

# God's Presence in Historic Revivals

by Sam Caldwell

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*This sermon emphasizes the historical hunger and thirst for God's presence in the church, detailing how saints throughout the ages experienced revival when seeking God fervently. It highlights the cyclical pattern of God's presence filling and receding in church history, encouraging the congregation to hunger and thirst for righteousness like those before them. The speaker urges the listeners to pray for God's presence in their community and personal lives, drawing inspiration from past revivals in Scotland, New England, Wales, North Korea, and England.*

**Duration:** 30:43

**Scripture:** Matthew 5:6, Psalm 42:1, John 4:14, Acts 3:19, James 4:8, Isaiah 55:6, 2 Chronicles 7:14, Revelation 3:20, Psalm 145:18

**Topics:** "Revival", "Hunger for God's Presence"

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## Description

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## Transcript

You'll find that the saints throughout the ages were hungering and thirsting for God's presence and then it would come and they would see revival and their churches would be alive again and then maybe his presence would leave them and they'd start again hungering and thirsting and then again they'd be filled and he would come and then the presence would leave them. So I'm basically telling you today that this verse, Matthew 5 verse 6, is also the story of church history. This is the atmosphere that we want to live in, brothers and sisters.

This is what we want to see. We ask for God's presence to come to our community. We hunger and thirst.

He comes. We're filled. He retreats.

We hunger and thirst again. I hope also in these quotes I'm going to give you that this gives you hope that God can come again to Portland, Maine because I'll read you of some accounts of Scotland where God is

there. His presence is right there and then he recedes and then a few years later he's back.

We also find that that happened right here in New England and I don't know if any of you have done this but at times we can think of revival and hunger for it and then we can say, nah, God's never going to come again. Portland is too far gone and we can just say let's close up shop and wait for the rapture but we shouldn't say that. There's every promise that God will continue to fill those who hunger and thirst for righteousness.

Amen? Listen. Rest in what I tell you now. Listen to this story of church history.

Brian Edwards, a great revival historian, said this. The mark of every revival is an awesome sense of the presence of God that awakens the church and changes the community. An awesome sense of the presence of God.

Go back with me to 1550 in the Scottish Reformation and we meet a man named John Knox. You all know that I love him. I love him mostly because he was strategic.

He was a logistical man. He would have looked at this verse and said, okay, how can we hunger and thirst for righteousness in this church? What's the next step we need to take? What's the next step we should take to reach Portland? And he was always logistical, almost like he was playing chess, trying to figure out the next best move. And he labored so hard in Scotland, John Knox, and as revival began to come, this is what he said.

The knowledge of God did wondrously increase and God gave his Holy Spirit to simple men in great abundance. Isn't that beautiful? Mark the word simple men in great abundance. The great glory of the Protestant Reformation is that those reformers taught that God comes to everyone.

God comes to simple people. Knox would have never looked at our congregation and said, you all must become monks and priests. You all must go get theological degrees.

You all must quit your jobs or something. No, Knox was looking for the Holy Spirit to come to all of us, simple people in great abundance. Amen? Then we go 80 years later to 1630 and Samuel Rutherford looks around at Scotland and listen to what he says.

He says, and now there is such a noise of crying sins in the land as the want of the knowledge of God of mercy and truth, such swearing, whoring, lying, and blood-touching blood that Christ is putting on his clothes and making himself like an ill-handled stranger to go to other lands. And he says this, pray him sister to lie down again with his beloved. What is Rutherford saying? Our land has become filthy in about 80 years time.

Christ is about ready to leave. And what does he pray for? That Christ would come kiss his church again, come in effect, be with his church again. He starts to pray for God's presence to come on the land again.

In the 1730s, before the great awakening here in America, Jonathan Edwards wrote a little tract and he sent it out to all the churches, every denomination, not just the Baptists, not just the Presbyterians. And he called for prayer and fasting. And this is what he asked for in his prayers, for the continuance and increase of the gracious presence of God in that place.

He's praying for the presence of God. Yeah, right there. So we see Edwards and this is in North Hampton, about four hours from us.

He's crying for all the churches to start to pray for the presence of God in that place. In 1742, George Whitefield starts in his preaching ministry and he starts over there in Scotland. And listen to what happens in Cambuslang, Scotland.

