

Featured Audio Sermon ■ The Holy Spirit and Revival

by Stewart Ruch

This sermon by Bishop Stuart Ruck shares a personal story of a life-defining adventure in Ireland that led to a profound encounter with God. He emphasizes the desire for a consequential Christ, a revival rooted in the resurrection of Jesus, and the need for continuous and catalytic revivals in the church. The sermon delves into the history of revivals, the power of prayer for revival, and the importance of tearing down barriers within the church and society.

Scripture: Luke 24:5, Romans 8:11, John 11:25, 1 Corinthians 15:20, Psalm 85:6, Acts 2:1, Ephesians 2:1

Topics: "Revival", "Encounter with God"

Description

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Transcript

This is Church of the Resurrection in Wheaton, Illinois. This week's sermon is by Bishop Stuart Ruck. Nearly thirty years ago I set out on what would end up becoming a life-defining adventure.

I made a decision to solo backpack through Europe and the United Kingdom and through Ireland. I had a lot of adventures, I've told some of those stories over the years in my teaching and preaching, but there was one experience that God used most powerfully out of everything that I experienced. I was hitchhiking in Ireland, I'd had a bad day hitchhiking because somehow I kept ending up about a quarter mile down the road farther from two young female Australians who were also hitchhiking and they would get the ride and the car would go blowing past me.

So I did a lot of walking that day and very little actually sitting in a car doing anything. At the end of the day I had a seven mile walk to get to my youth hostel. It was Ireland, it was grey that day, it was raining, it was cold, I was hungry.

I was coming around the corner just a quarter of a mile from where I'd finally get some dinner and I saw what I'd seen throughout my entire journey in Ireland, an abandoned stone church. That in itself was not unusual if you've had the privilege of traveling in a beautiful place like Ireland, but something happened to me and there was a drawing I at the time would have described it as an intuition. Now if you heard my teaching last week, I would describe it as a kind of prophetic experience.

There was a drawing toward that empty church. I walked up to it, I looked in the now open windows that once held glass. I imagined people worshipping the living God there and I felt this compelling push toward this church.

Now I was not a follower of Jesus at that point, I had known the Lord, I had walked away from Him and I was in a season of very deliberate rebellion. I was in a place of great arrogance, I was religion tired. I still wanted Jesus, but I wanted a consequential Christ.

I wanted a Jesus that was so full and so real and so embodied that He would change my life, that He would even confront the life that I was living, that I didn't want more vague impressions about Jesus or worked out in sort of habits of religion. I wanted a consequential fullness of Jesus. I wanted something like that was stone built.

I wanted something that powerful and that unmistakable. I didn't know then that what I was being drawn to was not just Jesus, that is what was happening there. And I believe His Holy Spirit drew me to that church as a kind of early icon, like a picture of what God wanted to do in my life, but I wanted Jesus and His church.

I didn't even know that you needed to combine those two. I had known a personal relationship with Jesus, I had grown up in different churches, both had been fine, but neither of them, due to my own decisions and sinfulness, had been consequential. And God set me in that moment on a lifelong seeking, a lifelong hunger for Jesus and His church.

And that little stone built church had become a picture for me of a deep hunger to see the church fully revived, to see the church in a place of revival, a place where the power of God is overcoming the power of death and of sin. And I would like to bring you along through the Scriptures into that reality today. And I would like, at least in some capacity, for some of you to revive the word revival.

If you have impressions, and this could be positive or negative, I haven't had positive ones of them, but you may have impressions of a tent meeting. You may have impressions of that which is set up and taken down again. You may have impressions of emotionalism.

You may have impressions of an anti-intellectualism. You may have impressions of being manipulated in revival or of seeking out for something that's an experience rather than the foundational, historical, supernatural reality of Jesus risen from the dead. I don't know what it might be, but as we look at the Scriptures and we look at the history of the people of God and the Word of God and of the history of the church, we will find the word revival revived.

Robert Coleman, evangelical scholar and a student of revival, describes revival this way. Revival is the return of something to its true nature or purpose. What is the true nature or purpose of the church? To be the body of Jesus, the resurrected body of Jesus.

