

Marks of True Revival

by Richard Owen Roberts

True revival is a breaking, remaking, pouring full, and great overflow of the Spirit, characterized by a manifest presence of Christ and the rapid spread of the word of God.

Duration: 1:25:46

Scripture: Exodus 32:11

Topics: "True Revival", "Spiritual Renewal"

Description

This sermon emphasizes the importance of true revival, distinguishing between genuine and false revivals. It delves into the necessity of God's presence and the rapid spread of His word in revival, highlighting the need for repentance, faith, and obedience. The sermon draws parallels from biblical accounts like Moses interceding for the Israelites and Paul's plea for the Thessalonians, urging a deep longing for God's manifest presence and the transformative power of His word.

Transcript

Thank you for the privilege of being here this weekend. I have felt quite restrained. Most of the invitations that I accept, it is made crystal clear, there's no time restraints.

Take as long as you like. But I have not been given that privilege this week, and I have felt it. You perhaps have appreciated the fact that restraints were put upon me time-wise.

But sometimes there are truths of such incredible consequence that we cannot wisely hurry through them, but we need to tarry over them until we have truly been gripped by the truth itself. Our subject this evening is revival, and it has been clearly indicated that there are true revivals, and there are false revivals. Now this morning, we were focusing upon conversion with the same exact focus, that there are true conversions and false conversions.

I indicated this morning that there is a reason why so many conversions are false. If your repentance is invalid, your conversion is invalid. If your faith is a throwaway, a wasted faith, your conversion is a throwaway, a wasted conversion.

You can't hope for a legitimate, true conversion when repentance and faith are defective. Though it must be said concerning revival that the great deal of what goes in the name of revival is false revival. But just as there is a cause of false conversion, so there is a cause of false revival.

If your view of God is wrong, your view of revival will be wrong. If you think God exists for your benefit, then you will be willing to claim something as revival, which is not true and genuine. But on the other hand, if you realize that God does not exist for your benefit, but you exist for his benefit.

After all, that question in the Catechism that so many of us learned, what is man's chief end? Man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever. So, a revival has got to be that which glorifies God and which makes it possible for more and more people to enjoy him forever. Now, I need say very little about false revivals.

They've been popular enough. But some of you remember several years back, there was a movement that began as near as anyone knows in Toronto. Initially, it was called the Toronto Revival.

Later on, it was sort of adjusted downward to the Toronto Blessing. But some of you remember that the great focus of that movement was laughter. There was said to be going on at the vineyard called the Airport Vineyard in Toronto, this incredible outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

Numerous people tried to induce me to go and to see for myself what was happening. I never felt any inclination whatsoever. But one of my friends, whose mother lived in Toronto, who needed to visit her, decided to take an evening and to visit the Airport Vineyard.

And he called me after he had been there. He was almost livid with anger and disgust. He said, while there was a preacher on the platform reading Isaiah chapter 53, there were people laughing like hyenas.

And it was impossible for anybody to focus upon the Word of God because of all this crazy laughter that was going on. Now, how does people laughing in an uncontrollable fashion bring glory to God? Oh, it can please the flesh. It can make the flesh feel something wonderful is transpired.

Now, during all major portions of that movement in its earliest days, I happened to be preaching in London, England. And the headlines, London newspapers, talking about the great outburst of laughter in one of the major Anglican centers. At the meeting that evening, a pastor slipped up to me and he said, I was reading today in John Wesley's diary.

I read something very interesting. I've got a copy of it with me. Would you like it? So he slipped me these sheets of paper that he had off printed from the diary.

And it was a report of John and Charles Wesley, who went out early one morning for a walk in the fields. It was a rather regular custom with them when they were together in London to go out together for a prayer walk. So they began this walk and began to seek God's face in prayer.

And suddenly Charles began to laugh in an uncontrollable fashion. And he laughed and he laughed like a wild man. And John kept trying to restrain him, to sober him up.

And for the longest time, he utterly failed. And then finally, Charles came under the control of good sense. And they stood there and they asked the question, was this of God? And they came quickly to the conclusion, we were directed by the Spirit of God to spend hours together praying, seeking God's face.

We were prevented in accomplishing our purpose by this wild laughter. It was not of God. It had to be from the evil one.

Strangely, that night when they went to their public meeting where they were presiding, a similar thing happened, an outburst of laughter. And immediately, they took control and said, this is not of God. We did not come here tonight to laugh.

