

Habakkuk - Part 1

by Roy Hession

Revival is God's work of restoring what has been lost or spoiled, and it requires humility and a willingness to admit our weakness and failure.

Duration: 1:02:30

Scripture: 1 Samuel 3:21, Psalm 85:5-6, Habakkuk 3:1-4

Topics: "Habakkuk"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the need for revival in the midst of the years. He refers to the Bible verse from Habakkuk 3:2, where the prophet asks God to revive His work. The speaker highlights the importance of recognizing our own flaws and confessing our need for God's remaking hands. He also mentions the NIV version of the verse, which alters the phrase to 'revive thy work in our time.' The sermon concludes with a call for individuals to seek revival in their own lives and to pray for revival in their time.

Transcript

I want you, if you will, to find, if it's not too difficult for you, the book of Habakkuk. Now that's not so easy. As a matter of fact, I'm not at my best in finding my way around the mind of prophets, but they're very important, and the book of Habakkuk, well, I can only assist you by saying it's the fifth book from the end of the New Testament backwards.

Go back five books, and there is Habakkuk. On the other hand, do not be ashamed to consult the index. That's what it's for.

Of course, today we have overcome this difficulty, especially in the Anglican Church. Apparently the Anglican Church are credited with not knowing their Bibles too well, because even in the most evangelical church, they're told the page number of the scripture in the pews in the Bible. Well, we never used to have that.

You just had to find your way, and you didn't want to betray your ignorance to your next door neighbour who used to look at the index very surreptitiously. But now, from the front, we're told what the page is. Well, we've all got different Bibles, and they all aren't the pages.

But I must say, I have a little chuckle every time we're told the page number of the passage. But I do have my difficulties, right up to this present hour. You see, I never went to Sunday school, and I was never

taught the order of the books of the Bible.

And any Sunday school teachers, whatever you do, teach the children the order of the Bible. If you've got some little rhyme you can teach them, because it's going to be a blessing to them. I'd still have to keep on turning till I come to the Minor Prophets.

And you know, you would be embarrassed if when you got to heaven, the one, the first you met was Habakkuk. And he said, how do you like my book? And you might have to confess you hadn't read it. Well, you're going to have one text of his book before you today, and it's going to come pretty often in our Bible readings.

Habakkuk, chapter three, verse three. Here beginneth the lesson, and it's one text. That's our reading for this morning.

It's not the whole of verse two, just a portion of it. O Lord, revive thy work in the midst of the years. In the midst of the years, make it known, in wrath remember mercy.

Now that is one of the great revival texts of the Bible, and it's rather interesting. There is more teaching about revival among the people of God in the Old Testament than there is in the New. Because Israel of old, their earthly people, are a picture to us of his spiritual people today.

And God's dealings with his earthly people, their declensions, their revivals that had to take place in their midst, are a picture of God's work among his spiritual people today. And here then, is one of the great revival texts in the Bible. Revive thy work, O Lord, in the midst of the years.

In the midst of the years, make it known, in wrath remember mercy. And this is going to be the anchor text of our Bible readings this morning. Now we're not told anything really about Habakkuk, his lineage, but, referring to the few books of reference I've brought with me, he apparently is assumed to be one of the several prophets whom God raised up in the southern kingdom of Judah.

He was a contemporary of Jeremiah, which means he lived in those last sad days in which Judah was a kingdom, when her enemies, the Assyrians, were invading her. And it would seem that Habakkuk was living there amongst them on the very eve of that terrible thing that happened, their deportation as a nation to Babylon. The last days of Judah.

The book, famous book, The Last Days of Pompeii. I've been studying lately the last days of Jerusalem, when that which the prophets had prophesied came to pass. God only prophesied that judgment.

In order that it might not come to pass, that was his motive, and always is, in the solemn judgment passages of the prophets. It may be, God said to Jeremiah, they will heed this word, and repent of their sin, and now forgive their sin, and I will not do, that's what I intended to do. But alas, we all know they never did repent.