Revival, as I will define it this morning, is simply this, the application by the Holy Spirit of the resurrection of Jesus in our time. Revival is the application of the resurrection in our time. I've known this revival personally.

It would be a year after that interesting encounter with that stone church in Ireland where I would have what I would call a catalytic revival experience in my own life. It was catalytic. Catalytic is to spark something, to start something.

It had the dynamism to it. I had this dynamic encounter with the risen Jesus Christ, the story I've told in different places in these sermons. It was catalytic.

I came into a belief and an understanding and an experience all at the same time that the power of God's resurrection was greater than the power of my own death and my own sin. But I can tell you thirty years later, after that catalytic revival, I have lived in a kind of continuous revival in the church, actually in this church. So you may think, oh, catalytic revivals are good, but they come and go.

Not when they're lived in their life in the church. You may think, oh, this liturgy, don't you ever get tired of it? I can tell you, I'm thirty years in, I'm not tired of it. Well, the same pattern is all the time, you ever get tired of it? No, no, no.

I don't get tired of it. It's a continuous living in Jesus' resurrection. So I want to talk about how we plant a continuous revival, I'll define that, how we plant a continuous revival based on the resurrection of Jesus, hence the resurrection passage being read this morning.

And isn't it kind of a joy to have it read on a Sunday other than Easter Sunday? Every Sunday, the church has understood, every Sunday is Resurrection Sunday. Every Sunday we come into the resurrection of Jesus. You want to come to a revival meeting, welcome, you're here.

You're at a revival meeting. You want to come to a revival week, it's called Holy Week. It's all part of continuous revival.

So we plant, I'll explain that, you're going, what is that? I'll plant continuous revival, we'll talk about that. Second, we pray for catalytic revival, and we'll look at Habakkuk's beautiful prayer in the third chapter of this prophet of the people of God, where he prays for a catalytic revival, Habakkuk 3. Look with me at Luke 24, that's page 884 if you have a resurrection Bible, and here we have Luke's account of the resurrection of Jesus. We see that women have gone to prepare Jesus' bodies, there are women followers of Jesus, women disciples of Jesus, pupils and students and leaders that had known Jesus, they go to prepare His body.

They're perplexed, there's two men who appear to them, they're dazzling, it says. They're frightened, they bow their faces to the ground, and these angels, these men say to them, verse 5, why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. Remember, it's an important word for revival understanding biblically, remember how He told you while He was still in Galilee that the Son of Man, that's referring to Jesus, you may not be familiar with that title, that Jesus must be delivered into the hands of sinful men and crucified, and on the third day rise.

And they remembered His words. Then we see later in the text, verse 12, but Peter rose. That's describing what he did, he got up and he ran to the tomb.

But we, the readers, the believers in the resurrection of Jesus understand that in Jesus' rising, He has risen. So He is now, by the power of the Holy Spirit, applied the resurrection to our lives. As Jesus rose, so we, like Peter, a sinful human being, rise.

Revival is the application of the resurrection by the power of the Holy Spirit. Revival is when the power of God overcomes the power of death and sin. And revival is rooted in Jesus and in His resurrected body.

If it is rooted in some experiential thinking, or it's rooted in some emotionalism, we should have concerns, and maybe even some fear around it. But if it's rooted in Jesus, His resurrected body, which is the church, then we can understand how revival is first and foremost personal. And I taught on this.

I didn't use the language personal revival because I hadn't worked on that word with you yet, but I taught on this in the first sermon in this Holy Spirit series, The Holy Spirit and Power, out of Romans, chapter 8, and there you can hear my teaching on personal revival, which is when we live not by the sin nature, but we live by the Holy Spirit. There's a continuous power that we see released, unleashed, ministered in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. It's so powerful and profound that one of the ways to understand it is that it's a returning of the church to its true nature, which is to be a resurrection movement, a resurrection body, to be filled with resurrection power.

Just the fact that many of our church experiences haven't in some way reflected that does not mean that that's not the true nature of the church. You can't understand church first and foremost by what you've experienced in church. You must understand it first and foremost by what you read in the Bible, as Jesus calling the church His body.