It was said that all the people knew the gracious and sensible presence of God. So that's many years after Knox. God has left the land for a time and under Whitefield, he comes back and all the people, what does that mean? The sensible presence of God.

It means they could feel it. They could experience the presence of God again. And now come with me to Portland, Maine in the early 1800s.

And we meet a man. This man's name was Edward Payson. He was called Praying Payson of Portland, Maine.

And he's buried right down the street from us here. He knew that about 100 years before him, through men like Jonathan Edwards and George Whitefield, revival had come through Portland. Can you all imagine this? There were reports that revival went all the way to North Yarmouth.

Can you imagine getting a letter or hearing in a text revivals coming to North Yarmouth? So under Whitefield and under men like Edwards, revival comes all the way up to North Yarmouth, Maine, and then it leaves. For many years, Praying Payson of Portland, Maine in the early 1800s you've all heard this. It was said that he bore grooves on the planks of his floor in his room because he was praying so much.

And God started to meet with him. Listen to what happened. March 4th, 1806.

In the evening, Payson writes, God was pleased to lift up the light of his countenance upon me. Oh, how refreshing, strengthening, and animating are his smiles. How ravishing the contemplation of his holiness, love, wisdom, power, and goodness.

He seemed to be a boundless ocean of love. And the sight caused my heart to expand with love to him and all his creatures. Oh, how trifling do earthly beauties appear when he is pleased to unveil his face and give a glimpse of heaven.

So that's Payson still about a decade before the revivals he would see in Portland, Maine. But where is he finding the presence of God? In his prayer closet. In his prayer closet.

Do we have anyone here who's willing to labor like Payson to search for the presence of God in your prayer closet? Because chances are God has to come to you first. He has to deal with us first. He has to give his presence to us first personally before he'll come and move this land again.

Listen to Payson again, November 21st, 1806. After seeking the divine presence, there's that word again, for which I was enabled to plead with great earnestness and a feeling sense that I could do nothing without it. I endeavored to recollect and confess my sins.

I felt the most ardent desire for God's glory and was willing to be a stepping stone or anything, however mean, to promote it. So when he met with God's presence, what did it do to him? It humbled him and he said, I'm willing to do anything. I'm willing to be just a little stepping stone, not even a minister, not

someone big in God's kingdom.

I'll do anything to see God's presence come to this land again. February 28th, 1807, Payson writes, was favored with great enlargement in prayer. Seems to be carried out of myself into the presence of God.

Do you all see that? The presence of God is coming to him more and more. And now, still a few years before revival broke out in Portland, Maine, 1807, Payson writes this. This is incredible.

Listen. Three females, the wives of three sea captains, who were all at sea in different parts of the world, were deeply impressed. And after severe convictions, obtained comfort.

So do you all imagine this? There are three women who are at their homes. Their husbands are out on the sea. They're sea captains.

All of the women began to be convicted and weighed down with the sense of God. And it says just about the same time, all of their absent husbands were converted at sea. Isn't that amazing? Still 10 years before revival came to Portland, but things like this started happening.

The wives, meanwhile, were anxious for the spiritual welfare of their husbands. And the husbands were no less concerned for their wives. So the husbands just became Christians and they're out on the boats and they start praying for their wives.

Judge what a happy meeting they must have had when they found what God had done for each other during their separation. Isn't that amazing? And think of that. It's almost as if God is projecting his presence into different places.

He's saying, I'll meet with you three ladies. You start to pray for your three husbands. I will send my presence to each of their ships.

They all come back and what do you have? Revived families, the presence of God in the family. It's incredible. And that was one of the sparks of revival in Portland, Maine.

Listen, as I tell you more about people who hungered and thirsted for the presence of God, John G. Peyton was a missionary to cannibals, to people who were literally eating one another. He speaks of what sparked his love for Jesus. And it was his father's prayer life.

His father was a stocking manufacturer. What does that mean? His father made socks basically in the 1830s. And this is what Peyton said about his dad.

He said, we occasionally heard, imagine he's a little boy, right? We occasionally heard the pathetic echoes of a trembling voice pleading as if for life. And we learned to slip out and in past the door on tiptoe. So what's going on? Their father's in the prayer closet and they learn, we're just going to tiptoe past him because they hear him pray.