And the solemn judgment of complete, or virtual complete, deportation to Babylon took place. And Habakkuk was living, and the time when he saw his nation disintegrating, facing certain defeat and yet persisting in his old way, and as he saw the work of God falling down around him, he prayed this prayer, Revive, O Lord, thy work in the midst of the years, in the midst of the years, make it known in all, and we're in the middle of it, Lord. Remember mercy.

My goodness, we're going to see that's one of the greatest, deepest prayers a man can ever pray. This is the prayer for revival that I don't think God can resist. And it's very seldom prayed.

We can pray for revival. Anybody, you haven't got to be spiritual to pray for revival, depends what your conception of revival is, but it needs something special, you need to be a broken, convicted man to say, in wrath, remember mercy. As I say, this is going to be our anchor text, and I'm happy to note and referring as I have this morning to the Revised Standard Version and the New International Version.

By the way, I'd never a day but refer to those other versions, just to see if they've got any light to throw upon the Authorised Version. That's my way, but you have another way, and I don't despise them, but I like to sort of put any new light I have on the familiar Authorised Version. But there isn't much variation here, but there is some.

And as this is going to be our anchor text, I want us all to really know it. And so I want you, if you will, to repeat it aloud after me. I'll say the phrase and I want you to say it, and then so on, just that you will really get the beautiful cadence of the Old Version.

O Lord, revive thy work in the midst of the years. O Lord, revive thy work in the midst of the years. In the midst of the years, make it known.

In wrath, remember mercy. In wrath, remember mercy. Now we're going to stay with this text, quite literally, right the way through.

And we're going to look at its constituent phrases, and we're going to go through the Bible this way and that way, to see what those phrases really mean as interpreted by so many other scriptures. This morning we're going to look at that first phrase, revive thy work, O Lord, in the midst of the years. We're going to think of this great subject of revival.

Tomorrow we shall move on to that deep, deep prayer in wrath, remember mercy, and we will spend a whole morning on a very tender, delicate subject, the anger of the Lord, as it applies not to the world at large only, but to the people of God. I'm amazed how much there is in our Bibles about this great, great important theme, the anger of the Lord. And yes, we read in the Old Testament about God's anger with the rebellious nations of the world, but more particularly there are special occasions with the anger of the Lord, with kin against Israel, his own people redeemed from Egypt, but it's a tender word as we shall see.

It's a domestic word, and maybe you haven't used that phrase to describe some of your experiences of that, what it really is, but it's always the anger of one who loves and who intends great restorations and great goodbyes. And then, we shall then move on to that with which it's contrasted, which utterly excels and exceeds the anger of the Lord, the mercy of the Lord, in wrath, remember mercy. And then I want us to think what it means for a man really to pray that prayer, it's about the most humbling prayer you could pray, in wrath, remember mercy.

And then we shall look at some of the men who humbled themselves to pray that prayer, and of the great results that were brought to them by the mercy of God, how he did indeed for them revive his work. And so this morning, oh no, before I come to that, I want to mention there's a very similar verse elsewhere to this one. Keeping your finger in Habakkuk 3, turn to Psalm 85 verse 6, Psalm 85 verse 6, 85 verse 5, wilt thou be angry with us forever? Wilt thou draw out thine anger to all generations? Wilt thou not revive us again, that thy people may rejoice in thee? The same juxtaposition of the anger of the Lord with revival, as you

find in Habakkuk.

To get the real meaning, I would take the liberty of adding one little word to that. Let me read it this way. Wilt thou be angry with us forever? Wilt thou draw out thine anger to all generations? Wilt thou not rather revive us again, that thy people may rejoice in thee? Which do you think, which do you think he'd rather do? You know, of course, he would much rather revive his people again, that they may rejoice in him, than persist in necessary disciplines and humblings and convictions in his anger.

I think it's a beautiful verse. Wilt thou not rather? Of course he would, if he'd only let it. Why must you persist? The whole head is smitten, says Isaiah, from toe of the foot to the feet.