So how do we engage this resurrection power? I talked to you several weeks ago. We live into the reality. I taught you to pray out of Romans 8, the resurrected one lives in me, and it's only one way that we engage is through an understanding of our identity and the power of Jesus and His resurrection.

But I also want to say there is an action that we can engage, and the best way for me to describe that action would be the way Apostle Paul describes Christian acting, Christian action. He describes it as planting. And one of the ways to go about our lives in the church, to go about our Christian lives, is actually one of the Apostle Paul's main words to help you understand, how do you live as a Christian? How do you act as a Christian? Because we get confused.

We understand from the Scriptures absolutely that we're saved by grace alone, by faith alone, in Jesus alone. And we think, oh, OK, He's done it all. He has done it all.

And yet, then we read things in the Bible about living out our faith, making decisions for our faith, and we get confused. I think planting is the way to understand this. Let me explain this.

I love planting. I love vegetable gardening, and I had my best summer ever this summer. I won't go into details.

I'll tip into hubris and pride. I won't describe the rich red of my rhubarb. I won't go into that.

It's crunchy kale, sweet, so well developed. I'm not going to do that. But here's what I'm going to say, is that planting and gardening is such an imbalanced work.

It is work. You prepare your soil. You've got to weed.

It's work. You work when you plant. But if you've ever put a seed in the ground, like, let's say, just for theory, a zucchini seed.

They're very, very small. OK, you put it in the ground. I put it there right around Mother's Day.

I put it in the ground, and I cover it, and even though I've been doing this for years, I never leave enough room between zucchini plants, because I think, it's not going to get that big. I mean, it's that tiny. It's teeny tiny.

I've got to find it in the seed envelope. It's not going to get that big. So I put it in there.

It gets massive. Some kind of soil explosion occurs in there. So I do my work, but the miracle, the wonder is inside the seed, which has nothing to do with me.

I'm not responsible for zucchini the size of my thigh. We plant. How else do we say it? How about this? God does everything.

We do something. I use that phrase when I'm taught on baptism. God does everything.

We do something. We plant our lives. Jesus will say, you know what your life is like? Your life is like a seed.

Your life is like a seed that is planted into the ground and dies. It goes into the dark, but there it bursts forth in fruitfulness, that when we plant revival, what it is is to say, we give our lives to Jesus' resurrection. We believe in His resurrection.

We live under the power of His resurrection. We live under the authority of the scriptures that have testified to the resurrection. That's what it means to plant our lives.

We bury ourselves. We die, Jesus says, that we may live in His power. Or you could be about the work of revival.

You plant continuous revival, which is to say you live your life in the church. The church is the seat of revival. This is where the ministry of the resurrection primarily happens.

So in some ways revival is something we're waiting for. I'll talk about that. But in others, I want to be really clear, it's within your reach because of the gospel of God in Jesus.

And maybe you just didn't know that's what church was. Maybe you never thought about it that way. I'm not exaggerating when I say Holy Week is revival week.

It's where the ministry of God is done from Palm Sunday all the way through to Easter Day when the miracle of God is done is miniaturized to us now. That all that happened in history and all that's an absolute fact is brought to bear now by the power of the Holy Spirit. Oh, we are at the Last Supper by the power of the Holy Spirit.

We are at the cross by the power of the Holy Spirit. Oh, we are raised again by Jesus and His resurrection on Easter Day. It's why over a thousand of you pack out this place and run around in absolute jubilation and joy.

I hope none of you are ever embarrassed after you've done that. You're just not aligned with the reality of the resurrection when you do that. It is the way the Psalms say, you're just shouting to God because you came to believe that the resurrection is a continuous revival in and through the church.

Norman Grubb, English Christian student at Cambridge University, where there was a movement revival among him and his friends. He and many others had hearts broken for the work of God and the nations. He ended up going to East Africa.

He experienced the most sustained revival that I'm aware of in the history of the church from the 1920s to the 1970s. Someone argues still has significant impact on Eastern Africa, starting in Rwanda, having influence in Uganda, Kenya, then Tanganyika, now Tanzania, Congo, Burundi. This revival spread, and it was sustained because it started in the Anglican church, but it spread throughout all churches that were open to the work of the gospel.

