

# Revival - Part 1 (June 2002)

by Richard Owen Roberts

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*Richard Owen Roberts discusses the true state of the church, emphasizing the need for revival and personal accountability in faith.*

**Duration:** 30:18

**Scripture:** Genesis 1:1-2, Exodus 20:3-4, Psalm 119:11, Matthew 4:4, John 4:14, Romans 10:17, Revelation 22:17

**Topics:** "Revival"

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## Description

In this sermon, the preacher begins by quoting Isaiah 55:1, inviting all who are thirsty to come to the waters and buy food and drink without cost. He emphasizes the futility of spending money and labor on things that do not satisfy. The preacher then reads from Psalm 85:4-7, calling on God to revive and show his unfailing love to his people. He discusses the decline in attendance in churches that have serious preaching, but believes that there will come a time when true ministry of the Word of God will be elevated. The preacher suggests that the current state of the world is a result of God's remedial judgment and calls for repentance. The sermon ends with an invitation for listeners to call in with their questions.

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## Transcript

Come, all who are thirsty, come to the waters. And you who have no money, come, buy and eat. Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost.

Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and your soul will delight in the richest of fare. Give ear and come to me, hear me, that your soul may live. Welcome to Springs of Living Water, with pastors Ray and Jan Greenlee.

Restore us again, O God our Savior, and put away your displeasure toward us. Will you be angry with us forever? Will you prolong your anger through all generations? Will you not revive us again, that your people may rejoice in you? Show us your unfailing love, O Lord, and grant us your salvation. We've been reading from Psalm 85, verses 4 through 7. And we welcome you today on Springs of Living Water.

We welcome you to this broadcast today. We have a special guest with us by telephone line. We're eager to have him share his insights and his understandings.

Our guest is Richard Owens Roberts. He is an itinerant preacher, a Bible expositor, a collector of rare books, a bookseller, a publisher. What interests me the most in our guest is that he has done extensive

research in the area of revival.

He has also spent a lifetime searching out before God in quietness and trust, searching out before God the ways of God. Today we welcome to our radio program Richard Owens Roberts. Welcome, Richard.

Thank you very much. And thank you for giving us your time. We consider it a privilege to have you join us live today on WABS.

Well, I'm grateful for the opportunity. We have several questions, and we want to just dive right in. The first question we'd like to ask you is, Brother, from every outward indication, the Christian church in America is prospering.

But do you believe the church is truly prospering? What is it that you see in the condition of the church? You travel extensively. You preach and teach in many different areas. What's happening to the church in America? Well, the key word is the word that you just used, outwardly.

Certainly what you said is the case. Outwardly, things look splendid. But Christianity, while there are outward aspects, is first and foremost inward.

It has to do primarily with our relationship with God. The way one perceives a matter depends upon their relationship with God. If you look at the church from man's standpoint, it looks marvelous.

If you look at it from God's standpoint, it looks extremely ill. It's devastatingly sorrowful in its condition. Very little about the church.

In any way, would be pleasing to God. Unless, now the critical question is, how many gods are there? If there are any number, or even if there are just two. The God of the Old Testament and the God of the New Testament.

And if the God of the Old Testament is dead and the God of the New Testament lives, one could imagine that that God is very pleased with all the activity, all the vast numbers of people tied into the church. But if indeed God is correct when he says that he alone is God, when he teaches that there is only one God, when he insists that he changes not, then the God of today is the same as the God of yesterday. The God of the Old Testament, the God of the New Testament are one God without change.

Well, some would not be prepared to say that there are two gods, but they think maybe God has changed. He's gotten control of his temper. He's no longer a God of wrath.

He's a God of love, of kindness. He just oozes grace and mercy in every direction. But that means there's a change in God.

Because the God of the Old Testament is a God of holiness. He despises sin. He finds it impossible to relate to those who delight in sin.

He distances himself from them. He refuses to bless that which is obnoxious to him. So if we are dealing with one and the same God that Israel faced, then how could we suppose for a moment that God is pleased with the church that he regards all as well? Every sober-minded person knows that the sin rate in the church is essentially the same as the sin rate in the world.

You can't name any crime or sin where there's any essential difference. There are homosexuals in the church to the same degree, maybe even a little worse than in the world. The abortion rate, the drunkenness rate, other substance abuse rates.

Take whatever sin you please. The church and the world are one and the same. And how then can we suppose that God is pleased when he's called the people to holiness? And certainly when you have a people who have no interest in holiness, and we have to face the fact that it's not merely that there are many in the church who are unholy, but basically the typical church will not tolerate serious preaching on holiness.

So we're dealing with an outward view from a man-centered perspective where things look good. And we're dealing with an inward view from a God-orientated approach where things look terrible. Brother Roberts, how do you deal then with almost every major ministry that broadcasts in America, almost without exception, they, of one unity, teach the unconditional love of God? Well, I fear that many of them have never really seriously looked at Scripture.

I recall an instance quite a few years ago where I sat in a large Western church. You have heard it said, God loves the sinner, but he hates the sinner's sin. But I say unto you, God hates both the sin and the unrepentant sinner.