There's no wound, soundness in it, but wounds and bruises and putrefying sores. Why will you go on rebelling more and more? And they could well say, oh Lord, you're going to be angry with us, it's always going to be like this. Wouldn't you rather? Yes, I would.

A hundred times rather revive my dear people again, that they may rejoice in me. So that's just an interesting parallel verse to the one we're looking at in Habakkuk. And so we do turn to Habakkuk, we turn to this first phrase, oh Lord, revive thy work in the midst of the years, in the midst of the years, make it known.

And the first thing I want to say about revival is something that's already been mentioned, certainly previous weeks, and I think yesterday. That word, much thought about today, begins with a little prefix, R-E, Latin, and it means again. And revival means God, in grace, doing something again.

When things have gone wrong, when the tide has gone out, when the horrid rocks appear which were before hidden by the full tide, when they become cold, and our circumstances all messed up because of our folly, it's God stooping to do something again. And I think that little word again is a wonderful word. I try and spot it every time I see it in my Bible and underline it.

It's the great word of grace. He doesn't give up on us. He doesn't say you've had it, we'll call it a day.

But in infinite patience he goes to work to do that thing which has been spoiled again. And if anything later happens, he'll do that again. This great word again.

There are all sorts of lovely agains. In 1 Samuel 3.21, you needn't turn to it if you don't want to, but you're listening. In any case, our versions aren't always the same.

And there's a lovely again there, 1 Samuel 3.21, telling of how Samuel arose as the new prophet, and the Lord appeared again in Shiloh. There'd be no voice from heaven in the temple at Shiloh. No word from God, no prophet had arisen.

But with the coming of Samuel, the Lord appeared again in Shiloh. Man, that could happen to your church. The Lord appearing again in that church, in that prayer meeting, in that parish.

There used to be great days, but they're only a memory. But God's the God of again, and revival for you and your church would be simply this. The Lord appearing again in Shiloh.

And the word of the Lord coming again from heaven. And the prayer meeting, I don't know, everything's sort of different. The Lord's appeared again, that's revival.

And then of course there's a, well there's all sorts of other ones. I spotted one in Acts 15.16, which is really a quotation from Amos. After this, Acts 15.16, you must have it, pop it down on the paper if you want to.

We don't want to spend too much time looking up every last verse because, well I've looked them up, and I think I can get them quick, but you might not be. After this, this is a prophecy from Amos being quoted. I will return, says Jehovah, and build again the tabernacle of David which has fallen down, and I will build again the ruins thereof.

It seems as if this Jehovah, God of grace, is at home in ruins. He's at home in declension. He knows what to do.

He's the God of the again. Not only is he grace enough to do it, but power enough to do it too. Could that not be a wonderful description of what could happen in your sphere? God building again the tabernacle of David which has fallen down.

I want to encourage your faith to expect him to do it again. He is in many places. Why not with you? And then thinking of things more personally, you've got another great again in the parable of the potter and the clay in Jeremiah 18.

So, he made it again, another vessel, as seemed good to the potter to make it. The clay had turned out wrong. It was marred in the hand of the potter.

He didn't give up on it. He didn't take it off the wheel and let it harden in its misshapen form, and then in the next day smash it in pieces. No, he went to work again on that misshapen piece of clay, and he made it again.

And that applies to individual life, or a particular situation that's gone wrong, or a relationship that's gone wrong. This is where he moves. This is Jesus in his great work in which he specialises, is making, as marred vessels, again another vessel.

And then there's another one you wouldn't think of, this one perhaps, it's in the last chapter of John, after these things, chapter 21-1, after these things, Jesus appeared again to his disciples, wonderful text, after these things of failure, disappointment, giving up their hopes, Jesus had no need, and he appeared again. And for you, after all you've been through, I want to tell you, can you expect him to appear again to you, that sad, discouraged, defeated disciple? Revival is God giving life again where that life has ended, making again that warped vessel, appearing again, inshallah, he's the God of the again. But finish it, revival always presupposes a declension, and it does.