Not to disturb the holy colloquy. That means the holy conversation. He heard that his dad was praying and talking to God.

And he says this, the outside world might not know, but we knew. Whence came that happy light as of a newborn smile that always was dawning on my father's face. So Peyton looked at his dad and said, that's a happy man.

He has light like a little baby on his face. And he says, we knew where it came from. No one else knew.

What does he say? It was a reflection from the divine presence in the consciousness of which he lived. Now that sweet man never saw a revival. That sweet man never went out on the mission field, but because he met with God and knew God's presence in the prayer closet, all three of his sons were sent out as missionaries.

He did great work for the kingdom of God. In 1859, a prayer meeting in Wales, revival hits, thousands are present. And this was reported.

One man, Mr. John walked away in awesome silence. A friend, Mr. Morgan stopped him and commented, what a glorious sight that was when the thousands were engaged in a spirit of prayer. Did you ever see anything like it, Mr. John? And Mr. John answered solemnly, I didn't see one of them.

I saw no one but God. I'm going home. How terrible is this place? It is too terrible for me.

My flesh is too weak to bear the weight of glory. When these revivals hit, you start to feel that God's presence is so righteous that it just humbles people and they go speechless back to their homes. In the 1860s, Andrew Murray saw revival throughout South Africa, but his father, Andrew Murray Sr. lived in a little town called Graaf Renet.

His father said to Andrew Murray, my son, you have experienced what I've been praying for for 36 years. Andrew Murray Sr., you all picture this, the father, he committed to praying for revival two hours every Friday night. And he prayed for 36 years.

You all imagine that? When revival hits, it goes everywhere in South Africa, to Andrew Murray's congregation, to all of these other congregations, even to Andrew Murray's brother's congregation. It's hitting everywhere. And the father writes and says, there's a pain in his heart.

It's not coming to Graaf Renet. It's not coming to my town. And I'm the one who's been praying for 36 years, every Friday for two hours.

I think he had a mixture of pain and of joy, no? Because he could say, oh yes, God's coming, God's coming. And in the next year, a man named Peter Hammond records that at the communion service in Graaf Renet, this happened. As they began the service, the presence of God came down.

And the service lasted 48 hours. Can you imagine that? They stayed in church for two days. They just couldn't stop.

The people sensed the presence of God. There was just such a sense of the holiness of God and the presence of God. They couldn't stop worshiping.

Do we know what we're praying for when we pray for revival? Do we know what we're praying for when we pray this, the attitude? Come now to 1904 and the revival in Wales under Evan Roberts. We hear in that revival that the bars closed down. In our day, we still have Christians who like the bars, but here the bars literally closed down.

They didn't have any more work in Wales. It was said that the mining horses, the horses that the men would take into the mines, they stopped being able to hear their commands. The horses became disobedient.

Why? Because their masters, the men who would ride them, used to only command them through curse words. The revival broke and these men couldn't swear anymore. So their horses couldn't figure out what they were saying.

The work stopped. The bars shut down. It's amazing.

Rhys Bevan Jones said this, a sense of the Lord's presence was everywhere. It pervaded, nay, it created the spiritual atmosphere. It mattered not where one went.

The conscious of the reality and nearness of God followed. God was hounding people down in that community. That Wales revival projected itself all the way to North Korea.

January of 1907, we hear of the North Korean revival under Kil Soon-Joo. That revival was started by some Presbyterians from Toronto who were sent out to North Korea and they came with one book translated into Korean. What book? Luke.

All of those Koreans noticed in their translation that in the gospel of Luke, the Lord Jesus Christ is always doing what? Anybody know? He's always praying. It's the gospel of prayer. These people caught sight of that, especially this man Kil Soon-Joo.

They had in those congregations startling confessions of sin. This man whose name was Kil, he stood up and would say to people, I have hated you for 10 years. Someone else would stand up and say, I have stolen your goods for the last many decades.

They just started to let it all come out. The confessions were open and wide and Christ was being confessed. They said this of the North Korean revival in 1907, each felt as he entered the church that the room was full of God's presence.

That night in Pyongyang, there was a sense of the nearness of God, impossible of description. People, as they entered the church, were just struck down by the presence of God. Now that revival sent its ripples to great Yarmouth.