Now that created an immense amount of opposition. One very prominent man wrote me a very hot letter in which he denounced me as extraordinarily dangerous because, as he said, you're very clever in the way you state things, and you have a taking way. People are drawn into your web, and yet you are a heretic of the worst order.

And it was really a very severe letter. I wrote back to him, I believe what was an extremely kind letter, saying to him, I believe that you are at a very considerable disadvantage. You have attacked me on a matter that you have never biblically considered.

The advantage I have over you is I have looked carefully at every single passage of Scripture where there is anything said about the subject of love, and I cannot find one single passage that hints that God loves unrepentant sinners. But I can find many, many passages where he declares his hatred. So I think what we have to solemnly face is that we are living in a time when people are more caught up in traditional notions and nice ideas than they are in the Bible itself, and they would sooner believe something comfortable than they would to face the realities of the Word of God.

Now, God would be in violation of himself if he loved unrepentant sinners. It poses an immense intellectual problem, even. I have said to people who sought to oppose this idea, what goes to hell? Does God send sin to hell, or does he send sinners to hell? Yes.

No one has ever insisted, well, he just sent sin to hell. They acknowledge that it's sinners. Well then, how can you say God loves sinners, and yet he consigns them to an eternal perdition and suffering? There are many, many sobering things, biblically, that could be stated, but I believe that we are living in a time when notions like God loves everybody have taken precedence over plain biblical truth.

Then how do you deal with the Christian who insists that they are saved and yet continue to walk in their sin with boldness? Well, unfortunately, there are many who sincerely believe that they're saved, who can even tell you the day and the hour that they were saved, who, if they took Scripture seriously, would be

trembling at the realization that Christ made many very adamant statements to the effect that not everyone that calls upon the Lord, who says, Lord, Lord, is saved, but those that do the will of his Father in heaven. And over and over we have statements such as many are called, few are chosen, and there is a general tendency among American preachers to take in as many people as they possibly can and to make the message so broad and inviting and easy so that everybody, without difficulty, can accept it. And then they give them some proof text that that means they're saved.

And again, they haven't paid any serious attention to the bulk of Scripture, just listed out of context an occasional statement that they favor. I don't have any way to know what the statistics are, I don't believe anybody does, but estimates have been made that at least 70% of the members of the evangelical churches in America are as lost as Satan himself. So whether that's true or untrue, I don't know.

I just know that you look at virtually any church, take some of these huge churches that seem to be prospering. They may have, say, 12,000 people on Sunday morning or if they have a Saturday night meeting between Saturday night and Sunday morning. If they have any prayer meeting at all, and many of them don't seem to have any prayer meetings, they probably have fewer than 50 people in attendance.

I asked one local pastor here this same question regarding their prayer meeting, and this is one of the large megachurches here in Northern Virginia, and his response was a laugh, and he said, Oh, yes, we have a little area that we give to our geriatric people so they can pray for their sore toes. And that was his response, and this is one of the leading Bible churches in the Washington metro area. And there's another thing that we have reached constantly and have been attracted with when we're preaching on the radio here, people just don't read their Bibles.

I mean, they believe whatever the pastor says, and I'm not saying that some pastors preach the word and some don't preach at all. So if you aren't preaching all of it, it's not the truth, but you don't read the Bible for themselves, and that's one of the things we've just really encouraged people to do. Read your Bible.

Make it a relay race from Genesis to Revelation three or four or five times a year. When you're done with it, read it again, and God's word will scrub and clean. Yes, I think that unfortunately there are many people who are willing to leave their salvation in someone else's hands.

And not concern themselves with it. So if some religious spokesman tells them they're all right, then they assume that they are all right. But Christianity is very much an individual matter.

Every single person deals with the Lord. One of the great issues of the Protestant Reformation was the priesthood of each believer. And it's not merely a priesthood, but every single believer is responsible before God and must answer to God.

Their pastor isn't going to answer for them. And if they're not seriously enough interested to even inquire personally of God what their status is, they certainly are in most grievous danger. And there no doubt are people listening now who are assuming that they are right with God because someone else has either plainly told them they were or hinted as much.

And they have never carefully searched the matter out themselves. They've never spent even 15 minutes seeking God. And they're basing their comfort and their security on foolishness.

That's so, it's terrifying. It really is. And of course, I'm, my wife and I are here in Washington, D.C. where we, this has been our area of ministry.

We've not traveled the country, we've not preached across the country. And I guess one of my questions to you is this, is this a regionalized thing or is this simply a product of the American culture? And is this what we're exporting in our missions work? Well, tragically, that is exactly the case. I have not been able to discern any single area of the country where things were any better morally or spiritually than any other part.

And we are great exporters despite the fact that we have had a rather severe balance of trade problem economically with manufactured goods and so on. We are the world's foremost exporters of religious notions. And in many parts of the world, the church is as badly hurt as it is here because American notions of religion have been exported there and they have embraced them as if we always tell the truth.