If he appears again, inshallah, it's only because for years there had been no open vision. The word of the Lord was rare in those days, it presupposed. They were just left with routine, religious chores, a pure set of ceremonies, and it presupposes that.

If he builds again the tabernacle of David, it presupposes it's fallen down. He's not doing what doesn't need to be done. And if he revives you, and if we talk about revival, it means it presupposes there's been a declension in our hearts, and only those who are prepared to admit that fact are going to be candidates for this grace that makes everything again.

If he's going to make again that vessel, it presupposes it's got marred, and you're no candidate for those wonderful remaking hands of his, unless you and I are prepared to confess the vessel that he made of

clay has become marred, there was part of that clay that was stubborn and wouldn't give in to his fingers, and the whole thing's gone wrong, at various levels. And if he appears again to his disciples, it implies he hadn't been appearing to them lately. They'd been left in their discouragement.

You know that text, after these things, Jesus appeared again to his disciples, is one of the favourite texts of my dear friend and father in God, Dr. Joe Church. I was brought to the Lord in the camp, in the house party that he ran before he ever went to East Africa, here in Southwell. He was with us last week, or was it the week before, in his eighties and getting a bit frail.

But this has been one of his great texts. You wouldn't have thought it was a great text. After these things, Jesus appeared again to his disciples.

He told me on one occasion, he was taking that much-loved text in Africa, and as he preached by interpretation, his interpreter began to weep. He hadn't been seeing Jesus for so long, he'd gotten away, and he saw there was hope in him after these things, and they were shameful things, no problem to Jesus. Didn't put Jesus on, after these things, Jesus appeared again, he did to that interpreter, and apparently a lot of other people in that great gathering.

Yes, it presupposes a detention, and the one condition of Jesus reviving his work in your heart and life is that you admit there has been detention. You have got cold, you have gotten away, the word isn't living to you as it once was, you've lost your desire to share him with others, you've got immersed in other things, all sorts of things, and you know it is not with you as it once was, and it's the man who's the most ready to confess to detention who's going to be the most ready candidate for that marvellous grace of our loving Lord, grace that exceeds our sin and our guilt. Revival then is not a good Christian becoming a better one, it's a Christian whose valley has become a valley of dry bones.

We were thinking yesterday of Ezekiel 47, Ezekiel 37 is another passage full of meaning, it's that vision that Ezekiel had when he was taken up and put down by the Spirit of God in the middle of a valley that was full of dead bones. There'd been a massacre, a whole army has been slain and been left unburied and all that was left were dead bones, and God said to Ezekiel, can these bones live? Teddo, had he the faith to expect it, he said, Lord you know, that's a good answer, he said, Ezekiel prophesied, preach to those bones, and if he preaches, preach to bones, some of our congregations, a little more sometimes, than dead bones, but now I'm going to preach the word of grace to them, and nothing's going to reach it, not by a censorious message, but a word of message of hope and grace, and do you know as he preached, a bone came to his bed, and they were complete skeletons, but there was no life of them, then the Lord said prophesy to the winds, Ezekiel, and he did, come from the four winds, O wind, and breathe upon these slain, they're still dead, they understand a bit, they've become a bit more orthodox, but they're still dead, and the answer came, the Holy Spirit came upon those still dead corpses, and they stood up, a mighty army, and God says, that's what I'm going to do to Israel, and so I would say revival isn't a green valley getting greener, it's a valley full of dry bones, and if your valley isn't full of dry bones, I'm sorry, you're no candidate for revival, but perhaps it is, or parts of it, there never used to be, in one of the letters to the churches in Revelation, the Lord talks about how fast that thou hast, and the things that are ready to die, and things have been dying perhaps in your spiritual life, prayer, the love of the word, your witness, many things, one thing after another, and the truth is, for some of us, our valley is a valley full of dry bones, our Christian life, oh what good hope, those are the very sort of valleys that Jesus likes to do this miracle in, and revival is not a good Christian becoming a better Christian, it's a Christian who knows things are wrong, there are areas in which there are dead bones, and being freely willing to admit that fact