We came here tonight to meet God. There are true and false revivals. In Pensacola, some little time after that outbreak at the airport vineyard, there was another supposed outpouring of the Holy Spirit that occurred in Pensacola.

I happened to be preaching in Mobile, Alabama at the time. And the pastor of the huge cottage grove Baptist Church where I was preaching at that time was telling me how he slipped over to Pensacola every time he had an opportunity in order to participate in this revival. And he asked me if I would not be willing to go over there with him and to share in this glorious outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

I said to him, not only would I be unwilling to go, but I plead with you to cease such foolishness. Well, he could not for a moment think I was right. He gave more and more of his time to pursuing this that was happening in Pensacola, split cottage grove church, and brought his own ministry under a heavy cloud of darkness.

Soon thereafter, a friend of ours from western Illinois, who was principal of a Christian school called the Tri-State School in Galena, called and said that she had to go to Pensacola. There's a large curriculum company in Pensacola that provides literature both for homeschoolers and for Christian schools. And she had to go on behalf of the school.

And she wanted to visit the revival and could Maggie and I go with her, or if Maggie could not, would I be willing to go with her? And I said to her, Mary Jane, suppose I were to tell you that there was an epidemic of yellow fever occurring in Chicago, and I'm going in to view what's happening, and I'd like you to accompany me. Would you be willing to go with me to the epidemic and to enjoy ourselves moseying around and seeing what's happening? Oh no, she said, I wouldn't do such a foolish thing. Well, I said, I wouldn't do such a foolish thing as to go to Pensacola.

Well, she was, I think, a bit offended or at least dubious at my wisdom. But she said, I have to go to Pensacola, and I am determined to visit the revival. Do you have any advice for me? Yes, I said, Mary Jane, I know you well enough to know that when you set your mind to do something, I'll not succeed in discouraging you.

This is what I would suggest you do. Now, she's a lovely lady with a very lovely personality. In a matter of a few minutes speaking with her, the average person thinks this is the best friend I ever had.

And it's not phony. I mean, she's just genuinely warm, and the people just relate to her. So I said to her, Mary Jane, this is the assignment that I give you.

Go and acquaint yourself with the chief of police. Spend a little time with him. Get him warmed up toward you.

And when you know that he is truly warmed up and ready to answer questions, ask him to tell you if there's a revival occurring in Pensacola. Now, obviously, if the first person to know whether a true revival is occurring or not will be the chief of police. For all true revivals have phenomenal impact upon crime.

Many of you have heard that in Wales during the movement of 1904-1905, day after day after day, the judges entered the courtroom, placed a pair of white gloves on the podium, signifying there was not a single case to be tried. Policemen were out of work. They had only one task.

There was no crime taking place. Their only task was to see that the auditoriums did not collapse because of the multitudes of people trying to get in to the services. They literally organized themselves into gospel quartets.

And the policemen went around to the churches singing praises to God because they had no regular work to do. So Mary Jane, go ingratiate yourself with the chief of police and then ask him if a revival is occurring. And the chief of police says, I assure you, Mary Jane, no revival is happening in Pensacola.

There has been a slight decrease of crime in Pensacola, but the decrease in Pensacola is considerably less than the decrease of crimes. And he named the categories of crime where there had been slight downward movement in certain classes of crime. But he said, I assure you, we have as many prostitutes on the streets all around the church.

We have as many thieves. We have all kinds of crime happening. And many of the persons being arrested are persons who are involved in the revival meetings.

True revival versus false revival. Now that a true revival is incredibly needed, there can be no question. But that a false revival will only fortify the kingdom of darkness is crystal clear.

So we want to be sure that we understand what true revival is. Wouldn't it be a sad thing to pray for a movement that ended up advancing the kingdom of darkness rather than the kingdom of light and black. So what I'd like to do is to lay out the subject this evening in three separate parts.

I'll tell you now what the parts are. And I'm going to try not to keep you as long as sometimes happens when I preach. But I'm not going to hesitate to keep you longer than some of you are used to.

Three parts. Number one, let me begin by speaking of the four things that always happen to individuals and to churches when true revival occurs. Then let me move to the two features that always mark genuine revival.

Number one, the manifest presence of Christ in the midst of his people. And number two, the rapid spread of the word of God racing like a giant flood across the region or across an entire land. Four things that always occur and impact individuals and churches in revival.