It lasted for years and years and years. It changed a generation, and what Norman Grubb saw there is that there are times of catalytic revival, and it started in a very catalytic way, but he also saw a continuous revival there in East Africa. Norman Grubb says this, quote, I had a misconception of years that revival could only come in great soul-shaking outpourings of the Holy Spirit.

He'd seen those miracles, wonders, signs. I saw defeatism and almost hopelessness that so many of us had fallen into by thinking that we could do nothing but pray, and we do pray, but we could do nothing but pray, but now I see revival in the truest sense in an everyday affair right down within our reach when it does break forth in greater and more public ways. Thank God.

The East African revival began in the 20s through an English leader, Dr. Joe Church, and a newly converted Kenyan, non-ordained, they began to preach the power of repentance, preach the power of conversion. There was a deep, sustaining work that happened there. Grubb was so blown away by the way he wrote in 1951, oh, that the Africans would one day come as missionaries to the United States.

Oh, that one day, he said, it's impossible to imagine the teams of revival Africans would come to the United States. Well, if you know anything about our history, our current movement was sparked in 2000 by a Rwandan archbishop and by a Singaporean bishop who sparked the work that we are in right now in this work of gospel Anglicanism. Grubb's prayer in 1951 was answered at least in part in 2000 and will be answered again when we have Africans, Brazilians, and others here in a month, bringing the ministry that they are singing of revival to this place, to resurrection, to our diocese.

This is why Tim Keller, one of the great minds and hearts and missionaries of the mid to late 20th and 21st century, says this, Tim Keller says, Revivalism is the work of the church. It's why the diocese, our mission that we've embraced, is to plant a revival of word and sacrament infused by the Holy Spirit. And yet, and yet, as beautiful as continuous revival is, and as much as I believe it in the life of the church, there's still more.

Oh, there's an ultimate more that I know without question will come when our Lord returns and establishes the new heavens and the new earth. There's an ultimate more. The Bible says every tear is going to be wiped away.

Every evil is going to be righted. Every injustice is going to be justly brought. We're waiting for that.

Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again.

But as we wait for that, there are moments of catalytic revival when that more that we still long for in this moment amidst continuous revival are asking God for. I was talking to one of our priests, Father Aaron Damiani, who planted a church for resurrection five years ago, and he said, I want revival, Stuart. I just want to see barriers come down.

And when he said that, I knew exactly what he meant. That we feel these barriers that are up, barriers between us, the church, and the culture. Barriers between us who know the Lord and those who haven't yet converted.

Barriers where we're just not seeing yet enough conversions. A kind of holy discontent that gives you a hunger to cry out for revival. To cry out for God to do a new work in our day that has even greater power.

The barrier between African-American church and white church. We become so used to it, so familiar with it, we think it's just how things are. But we need revival to come and tear down that barrier in the name of Jesus.

The barrier between Jew and Gentile, one of the oldest barriers that's ever been established among the people of God. The barrier between male and female. Do you know that we're to live in union with one another, in unity with one another, reflecting the image of God, male and female, is to be a beautiful thing.

But there's a sword between the sexes. It's a scandal to the church, it's a scandal to the world, it's a scandal to our own hearts. Don't you want to see that barrier torn down in the name of Jesus? When this begins to stir in you and you realize the least, the poor, like we don't even see them, we don't even listen to them.

We don't hear the voice of the refugee or the immigrant. We don't hear the voice of the unborn, what has happened to us? Why are we so numb? God, revive us. Tear the barrier down between us and the least.

Humble us. Oh, Father, humble us. So yes, we plant continuous revival.

We do the work of the church and of giving up our lives, but we pray for catalytic revival. Habakkuk is praying for that in Habakkuk chapter three. He's coming out of a long tradition of the prophets who pray out of a covenant confidence.

Covenant means promise. Out of a covenant confidence that God will be true to His covenants, God will be true to His promise. God said, I will be your God and you will be my people.

And again and again and again, we forsake and betray God by not being His people, but He has never not been our God. And Habakkuk and the prophets of the Hebrew scriptures and the people throughout the life of the church have said, yes, it's true, we've not been your people, but oh God, we repent. Oh God, we confess.