In England, in 1921, in the London Road Baptist Church, and this is getting into the 1900s, one of the last, I would say, legitimate revivals that was recorded. The great North Yarmouth 1921 revival in England. And there was a group of people praying for revival every Monday, and this was reported.

Listen, it's amazing. Among the fishing ports on the east coast of England, in 1921, tough, burly fishermen were giving testimony to how God had dealt with them. Tough, burly men, and God is cutting them down.

As these recently converted people got up and told how and when they were saved, the atmosphere was charged with the, what? Presence of God. It is recorded in Yarmouth that year, the entire town was in the grip of the presence of God. So evident was this, that even the Yarmouth Times for the 10th of November, 1921, reported, God has become very near.

Now that was a secular newspaper. Can you all imagine the Portland Press Herald ever having a front headline? God has become very near. Well, let me tell you this, that's what we should be praying for.

That's what we should be praying for. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness in this city. And we could be filled.

Just imagine that, a paper saying God has become very near to this community. Duncan Campbell in the Lewis Revival, another genuine revival, 1949 to 52, on the island off the coast of Scotland. Remember, we talked about Scotland and we've seen God come there and then recede and then give his presence again and then recede and then give his presence again, which should give us all hope that he could do the same thing here.

Come again and come again and come again. Duncan Campbell, one of my favorite preachers ever said, we haven't seen nations trembling, but we have seen communities. We have seen districts.

We have seen parishes in the grips of God in a matter of hours when God comes down. Howard Spring said, the kingdom of God is not going to advance by our churches becoming filled with men. Just stop right there.

I confess my own sin and hoping just for this church to be filled just with numbers. We should repent of that sin. Listen to what this man says.

The kingdom of God is not going to advance by our churches becoming filled with men, but by men in our churches becoming filled with God. You all hear that? Let's stop praying for numbers. Let's pray that we ourselves would see God's presence, that God would deal with us first.

Duncan Campbell again said, I have no hesitation in saying that the awareness of God is the most crying need of the church today. The awareness of God, do you feel him? Do you know him? Do you have his presence with you? And don't lie to yourself and say, I walk in a God bubble. I've heard people on the street say, oh yes, I'm God conscious.

And then they turn around and they're doing drugs right there. Or they'll say, I walk in a God bubble. And you say, okay, well, where do you go to church? Oh, so I don't need the church.

Then you don't walk in a God bubble and you don't know anything of the presence of God. If you're not pursuing the righteousness of God, you see that? He said, I have no hesitation in saying that the awareness of God is the most crying need of the church today. Brothers and sisters, we need the awareness of God and we need it on us at all times.

Andrew Murray again said this, we must begin to believe that God in the mystery of prayer has entrusted us with a force that can move the heavenly world and can bring its power down to earth. That's what we're looking for, isn't it? That God would be our righteousness and that we would be filled with him. Finally, I want to exhort all of you, please, please, brothers and sisters, it doesn't matter how young you are, doesn't matter how old you are, cultivate an awareness of God's presence in your life.

Always. I'm exhorting us today to pray for revival, aren't I? To pray for God's presence to come back. But I'm also exhorting each one of us to pray for personal revival.

Don't quench the spirit. Don't despise God's presence. Cultivate it.

You know that we can get to that place where you can walk through your day and even be at a hard day at work. You can say, God is always with you. Amy Grant is basically leaving the faith now, but she said this about Rich Mullins.

I hope you all know Rich Mullins, a wonderful songwriter from the 80s and 90s. Rich Mullins was a man who really loved this verse, blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled. He was always hungering, even to the point that people would look at him and say, Rich, you got to calm down, man.

He looked crazy to people. He loved God. He was always hungering and thirsting.

Listen to what one of his good friends, Amy Grant, said of him. Please heed this. Most of us love the first spring day when you can kick your shoes off, but nobody had calluses on their feet like Rich did.

You heard she saying? He was that way with spiritual things too. You know, most of us kind of have a brush with God and we're enamored and frightened and pulled in, but it's always kind of that barely leaning in, but Rich just had a way of running headlong into the unknown. Blessed are those who hunger, thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled.

Thank you, Lord, for these blessed men and women throughout church history who sought your presence. Lord, we confess that we do not and we need you more, Lord. Please come to your people.

We believe in the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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