Let me list them for you. There's always a breaking. There is always a remaking.

There is always a pouring full. And there's always a great overflow. Try to fix those four things in mind.

A breaking, a remaking, a pouring full, and a glorious overflow. Think, if you will, of Psalm 23. My cup runneth over.

That's the nature of revival. Subjects of revival find their cups running over, but not the cup that they began with. For the cup that they began with is broken and replaced and poured full and it spills all over everywhere.

So, I don't know hardly any of you well, perhaps none really well. Dear Pastor Kurt, the best of any of you, but even so we don't know one another that well. I think we've had very cordial fellowship over the years and a great deal of attraction and affection for one another, and yet we've never been together enough to be really close.

So, I don't know what kind of an imagination you have. I do meet people who almost think it's sinful to use the imagination. I think it's stupid not to use the imagination.

After all, it's God's gift. What could be more wonderful than putting your imagination to work? Imagining what it will be like when the Spirit of God comes in great power upon the church. Well, if you will, utilize your imagination now and imagine yourself as a cup.

Can you do that? That's exactly what I'm doing. Maggie and I have been married 49 years. I was a day short of 31 when we were married.

I had lived alone for years. I hated it. I was in the pastorate in Oregon for four years as a bachelor.

I just literally despised coming home late to the dirty dishes I left in the sink when I left early in the morning. Some friends had furnished an apartment for me as a place to live and they had provided some old dinnerware, cups and saucers and plates, etc. So, when Maggie and I were married, I still had that old stuff.

I'm imagining now myself as a cup. I'm urging you to do the same. I've got in my mind right now this green mug.

It's been mine for about 55 years. If you were to come to our home, and any of you and all of you are invited to do so, but I assure you, if you come, you will not be served either tea or coffee in my mug. Not because I'm selfish, but because it simply isn't good enough for guests.

It's quite okay for me. I like it, in fact. I'm used to it.

I should be after this many years. But I'm imagining myself now as this mug. I've asked you to imagine yourself as a cup.

I have four questions I would like to ask of the cup of your life. Question number one, how big is your cup? Question number two, how clean is your cup? Question number three, what is the true condition of the cup of your life? And question number four, how full is your cup? Now follow me in this. The first question, I'm imagining now myself as an old green mug.

And I'm asking the question, how big is the cup of my life? Well, if the teapot is handy, it's big enough, because you can fill it two or three times if necessary. But on the other hand, if you don't take it with you as you go to work, it'll be empty long before you reach the job. I mean, there are these gigantic mugs that are available.

But now, how big is the cup of your life? I've told you that there are four things that always happen to individuals in churches in revival. There's always a breaking. Suppose the Holy Spirit takes the hammer of his word and smashes the cup of your life into little pieces.

Will it matter? Is the cup of your life so precious that you cannot even stand the thought of being broken by the word, by the Spirit of God? What if God utterly smashed your life? The obvious question you would

need to ask is why? I'm not much, I admit that. But why would he smash what little of me there is? Ah, you see, that's the lovely thing. He smashes the cup of the life in order to replace it with something bigger.

You see, the world is starving to death spiritually because the Christians are living in such a miserable fashion. Tiny little cups, scarcely enough grace for themselves. In most families, not even enough grace in the parents to extend to their own children.

Everywhere I go, families who are hoping against hope that their children are right with God, when the evidence is overwhelming that they are not. We can pretty well gauge the size of our cup by our prayer line. Lord, bless me and mine.

Oh, oh, maybe once every third week. Oh, by the Lord, by the way, Lord, don't forget to bless our dear pastor. But most of us have such limited prayer concerns.

We have such a narrow view of the kingdom of God, such severe limitations on our passions and concerns for others that indeed it would be a glorious thing if God smashed the cup of our life. But I ask secondly, how clean is your cup? Really, truly, how clean is your cup? Now, for a long time, my dear wife Maggie wouldn't touch coffee. She tasted it as a child, thought it was terrible.

Occasionally, when we had guests come, she would say, would you like tea or coffee? And they would say coffee. And I always sort of felt, this is pretty dangerous. You're not very smart to ask Maggie to make her a cup of coffee.

She's never had a cup in all her life. How does she even know what's decent and what's indecent? But lately she's been feeling the need for something to kind of perk her up. So she's been having a bit of coffee.

That's beside the point. You just need to know a little bit about this dear woman I'm married to. But generally speaking, through the years, we've had tea.