And now, God, remember your covenants. We remember your covenant now, oh God. We remember your resurrection.

We remember these things now, God, please come in power yet again. The Hebrew scriptures have this pattern of revival. You'll see the people of God, they decline, there's decline in the culture among the people of God.

Then they imitate the other gods of the other cultures. Then a voice comes to say, repent, return to the Lord. And in the seasons as they repent, we see a revival of the living God in His presence and power.

Judges 6, the Gideon revival. Second Chronicles 7, the Solomon revival. Second Kings 22, the Josiah revival, a revival, I would add, of word and sacrament, as our canon often points out.

Nehemiah 9, the Ezra revival. The first chapters of the Gospels, the John the Baptist revival. 1730s, a revival so profound, it spread out into the farthest reaches of culture and society.

A revival so powerful, it only happened within the church, but it's called an awakening because it moved out from the church here in America, there in Britain. George Whitefield in Anglican, John Wesley, part of our heritage, brothers and sisters. Jonathan Edwards.

1859, Wales and Northern Ireland knew a great revival. 1904, Wales again. 1949, on teeny tiny islands, full of folks that people didn't even know existed in the Hebrides Islands in Scotland.

A revival happened among Scottish Presbyterians. Now you may be new to Christianity, but when I say that, that's funny. They're just not known for this.

Why? But why did they do it? Because they knew the covenant. They knew God. They knew the Bibles.

They said, remember your covenant. They would sit there and they would cry out in these tiny prayer meetings on these forgotten islands of the Hebrides. Remember your covenant, Lord.

You're our God. We will be your people. And God came in power.

Oh, God came in so much power through those islands. The stories and the accounts that are written. 1949, you have all kinds of accounts of what God did, deeply biblical, deeply full.

Isn't it amazing? You can't get denominations and traditions in Christianity to agree about much, but you get Reformed folks, Methodist folks, Lutheran folks, Catholic folks, Anglican folks, and all of us have a history of revival. Why? Because Jesus is our history. Because the resurrection of Jesus overcomes the power of sin and death.

That's why. That's why you may hunger for it yourself, not even know why you hunger for it. 1920s to the 1970s, the East African revival.

And similarly in West Africa, based in Nigeria, which is a huge place of importance for me personally, revival is still spreading. I will preach at four revival meetings, so-called by the Anglican leaders in November with Father Matt, Tim Keller again. Revival is not a historical curiosity.

It is a consistent pattern of how the Holy Spirit works in a community to arrest and counteract the default mode of the human heart. And when catalytic revival comes, it appears spontaneous to us, but to God is part of His sovereign plan. There is a sovereign power of God mystery to catalytic revival.

We don't know necessarily why it comes when it comes. We don't know how He chooses. Isn't that powerful and beautiful and right? We will never control catalytic revival.

God will not be controlled by us. But Habakkuk prays for it. Oh, Lord, I have heard the report of you.

I know the history of the people of God and your work. Oh, Lord, do I fear in the midst of the years? And it's implied in the midst of our years. Revive your work.

So there's a proper position of crying out to God to revive His work. We do so with covenant confidence, but we do so with a cry of the person. The barriers must come down.

We say, Father, this is glorious. We are so thankful for all that you've given us, but Lord, we dare ask for more for the sake of the lost and the least and the barriers that exist. We dare ask for more.

We ask for more, knowing that we may be the generation that prayed for a catalytic revival that will come after we've gone to be with the Lord. Or we may be the generation that experiences that catalytic revival. We do so all with joy, all trusting in the Lord.

Martin Lloyd-Jones, great preacher of the mid-20th century, Reformed preacher, had a passion and power for revival. He would say he never saw it, as he'd hoped to see it in his Welsh homeland. And as he knew the stories of revival, he said this, To not care and to not seek revival can quench the spirit.

Why? Because to not care and to not seek the power of the resurrection over the power of death and sin can quench the spirit. Revival is when the resurrection of Jesus is applied by the Holy Spirit to our lives, our churches, our society, our culture. Let's plant with discipline and joy a continuous revival.

Let's pray. Let's pray for catalytic revival. In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

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