I don't travel constantly in foreign lands, but from time to time, normally once or twice a year I make a foreign trip. And wherever I have been, I have seen this immense problem. We have some extremely faithful missionaries who never export air, but we have plenty of others who are themselves so caught up in the evangelical traditionalism that they couldn't possibly teach or preach anything other than the air that they've embraced.

So what's the answer? Well, the answer obviously is God. And the thing that in my mind just totally underlines what we've been speaking about is this very, very sad observation. The less that is said about God in the church, and I'm speaking now specifically of what is said biblically about God, notions about God are acceptable.

But biblical facts about God are basically undesirable. So that wherever you have a church where much is said about God, with very few exceptions, you have a thinning attendance. The more serious the preaching is about God, the fewer the people who are coming to hear it.

And if you want to grow a big church, then the main thing you have to refrain from is speaking seriously about God. Just give a vague notion of God. Let it be of a religious sort, not specific, not earnest, not thoroughly biblical, and people will come in great numbers to hear mediocre, careless, wide of the mark proclamations.

But where you have serious preaching, you have basically a decline in attendance. Now that has not always been true. I don't believe it always will be true.

I believe it's a characteristic of this age. But I believe the day will come when things will turn around, and the places where there is a true ministry of the word of God, and God himself is immensely elevated, they will be packed jammed with people. And those that are toying around will have diminishing numbers.

And we pray for and we await that turn when God-centered churches and living are indeed the primary ones and where the blessing of God exists. But I think what we have tied in with this is the simple fact that when you have a nation that is under divine judgment, that judgment could take on any number of forms. Obviously, God is unlimited, and he has an incredible imagination, so no one would dare to say how God could or would act.

But using our scriptures, we observe that the judgments of God fall into two basic categories. There are what we call remedial or gracious judgments, and there are what we call technically final judgments. Now, an easy way of thinking through these matters is to think of a final judgment as a judgment in which there is neither time nor opportunity for repentance.

We have in our New Testaments, in the book of Acts, a very classic example of this. We have Ananias coming in where Peter was, and he's asked concerning the distribution of a certain sum of money, and he tells a lie. Peter doesn't say to him, no, you're on dangerous ground.

I want you to see the prayer room over there. You better slip over to the prayer room. Confess thy sin.

Confess thy sin and try and get right with God. No, there's not a moment for confession, for repentance. The judgment of God falls, and he is dead.

Not very long thereafter, his wife comes in, and the similar process is repeated. Now, we have in the Old Testament just incredible numbers of judgments of this sort where death and destruction occur, often in a moment of time. Maybe God, so to speak, whispers in the ear of Philistine leaders, Israel is yours, help yourself.

And perhaps in a single day, they destroy 132,000 Israelites. Those are standard judgments, final judgments. Now, we live at a time when the thinking of people is so careless, spiritually and biblically, that many, when they hear the word judgment, think of nothing other than death and destruction.

So I've had preachers say to me, well, if we're not careful, God may judge us. And I'm apt to say to them, since when are the judgments of God iffy or uncertain? What do you mean if we're not careful? God has judged us. Oh no, they say, we're still here.

Ah, the problem is you don't understand that God's first desire is not death and destruction, but repentance and faith. And so when he's not through with the people, and we see just so many wonderful illustrations of this in the history of Israel, when he's not through with the people, he brings some form of remedial judgment, a judgment intended to correct and to change. It's gracious.

It oozes the mercy of God. Now we are seeing what I would describe as one of numerous remedial judgments right now. The state of Colorado is on fire to an extraordinarily large degree.

God could have destroyed the entire state. Instead, he's allowed the destruction of much material goods, but relatively few lives. Yes, we have incredible accounts of plagues, of locusts.

Joel describes one of these in a way that is simply astonishing. We have various diseases. We have floods, earthquakes, tornadoes.

I mean, the list is virtually endless. And when you examine it, you think, well, that was certainly destructive. But it's amazing how few died.

Now, I observe that the general tendency when America comes through some great calamity is to boast and say, well, we sure handled that well. Look at the outpouring of love and kindness and so on. And very few ask the question, is God speaking to us? Yes.

One of the things that greatly impressed me in earlier years was the pamphlet literature that was produced in America, say, up until approximately 1850. I have hundreds of these in my own library. And of course, there are many, many that I do not have.

But so many of these focus on the judgments of God. Days of fasting and prayer. Some are called by state.

Some are called by federal governments. But days in which the pastors addressed the peoples and so often raised the question, what is God's message in this calamity that we are experiencing? And time after time after time, the nation was called to repentance. And the prompt was the goodness of God in a remedial judgment.

And I believe that's what we're facing today, that we are truly under remedial judgment. But I do not think our leaders interpret right. What is transpiring and the most astonishing of these remedial judgments, the most devastating is the withdrawal of God's manifest presence in the church.

We need to take a two minute break. We're speaking with Richard Owens Roberts. He is an itinerant preacher, a Bible expository, a man of God.

And we'd like to invite you to join us with your questions. Our telephone number is 1-877-534-0780.

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