Now, one thing is quite apparent. You can't drink tea very long before the cup is looking really vile. So every once in a while, the cup will disappear.

I've never quite known exactly what is done, but I know that some kind of a scouring takes place to make that cup at least a bit more decent. Now, let's ask, how clean is the cup of my life? Well, some of you have been relatively faithful in refusing to go to bed at night without reviewing before the Lord your life that day, and bringing before him in confession everything that was out of the way. Some of us, however, have been careless, and we have gone for protracted seasons, allowing sins to accumulate in our life.

But no matter what, there are impacts, there are effects of sin in our lives. And those show up in the cup of our life. And would it be awful if the Spirit of God and the Word of God functioned like a hammer and smashed the cup of life that's deeply stained? And what is the condition of your cup? Chipped? Cracked? Well, most of you are like Maggie and myself, we don't serve our guests from our everyday cups and saucers, but they're good enough for us.

And some of us have reached that place where we know we don't look very good, but we think, well, I'm good enough. And we're trying to serve the Lord with cups that are miserably small, grievously stained, somewhat chipped and cracked. And again, what if the Word and the Spirit functioned as a hammer and smashed the cup of your life to smithereens? And the fourth question I ask, how full is your cup? It's

possible for a person to try to serve the Lord out of the dregs of the cup.

Were you ever in a Sunday school class? Did you ever sit in a public service and listen to a sermon that sounded as if the teacher or the preacher had gotten a vile little sponge and was down in the bottom of their cup, dredging around, trying to find a little something. And finally they stand in the pulpit or before the podium and they wring and they wring and they wring that foul little sponge and finally one sour drop comes out. And you go away worse than you went, but there's nothing there.

The little bit that's squeezed out is sour. So if a person is serving Christ out of the dregs of the cup, would it be awful if the Word and the Spirit smashed the cup of life to smithereens? The nature of revival is that it's a breaking, a breaking of these tiny, stained, cracked, nearly empty cups for the purpose of remaking. Wouldn't you love to be seven times larger in spirit than you are now? Fourteen times more effective as a servant of Christ.

A hundred times more useful in the kingdom of God. Would it not be glorious if God smashed the cup of every life here and replaced it with a lovely, large, grand, spanking new cup? And especially if when the cup of your life were replaced, the portals of heaven were rolled back and the angels bring to the portals these giant vats of fresh graces and blessings. And there the cup of your life is under one of these portals and our dear Lord says to the angels, now begin to pour and they pour and they pour and they pour and they pour some more and yet they keep on pouring until you are filled with all fresh graces and you are so full that everywhere you go you are spilling and all the time you're spilling fresh graces are being poured in so that the world, instead of being under the curse of our ringing of filthy sponge and getting out a single bitter drop, is constantly overflowed, spilled upon by believers who are loaded with fresh new graces from Christ.

That's the nature of revival. It always happens that way. Now because God is the author of revival, no two revivals are ever identical.

As I said this morning, he loves variety and he has incredible ability to produce revival after revival, each of which has its own distinct and unique characteristics, but all of them have at least some similarity and every true revival, breaking, remaking, pouring full and spilling over. Now false revival doesn't look like that, but a true revival does. That makes it the most attractive thing that I can imagine.

I would love it if every Christian who knows me were to see me not as I've been, but as I will be in the midst of a great revival. I'd love to think of every one of you, broken, remade, poured full and spilling everywhere the fresh graces of Christ. Now I said there are two things that happen in revival that are worthy of careful consideration.

You say it's taken a long time. Well, that's all right. After all, we've had several sermons this weekend that have been distinctly biblical.

And now we're going to turn to the scripture and I invite you to turn to that first incredible reporting of a true revival in the Old Testament found in the book of Exodus. Some of you will be very familiar with the passage. I have no intention of reading it in its entirety, but I would like to draw your attention to the prayers that appear in segments in Exodus 32 and 33.

I've said to you that there are two great things that always characterize true revival. Number one, the manifest presence of Christ in his people in the church. I don't know whether you've ever found this

statement or not, but before I read from Exodus 32, I just want to draw your attention to a few words from Psalm 73.

The last verse of Psalm 73, but as for me, the nearness of God is my God. Dwell upon those words. Say them in your heart with me as I repeat them again.