to Jesus. Sometimes, not often, people come to say Mr. Heston, how can I be filled with the Holy Spirit, there's a great blessing isn't there, being filled with the Holy Spirit, yes, how can I be filled, well I said what's wrong, no nothing's wrong, everything's just fine, but I want to be filled with the Spirit, then I've got nothing for you.

God is not out to make a good Christian a better Christian, he wants that Christian to see the extent to which he's a bag of bones, and there, into that situation, grace comes, someone has said the Holy Spirit is not the reward of your faithfulness, but God's gift to your weakness and your failure, and if you aren't weak, if you don't know the experience that's in you, that's in your flesh, well there's no good thing here, no candidate. I used to have an eye for neat form, how to be filled with the Spirit, 1, 2, 3, 4, I don't, when a man comes with a problem. A man came to me a few years ago in a Bible college, and confessed to the sin of homosexuality, well, I helped, tried to help him, Jesus.

And to the blood of sprinkling that speak is better things than that of Abel. He was washed and made clean, he knew the utter forgiveness of God, and the cleansing from even the shamest stain of it. And I said, wait a minute, in Leviticus, there's a bit of ritual for the cleansing of the leper, and they put the blood on his ear, the blood of a sacrificial victim, his right thumb and his right toe, and then they took the holy anointing oil, and where they put the blood, they put the oil.

First the blood, then the oil. And then there was still something over, so they clapped it on his head, as an extra bonus anointing. And you know, normally there are only three people anointed, Christed, that's what it means.

Where were they? Prophets? They were anointed on the head. Kings? They were. Priests? And lepers.

And you can class yourself as one of those. And that dear man went away, not only forgiven and cleansed, but rejoicing, daring to believe the Spirit had come into his life, and he was anointed with life and power from on high. What did he do with the Spirit? What's wrong? Nothing wrong, Sergeant.

Well, I mean to say, you haven't got to rake up something, but you've got to come with need of some sort. This isn't a special luxury, to give you a leg up, one above other people. Not the reward of our faithfulness, but God's sweet lovely gift to our weakness, and much of it.

Then I want to go on to say, I know this word revival is a confusing word, because it is used by different people with different connotations. I know that. And because so often, as we read the books of God's great doings in former days, we read the story of great movements of the Spirit, quite ostensible.

When, well even in Rwanda, as you will read in that book, what is it, the quest for the highest, in the early days of that revival, they didn't do very much, they just gave us a little something of a message, and the people broke down, they trembled, they fell off their seats. And some of them had to be revived, they almost passed out under conviction of sin. And we said, now that's revival.

And then this movement of the Spirit went over the hills and the valleys. And not only there, but this has happened again and again in history. And we long that it may happen again, it's not wrong so to long for it.

But I don't think that is really revival in its essence. I think revival is something that must surely happen among those who've got some life. If there's no life, there's nothing to revive.

If those flowers have gone completely dead, they're finished. But if they've still got a bit of life in, you can put them in a vase and they'll revive. What some people need is revival.

For others of us, we need revival. And this isn't necessarily something that has got to be spectacular. When Dr. Church, in 1947, was coming back to England in order to share with us what he'd been learning and others of them out there in revival, they had a session with that old prophet of the revival, recently gone to heaven, Simeone Sebambi.

He said, go to England, you need it. They'd had a rough time. They'd had some discouragement.

God will encourage you. But Joe, he said, just look for one man. One man.

And if revival comes to one man, you can say it's come to the country. And so that early team, back in 47, came with a vision, only one man. They didn't have to have big meetings.

And they didn't have big meetings. God gave them a number of one man. One man.

