come out to early morning prayer? How many can he get to throw out their television on a moment's not how many, you know, you go through it, you find out what about 50. Well, that's in 10 years. He's only got a 50 committed people.

That's not revival. So one thing that happens. One thing that assures you that you're in a state needing revival is when all the workings of God and the miraculous accounts are only a memory.

Now, let me ask a question here. How many of you have seen someone born totally blind in both eyes? Did you hear that born totally blind in both eyes instantly heal in front of you? How many just raise your

hand. Okay.

Zero one. Okay. One.

I'm not skeptical, but I don't know if it was born totally blind in both eyes. How many of you have seen someone born with severe cerebral palsy, severe cerebral palsy? I mean, crippled in arms, crippled in legs, drooling, able to communicate at all. No muscle tone whatsoever.

How many of you seen someone in that state instantly healed in front of your eyes? Zero. All right. Let's ask another question.

How many of you have seen in front of your eyes someone preach a message to unsaved people who were against you or against the preacher? All right. Unsaved, angry, and have seen one message preached and have seen conviction come. People fall under weeping, wailing, run up and several thousand get right with God on the spot and years later, still be walking with God.

How many have seen that in front of your eyes? Several thousand. That's what the man said. Zero.

Now you say, oh, but you're making it different. I'm just taking possible excerpts out of various biblical accounts. Okay.

That's all I'm doing. All right. Well, Bible days are not here again.

Now you say, but don't we believe in restoration? Yes, that's the whole thing. We are being restored, but let us realistically look at where we are. Now, if God restored everything at once, we would instantly totally fall apart at the seams, either through pride, through confusion, through questions, through something or other.

Okay. The fact of the matter is that we've had the gifts of the Spirit with us now for eighty, ninety years in some measure restored to the body, and we still don't know what we're doing with most of them. Now, you may take that as an extreme statement.

I know better. It's not an extreme statement. Okay.

We've had God's healing power back in our midst for one hundred years or so, and we're still frustrated with the results and arguing. Is it faith or is it this or is it that we've had Jewish restoration really awoken or awakened in our midst, especially in the last twenty or thirty years? And God is my witness. We've had a lot of Ishmael's, but no Isaacs yet.

It takes a while for restoration to take effect. But when God moves, remember we said one of the signs of revival is that it will be sudden and spontaneous, uncontrollable and uncontainable. God, in a few moments of time, will do more than all of our years of effort and striving and praying.

It will be as a result of our crying out to Him for years that He will suddenly come and move, and then we will see it in front of our eyes.

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