The nearness of God is my God. Is God always equidistant from us? Is there a uniformity in our experience? Well, if you think there is, you're not a very good thinker or observer of life. Our fathers, in describing this matter, use such expressions as the springtime of the saw, or the wintertime of the saw, or the night season of the saw over against the day season of the saw.

The reason we know as an absolute fact that God's nearness is not always the same is because we have such precious statements as in the fourth chapter of James. Draw near to me and I will draw near to you. Those would be senseless words if God were always as close to us as is desirable.

But what a wonderful thing to realize. Can you join me not merely in reciting the words, but in your experience, can you confirm with me right now, the nearness of God is my God. Oh, if we had endless time, I could tell you of incredible seasons in my own soul when God was so near, it was almost as if I could reach out and touch him.

There have been other times when God seemed so far away, I wondered if he had forgotten me altogether. Now, a season of revival is a season when God draws near. I began by mentioning two movements that were identified by some as revival, the laughing revival in Toronto that spread to many places.

If one can laugh while the sacred word of God has been read, it surely doesn't indicate the nearness of God. We've got plenty of biblical reports of God drawing near. When God draws near, people fall on their faces and they cry out, whoa, it's me.

But I've asked you, can you identify even now in your own life, seasons when God has been wondrously near, and can you join me in a personal testimony, the nearness of God is my God. While my own parents were still alive, family members would from time to time call for a family reunion. They lived in Upper New York, and I remember one of those occasions.

We have one family member, quite wealthy, who owns a large estate, and a tent had been erected on the estate, and the whole family coming from all directions was there, and we were enjoying meals together in the tent. Many of us were lodged in the estate home. But on Saturday night, quite late, a number of the young people came up to me, and they said, Uncle Dick, what is the plan for tomorrow? Well, I said, I understand that Grandma and Grandpa wish us all to go together with them to their church.

And so some of the young people said, oh, we were hoping we could have a meeting under the tent, and that you would preach. Will you? I said, I'm not the elder brother. I don't have the right to determine such matters.

Why don't you go to my older brother and ask him? So this group of several young people went off and found him, and they said, Uncle Earl, wouldn't it be wonderful if we had a meeting under the tent? Well, he said, I think it's a splendid idea, but it's pretty late to plan such a thing. They said, what if Uncle Dick preached? Well, if Uncle Dick is willing to, it'd sure be all right with me. So it was already past bedtime.

I didn't really have much time to think, but the Lord directed my attention to that phrase that I've held in front of you, the nearness of God is my God. So that morning under the tent, with the whole extended family present, I spoke upon Psalm 73. I reviewed circumstances in our family.

My older brother had been a missionary in Nigeria. At the time of the Biafra conflict, he was on the front lines serving the troops. His wife and three of his sons went to the airport to pick up a returning missionary family.

They had a native driver. Somehow, the driver veered across the center line, roared into a huge lorry. Two sons were killed outright.

The wife and the third son were dragged into a hospital in Lagos, thrown in a corner and left to die. Strangely and wonderfully, Shell Oil Company learned of the tragedy and arranged a private airplane and transported them to London, where they received medical help. The son and the wife were spared for the entire family.

It was one of those times when we could all say, the nearness of God is our God. I reiterated numerous occasions where in the lives of various family members that was true. I reported how Maggie and I, time after time, had experienced the nearness of God.

At the end of the service, an unsaved niece slipped up to me and stood standing before me, weeping. And I said to her, Bonnie dear, isn't it time for you to know that the nearness of God is your God? And the tears just gushed out. Oh, she said, Uncle Dick, I wish it could happen.

And I said, Bonnie, why don't you fly out to Chicago and spend a few days with us? And she came. And in a few days, her life was transformed. And she knew herself that the nearness of God was her God.

Most of you, know many people who have never experienced the nearness of God. But I'm simply reporting that in all true seasons of revival, the nearness of God is the remarkable thing. Now then, as I declared, let me read just several excerpts from Exodus 32 and 33.

The first portion, starting at verse 11 of chapter 32. Then Moses entreated the Lord, his God. And he said, O Lord, why doth thine anger burn against thy people, whom thou hast brought out from the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand? Why should the Egyptians speak, saying with evil intent, he brought them out to kill them in the mountains and to destroy them from the face of the earth.

Turn from thy burning anger and change thy mind about doing harm to thy people. Remember Abraham and Isaac and Israel, thy servants, by whom thou didst swear by thyself and didst say to them, I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heavens. And all this land of which I have spoken, I will give to your descendants and they shall inherit it forever.