And some of us who were helped and touched by them, got together. Peter Marrow invited us to his vicarage for two days. I didn't know the others who had been helped and touched by this message of revival.

But we got to know one another. That's where the team, if you can call it such, began in 47. And, well, I'd had some new experiences of the Lord, and I was full up with some all sorts of insights I wanted to share and so on.

And the first words of Peter as our host, we sat down with this. There were about 10 of us, that's all. He said, we've not come here to talk about revival, but to be revived.

I had come to talk about revival. But the moment we got on that, to be revived, anew and afresh, I can't remember what it was. Immediately I knew there was something in my heart that I had to take care of, I had to bring to Jesus.

I thought I contributed with a new testimony along that line. And at bottom, it's this one man vision. It can be many others, but one man.

I remember when later, I went to the United States for the first time with my first wife, Revel, and I went, what a privilege, with William Lagenda and Joe Church. Quite a team, four of us traveled around for a number of weeks or a month or so. And again and again, Joe used to pray, Lord, we've come to this huge land of America.

Just look at the advertisements on the church page in the Saturday papers. It was stunning. You've never met, seen anything more spectacular than all the advertisements for all the things the churches were doing in any big city.

He said, Lord, we don't know what's happening here, but Lord, we ask, give us one man. We went to America for one man. That was a vision that dear Sir Bambi said to Joe.

It was so restful. We were on the lookout for the one man, where of course the minister, he was a or it might not be, someone quite unimportant. God gave us quite a number, one, but it doesn't stop at one man.

The life of the Lord Jesus, experienced in fuller measure, is so infectious, that testimony touches other spots in other people's lives. There'll be others. But at bottom, and this was a thing that really no one could quite understand.

Joe used to say, if God will give us one man who gets broken at the cross, and sees the blood, and gets into liberty, gets filled with the Spirit again, we can go home and say, the Bible has come to America. There was the foothold. There was the bridgehead.

Who knows? Well, you understand that or agree with it, that's what Joe said. And I don't know, I find it so restful. When Pam and I go around, we're really at bottom looking for one man.

I'm afraid we're not so much on our toes, as perhaps Joe was, or William. Nobody was quite safe, when William in his artless way would get to know him. There'd be a few questions, and he longed to help that man into liberty.

As I say, it is a difficult word, because of the other connotation. Some people have used the other word renewal, and one understands why, because you get away from that picture of the big dramatic thing. For myself, I prefer to use the word revival, but always reminding myself what I really mean.

And more than that, this one man, personal, immediate experience of grace that's available to you for all your needs, is linked to that larger work of the Spirit, that some people are praying so much for. We all ought to be. Why not? God's able.

But maybe it's through the one man vision. And I remember some years ago, William Lagenda and I, just the two of us, went to Indonesia. There was a German missionary whom we'd had touch with, and he asked us to go to that Bible school in Batu, where later that very, very spectacular revival began, but there was no such time as it.

But we had a beautiful time on this one and that one, finding the way to the cross and into peace and liberty. And we went and rejoined. It was a year or two later that that very unusual outpouring of the Spirit and awakening took place.

You've always said it was a trace to that other visit where they just saw Jesus, where they confessed themselves balanced, full of dry bones, where Jesus came in and they stood up altogether new. But that was a personal thing. You wouldn't say the top blew off or something like that, no.

But it led ultimately to something that was indeed an awakening. I think perhaps we ought to call that other thing an awakening. The Banner of Truth got a wonderful book called The Great Awakening, telling the story of George Whitfield's ministry in America.

That was an awakening. No one could account for it. Well, may God do it again.

But I am responsible for only one man's revival ultimately, and that's my own. And that's the best contribution I can make to any wider work that God purposes and wishes to do. I've only been to East Africa twice and then on little visits, preaching visits, but no more so.

I can't claim to have been a missionary, although Pam was up there for nine years. And I remember once on one of those visits I was at Joe Church's station, Gahini. And can you believe it? There was a station and there were 350 village churches linked with that one station.