So the Lord changed his mind about the harm which he said he would do to his people. Now all of you who know this passage realize that the setting is when Moses is up on the mountain with God receiving the tablets and stone engraved by the finger of God. Aaron is down on the plain and the people are murmuring and complaining and saying, as for this Moses, we don't know what has become of him.

And Aaron, like many an associate pastor, has led the people into the depths of evil by inviting them to bring their gold, which he fashions into a golden calf. And so God has said to Moses just before Moses' intercession, get out of the way Moses, I'm going to go down there and utterly destroy those people. And

instead of getting out of the way, Moses gets right in God's face and insists that God must not destroy the people and gives them some very sound arguments.

If God destroyed the people, how could he keep his promise? A promise, he is reminded, made to Abraham, Isaac, Israel, to multiply their seeds and to make them more numerous than the sands of the seashore. And also an argument, what will the Egyptians think? They will wonder why would God bring them out of Egypt with a mighty arm made bare, only to destroy them in the wilderness? What kind of folly is that? Now the issue, friends, is the presence of God. God has been going before them in the pillar of fog by day, in the pillar of fire by night.

And now God is saying, get out of the way, I'll utterly destroy these people. Drop down, if you will, to the next segment of the prayer. Verse 31 of chapter 32, and Moses returned to the Lord and he said, alas, this people has committed a great sin and they made a God of gold for themselves.

But now, if thou wilt forgive their sin. You say, why, did you sit down, O Bill? No, I'm reading this picture. I'm paying attention to the punctuation.

You see that, don't you? But now, if thou wilt forgive their sin, dash, the words they're about to follow are not words spoken carelessly. They're costly words. They're words that must be weighed with great care.

If not, block me out from the book which thou has written. Moses was so closely identified with the people that if God would not save them, then he was willing to be lost forever himself. It is not that Moses denied that the people deserved destruction, for they surely did.

But Moses was so deeply aware of God and of his plan and his purpose, that he was able to pray with such incredible burden that he's ready to be lost forever rather than to see the people destroyed. Verse 33. The Lord said to Moses, whoever has sinned against me, I will blot out of my book.

But now, go, lead the people where I told you. Behold, my angel shall go before you. Nevertheless, in the day when I punish, I will punish them for their sin.

Then the Lord spoke to people because of what they did with the calf which Aaron had made. Then the Lord spoke to Moses, depart, go up from here, you and the people whom you have brought up from the land of Egypt, to the land of which I swore to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, saying to their descendants, I will give it. And I will send an angel before you.

And I will drive out the Canaanites and the Amorites, the Hittites and the Perizzites, the Hivites and the Jebusites. Go up to a land flowing with milk and honey, for I will not go in your midst. You are an obstinate people, lest I destroy you on the way.

Now some of us have lived through seasons that we were so exasperated, so unclear, so uncertain as to the will and purpose of God. If God had said to us, go on, get moving, I'll send an angel before you, we would have clapped our hands, shouted hallelujah, and began to march. But these people had not been led by an angel.

But by the Shekinah glory. And now they're told, I won't go with you. You're an obstinate people.

If I went with you, I would destroy you on the way. So the threat that God has made against Israel, after that first intercession on Moses' part, was not to destroy them, but to refuse to go with them. Now dear

friends, we are living at a time when God is not with us as he was.

I know it's unfair to the young people to keep speaking of the past, but sheer integrity requires me to declare to you that I lived through days when God was with us. I lived at times when in preaching the word of God, I saw entire congregations bathed in tears. Where I saw incredible conviction of sin, where I saw multitudes of people being gloriously and permanently transformed.

When the evidence was simply overwhelming that God was with us. Now the evidence is overwhelming that God is not with us. Moses had the spiritual ability to discern that going anywhere without God was ridiculous.

But we have become so used to the absence of God's presence that it would astonish us if God came anywhere near. But in seasons of revival, that's exactly what happens. God draws near.

I could entertain you for hours with glorious accounts. I'll just mention one I think is very special. When God visited Wales in 1904 and 1905, in the southern districts where coal mining, deep pit mines were very common.

The mules, the ponies down in the bowels of the earth that drew the ore cracks went on strike as a result of the nearness of God. These animals had been driven by kicks and curses. And when a miner descended the great elevator shaft to say a mile and a quarter into the earth and walked up to the place where his donkey stood standing, and he put his arm around the donkey and said, now donkey dear, you and I are here to serve the Lord God.

Let's begin with a song. And so the miner sang. And let's have prayer.

And so the miner prayed. And the poor dumb beast didn't know what to do. They had to be retrained to respond to human kindness because the presence of God had come into the principality of Wales.

And more than 100,000 people in that small population were gloriously brought into right relationship with Jesus Christ. Look, if you will, in chapter 33, let me read just a bit at verse 12. Then Moses said to the Lord, see, thou dost say to me, bring up this people, but thou thyself hast not let me know whom thou wilt send with me.

Moreover, thou hast said, I have known you by name, and you have also found favor in my sight. Now, therefore, I pray thee, if I have found favor in thy sight, let me know thy ways, that I may know thee, so that I may find favor in thy sight. Consider, too, that this nation is thy people.

And God said, my presence shall go with you, and I will give you rest. And then Moses said, if thy presence does not go with us, do not lead us up from here. Oh, would to God every church in America would come to the resolve, Lord, if you do not come among us in your glorious manifest presence, we're not going anywhere.

We're just going to tarry and wait until the presence of our God is manifest in our midst. But notice verse 16, for how then can it be known that I have found favor in thy sight, I and thy people? Is it not by thy going with us, so that we, I and thy people, may be distinguished from all the other people who are upon the face of the earth? Oh, look at those words. Ask God to speak those words into your life.

How can the world believe if God is not with us? It is the presence of Christ in the midst of his people that sets the world to thinking, that brings upon the world conviction of sin, that results in glorious conversion. As it stands now, we bear witness and the world sneers. They say, why should I believe you? You're no different than we are.

But when God is in our midst, nobody says that. The nearness of God is our God. The nature of true revival is that God draws near and is in the midst of his people.

False revivals are not marked by the nearness of God, but often by the nearness of foolishness. Do it again, Lord. Do it again.

Part three. Turn, if you will, to a New Testament passage. 2 Thessalonians, please.

Let me read just two verses, wonderfully helpful and insightful verses. 2 Thessalonians, chapter 3, verses 1 and 2. Finally, brethren, pray for us that the word of the Lord may spread rapidly and be glorified just as it did also with you, and that we may be delivered from the perverse and evil men, for not all men have faith. You see, that's the great second earmark of revival.

The word of God begins to run with incredible speed and power. Time after time, as I journey back and forth across the country, preaching here, preaching there, wherever I can, people listen intently. They go by me at the door and they say, oh, that was interesting.

Or even more stupidly, they say, oh, I sure enjoyed that. You enjoyed being called a wretched sinner? You enjoyed being implored to turn to God in repentance and faith? Most of the responses that are made after services simply demonstrate that people aren't paying any attention. I'm not throwing stones at you.

I mean, some of you have foolishly said to me you enjoyed my preaching this week. Well, I think I understand that sometimes we don't choose the right words, but we are trying to say that helped, even though we say something clumsy and silly. But dear friends, in the season of revival, people don't make silly comments like that.

When you hear the word of God preached and the Spirit of God is at work, you don't end up saying, I'll think about it. You surely don't say, oh, I enjoyed that, as if you'd been to a ball game. When the word of God is running like a mighty flood, you say, yes, Lord.

Whatever you say, Lord, in absolute obedience, Lord. Right now, Lord. Oh, for a day.

When the presence of Christ is so real in the church, and the word of God is running as Paul speaks of it here, and immediately people are responding in obedience and in passionate following of the Lord Jesus Christ clear to the end. Let's take just a few moments to think about verses 1 and 2 of 2 Thessalonians chapter 3. Finally, brethren, pray for us that the word of the Lord may spread rapidly, just as it did also with you. When Paul ministered to the Thessalonians, the word rushed forward like an incredible flood.

But that was not always Paul's experience. Paul was in situations where there was resistance to the word, where people did make inane statements like, I'll think about it. And so he's asking the Thessalonians to pray that once again, the word of the Lord will run or have free course or go forward unhindered, that it will have a swift and glorious effect, that God's kingdom will be ushered in with great power and in revival.

That's an inevitable blessing. The word of God takes on dimensions of marvelous power, and it runs freely as a giant wave of divine blessing. Notice how the word says that the word may run or spread rapidly and be glorified.