Each one with a teacher whom they'd thank. And that was true of all those stations. I don't know if that is special, how it compares with other places.

Well, I said, Joe, how in the world do you take care of 350 churches from this centre? He said, I don't. He said, I could go round and see if the churches were falling down and get the poor teacher to do this and that and get him rattled. We've discovered if my brother, my colleague here in the central station, you see a canuka, he's recently gone to heaven now, are walking with Jesus and were one with one another, God will take care of the wider field.

And so I went off to some other parts and that was a three weeks, four weeks later I came back to Gahini. I said, Joe, how's God taking care of the wider field? He said, it's wonderful. Letting a new wind of the Spirit blowing out there.

But in the centre everything was, because there was a group going on in the grand old way of the blood of Jesus Christ and the grace of God and walking in his light. And there was the song of praise there. And so I just want to make that point.

I want to make that point away. Revive thy work, O Lord, in the midst of the earth. Let's not think too much about that big awakening.

Much of that's in the sovereignty of God. It's happening here and there. And I don't believe he's going to forget Britain.

And I can pray toward that end that the thing for which I'm responsible is to get into the blessing of God. To get my valley full of dry bones revived by the grace of God. Because the moment you confess it's dry, it's only to find there's a beautiful provision of grace.

It's been anticipated, every need, everything that's gone wrong, by Jesus on the cross, before he ever went wrong. The provision's there. The fountain's open.

So it doesn't take God by surprise. And the Holy Spirit's there to fill what he cleansed. That's what we've got in mind.

Revive thy work. Thy work in me. Thy work in my ministry.

Thy work in our fellowship. Thy work in my home. Revive it, Lord, because frankly it's gone a bit dead.

I've got a bit cold. I've got struggling and striving and snatting. Oh what a lovely thing it is.

Knowing he's the God of grace, you can afford to let your hair down and admit. Yes, in some areas there's been indeed declension. But I see that that makes me all the more the candidate for thy reviving grace, Lord Jesus.

I'm asking you to say, to comment on the phrase, in the midst of the years. Revive thy work in the midst of the years. In the midst of the years, make it known.

And maybe middle years, the dangerous years. We have young people here, bless your heart. You have your need.

Things can go dead in your heart, even though you've only known the Lord a year or two. But the middle years, in the midst of the years, where you've been a Christian for some time, where you know your stuff, you know your distancation. Oh it's wonderful.

You know I'm amazed how quickly, as a young Christian, I got my displacement straightened. And I thought, well I mastered this old book. I knew when the Lord was going to come.

I knew what was going to happen about the tribulation and all those things. My dear friends, that's chicken seeds. But those middle years, when we think we know it, this is the time, when you can leave your first love.

Then perhaps you can get very busy, but miss Jesus. Revive thy work, O Lord, in the midst of the years. But I noticed that the NIV has a little alteration.

Revive thy work in our time. That's what we want. In our time.

When Billy Graham first began his Hour of Decision broadcast, he had Jerry Devon with him, who was, well I forget what his particular sphere was, except that he always had some minutes on that program in which he reported on how the crusades were going. And he always contrived to end his report, the last sentence always sort of slipped into the phrase, revival in our time. Revival in our time.

And that's what you ought to be out for, in your life, in your circle, in any wider circle, beginning with yourself, in our time. And it can be. If revival is a stunning, unusual happening that happened there, you put it almost beyond your reach, but it has got to begin with you.

And if all that is needed is an honest confession of admission and coming to Jesus, if it is indeed a work of grace, then you don't have to wait. It can be in our time, as far as you and your circle is concerned. Dr. Martin Lord Jones, beloved by so many of us, has recently passed away.

And I don't want to say a thing that would indicate that I don't appreciate him and his ministry tremendously. But years ago, I was asked if I would meet with a group of, I don't know what we would call ourselves, some were ministers, some were not. I was just a crab preacher and evangelist.