I could not tell you how many hundreds of times I've gone back to the hotel in the city where I was preaching, feeling the weight and the sorrow that the word seemed to have so little impact. Frequently people say to me, I haven't heard preaching like that for a long time. Well, there's a reason.

Most people don't want to hear the truth. They'd rather have a few bouquets thrown in the direction. They'd much prefer to think good about themselves than to think realistically as God's word makes claim.

Oh, that I might live long enough to see the word again rushing forward like a tidal wave of divine blessing, so that the word itself brings glory to God. Or as it says in verse 2, that the church might be delivered from perverse and evil men. I mean, that's what we're faced with today.

Multitudes of churches pastored by perverse and evil men who are much more insistent upon advancing their kingdom than the kingdom of Christ. I was in one of those so-called mega churches in Texas sometime back for a Sunday morning to a Wednesday night series. And it was obvious the pastor was very angry on Sunday morning.

And I said to him, why did you invite me here? It's obvious you don't want to hear the truth. Oh, he said, I heard about you and I thought it might be good for the people, but now I wish I hadn't invited you. And Sunday night he was even more angry.

He called me early Monday morning. He said, the whole staff is up in arms. We've reserved a private room at the hotel where you're staying.

We'll meet you there for lunch. So eight of them came. And for an hour and a half, they attacked me steadily.

And all I did was smile. But finally seven of the younger men left and the senior pastor so-called remained. And he was looking just a bit sheepish because in most circles, even today, it's not really fair for eight young men to attack one old man.

So he was looking, as I said, a bit sheepish. And I said to him, pastor, did you ever knowingly baptize an unconverted person? Well, yes, I would admit that I have. With what frequency have you done that? Well, I haven't really kept track, I should think, not more than a thousand times.

And I said, why do you do that? Oh, he said, you have to understand, I've committed myself to build a mega church. Oh, I understand that. But I wonder, do you understand that if your church you're building, and it has absolutely nothing to do with the Lord Jesus Christ, and every person whom you are leading astray, you will be held accountable for, and you're going to answer to God for every person whose soul you have damaged.

He left. He didn't speak to me that day, the rest of the day, or all day Tuesday, or all day Wednesday. But on Wednesday night, just before the service, he stepped up to me.

He said, Mr. Roberts, would you be willing to go to a restaurant with me after the service for something to eat? I have something I want to ask you. Yes, I said, certainly. He said, there'll be many people who will

wish to speak with you.

I'll wait on the side until you're free. So he came up to me long after the service had ended, and he said, before we go to the car, I want to tell you the question. Will you be willing to tell me everything that you've seen in me that's wrong? I said, why? Are you telling me that you're ready to repent? No, he said, I don't dare be that brash.

All I can tell you is, I have two weeks in which to get right with God, or it will be everlastingly too late for me. I said, why do you say that? He said, I know myself. I'm under conviction for the first time in my life.

We went to the restaurant. He pulled out a pad and a pen. He said, I mean it, now get it to me straight.

I won't review what I told him, only to say that I said, the evidence is clear to me. You are an unconverted man, but I don't want to be unfair. If I say you are unconverted, is that unfair? No, he said, I believe that's the case.

And I proceeded with a list of a dozen things, but listen, I never heard from him again. I feel certain, had he repented, he would have let me know. I'm telling you, we live in a time when there are vast numbers of churches, where they are not building the kingdom of God, but the kingdom of man, where they do not enter the pulpit, burdened with the word of the Lord, burning in their soul.

And we are in desperate need of a revival, where Christ draws near, and where the word of God again rushes across the land like a mighty tidal wave of blessing, where the church is delivered from perverse and evil man. That's true revival. That's what we need.

I hope that's what you're praying for, and praying it with the same fervency as Moses prayed. Either save my people, or blot my name out of the book that you have written. Wouldn't it be wonderful if right here, in this congregation, God should be speaking to a young man, whom he is calling to stand before the people, and to cry out in the power of the Holy Spirit, repent and return to God.

And the word of God through him, rushing like a mighty flood, turned thousands and thousands back to God. Let us vow before we live, that we will give everything we've got to pray for true revival.

Audio: <https://sermonindex1.b-cdn.net/24/SID24186.mp3>

Video: <https://sermonindex2.b-cdn.net/28Opn19Eino.mp4>

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/richard-owen-roberts/marks-of-true-revival/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net