But there was various ministers. John Stott was to have been there, but he couldn't, but there were people of equal prominence, and we gathered in his study. And I said, well, look, can I bring a friend, Bishop Lawrence Barton? Yes, go on, bring him here for me.

And our subject was to think about revival. It was a unique meeting, yes, about seven of us, these men. I wish we'd had a tape recorder.

Actually, Dr. Martin did most of the speaking, but he was always worth listening to. We didn't find any nuances, but it was certainly extraordinarily interesting. We each make some sort of contribution.

He said, I know there's different conceptions of what revival is in this room alone, how much more so in a wider circle. But he said one thing that I shall not forget. I knew that he'd been in process of giving a series of Sunday mornings on revival.

And I'd heard some of them. I'd been there. I heard his great message on, oh, that thou would bend the heavens and come down, that the mountains might flow down at thy presence.

He was a Welshman, and a Welsh Christian never forgets the Welsh revival. That's the norm for him when God visited his native land back in 1904 and 5. And then he said this. He said, I don't know, I've been preaching this series on revival.

And in our church prayer meeting, no one ever prayed for it to happen here. Until about the seventh sermon, someone did give something of a prayer. And then the discussion went on.

And I thought about that. And I remember what I'd heard. Revival for him was so terrific, I hadn't got the faith to pray for him.

And apparently nobody else had. It was something big, a power-off. I'm not saying God hasn't got all sorts of wonderful things in store.

But if it's for me. If a valley full of dry bones can be made to live again by the grace of God and by the power of the blood of Jesus, then that's in Egypt. And whatever revival's going, it can begin in me.

And if it begins in me, it needs end in me. And that's important. And I want to say that this revival can, is linked, as I've already said, with the larger awakenings when God wills it.

And by the way, may I suggest, say one word before I'm closing. I believe we've got to see that link. We here in this conference, I would say I very much include myself in this.

We've made a big emphasis on the need of fellowship. And there's all too little fellowship of an open sort, where people are frank and open and can really praise the Lord for what he's doing in their lives. And are really through with the sense of shame that they can share.

Perhaps we've made too much of that. And we haven't seen the lost. Jesus blessed you only through you to reach the others.

And I include myself in this. And it could be that this new experience of grace that you've been coming into hasn't yet, I think I'll include myself in this, eventuated in a greater vision for the lost around me. I'm not on my toes as I was.

I don't think I've seen so many people converted as I once did. There is a link between this personal being revived and God moving us out and perhaps doing a wider work among those that are lost. By the way, I use the word lost and not unconverted.

I was astonished in the southern states. They don't talk about the unconverted. They only talk about the lost.

And many say, oh I've got some lost deacons in Manchester. So many of my members are still lost. That's it, they're lost.

But if they're lost, there's someone looking for them. I want to do it through us. Let's seek to have a renewed vision of the lost.

Not doomed, sort of as if, it isn't ultimate yet. That won't happen until there's a final rejection at the end. Right now, the lost are being looked for.

And he wants you in on this lovely act along with himself. And so we praise the Lord. This is a possibility of Revive, O Lord, thy work in the midst of the earth, in our time.

And begin it, Lord, with me, I know. I am something of a valley full of dry bones. I'll be honest with you, Lord.

All right, you're a candidate. What's wrong with that? And he's not going to turn away your candidature. Let us pray.

And Lord, we want to thank thee. You find no problem in beating our knee. You're not shocked at the sight of valleys full of dry bones.

You can make them green valleys. You can breathe life into us afresh. And O Lord, we ask that that shall happen.

Come from the four windows, O, and breathe upon these things. On us, Lord. Show us wherein we've declined.

Show us what's caused it. And may we come into that experience of freshness with thee. May we welcome you perhaps, Buddha.

And Lord, we do confess we've been a little more intent on having fellowship at a deep level with others. That's a wonderful thing, Lord. But forgive us where we've lost our vision, thy vision for the lost.

We ask it in thy dear name. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God. Amen.

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