

Revival introduction

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 01 January 2000

Preacher: Rev Maurice Roberts

[0 : 0 0] 4 and to verse 1 Oh that thou wouldest rend the heavens that thou wouldest come down that the mountains might flow down at thy presence as when the melting fire burneth the fire causeth the waters to boil to make thy name known to thine adversary that the nations may tremble at thy presence Oh that thou wouldest rend the heavens that thou wouldest come down Now I propose to begin today a new short series with you under the general heading of religious revival religious revival the chapter here before us like many other sections of the word of God deals with the theme of revival and this is surely a most wonderful subject religious revival means God coming down to visit his people and to grant his blessing once again his power to the church on earth

I believe this is the most relevant and vital subject for serious Christians to study in our days the great questions confront us in our age however is the Christian church to recover in our nation from a terrible decline most of the denominations in Britain today will tell you the same story the congregations the congregations have shrunk over the last 20-25 years that their prayer meetings have shrunk that there are fewer people now coming to communion services than there used to be that there's less power in the witness that open air preaching is a thing of the past nobody in their area anymore goes out of tracks or does house to house work but above all that when the gospel is preached it seems to fall everywhere on deaf ears now of course we must not overstate the case there are notable exceptions to just about everything

I have said and it is so in this country and it is abundantly so in many other countries where the gospel is flourishing as we well know in Korea and in Malaysia or no not Malaysia but Indonesia and we hear too in Russia and China and other places but in this country it is certainly very true that there is a dryness coming upon the church and has come upon it for a long time there has been no revival for instance in this part of Scotland since the middle of the 20s there was just a little touch of blessing round about the 20s of this century in places like Andang possibly though I do not know for sure in other areas near air now if you go to the parts of the Highlands there were notable revivals in the 1930s and about 1950s and 50s and in the 60s and in some places there there is a continual blessing and a momentum of the spirit but let me just remind you of how different this is from what used to be the case or has been anyway the case in Scotland because of all the parts of our nation nowhere probably has known more about blessing and reviving than has Scotland

Wales too for that matter has known much blessing and I could speak of many revivals in the history of Scotland but let me just tell you about one of them as I introduce the theme as a whole to you today the great revival of 1859 and 1860 affected every part of Scotland from the borders up to the Butterf Nest in Lewes and it is calculated by one authority on the subject of that 1859 revival that one person out of every ten in Scotland during those years began to go to church and many many were converted many thousands were converted converted in the spate of a few months now that's a prodigious act of God if you were to cross the Irish Sea and go to

Ulster in 1859 the Spirit of God was moving with even greater power in that province the preaching of the word of God was sublime people wanted services lasting hour upon hour they could not get enough of the word of God there is no question but that many many thousands of people were brought to a confession of Christ within a matter of months in 1859 and 60 and that revival began humanist speaking through a little prayer meeting started by some Christian young men if you go across the ocean to America and Canada in 1858 the year before you would see that in the great city of New York a missionary started a prayer meeting in a downtown mission hall a man called

[6 : 46] Lantheon and he put a notice on the front door of the hall to say that if anybody wanted to join him in prayer for revival to do so at midday and he turned up and after about quarter of an hour another half dozen turned up and they prayed to God for revival and they promised one another they would go on doing this at the same time each day in a matter of days the numbers of people praying were multiplied in a matter of months they were having to stop the businesses of the whole of New York at four o'clock to give the people of the city liberty to go to the meetings for prayer in all the churches they were standing room only in the largest of churches and the people of the city were agonizing to God to send the spirit of power and revival down and that would continue for some months until there was a great work of God done and again many thousands of people made professions of faith in Christ now if one had time one could speak for hours about the same kind of wonderful action of

God in Scotland Wales England and in many other nations within the lifetime of some of the most elderly people in our congregation the same has happened in Korea Korea which used to be anything but a Christian country was blessed with what is sometimes called its Pentecost in the early years of this century the Holy Ghost came down with tremendous power upon the churches of Korea they were great in gathering and you may know that today in the capital city there are some congregations numbering 10 20,000 people huge edifices almost like super cathedrals for the huge numbers of people I therefore say these things by way of introducing the theme of revival to show you that the deadness of our own day towards the things of

God is not without a possibility of a solution and an answer from heaven so I'm going to open up the theme today in this way I would I would like to show you briefly what revival is not and then second I want to show you what revival is and then third our need for revival today and if I have any time after that I shall speak about the need to pray for it but we shall see so my first heading then is let us remind ourselves what revival is not now the first point we must see here is this revival is not simply reformation now reformation is very important in the life of the church reformation is trying to put right the evils and the shortcomings of a church to bring it into line with the order of scripture now many congregations are becoming aware in

England just now that the pattern of these scriptures is different from the pattern of their own churches one particular thing that they are aware of and have become aware of over the last 25 years is the need for instance to have elders many churches that were evangelical did not have elders they had perhaps another type of office but not elders so they reformed the church and they made elders or again another thing that is becoming of interest to churches in the south is this the neglect of the psalms and I find that many times when I go to churches now they are introducing more psalm singing as being part of the reformed biblical pattern of worship as they would regard it so I simply use these as illustrations of ways in which churches may wish to reform of course there are many many others these are only just examples one may reform for instance the church order one may reform the church discipline of the congregation all of these things are important in their way but what I'm saying is that revival is not reformation it's an interesting question what comes first revival or reformation and the answer to that is that you can't be dogmatic sometimes when churches reform the blessing of God comes upon them well you would expect that but other times churches are in a very bad condition in history have suddenly been visited by the power of

God so you mustn't lay down any hard and fast rules it's up to us to reform as much as we can it's up to us to put the church right in terms of order and scripture as much as we can but that's not going to produce revival necessarily revival is something distinct revival is the power of God coming down and then again revival is not simply evangelism now the confusion has come in here particularly since the last century because there was an American man who became very famous by the name of Charles Grandison Finney and he wrote a very important set of lectures called Finney's Lectures on Revival they have had a great deal of influence and some of the things in them are very important and very good but others are very confusing and misleading and harmful and the theory that Finney had about revival is this let me quote him he said revival is something that man can do in other words his theory is that it is the right use of the appropriate means and that is how the

[13 : 21] Americans of a certain kind of evangelical school of thought talk about holding a revival this is what they have done and still do they hold a revival now what they mean is you have a great evangelistic campaign and you invite some prominent speaker and after the soft music has died away he speaks and when he stops speaking the soft music begins again and you have this tremendous appeal for the people to come forward now the theory behind that is that with the right use of the appropriate means you can break down people's resistance and you can make them into Christians now that is just not true and that theory has landed us very largely in the mess that we're in today these huge evangelistic events in London Glasgow and Birmingham and elsewhere they have not solved the problem of the church in our age and there are some very capable thinkers who feel that these mass evangelistic meetings have only led to greater confusion and greater ignorance and greater disorder within the church context now I said as my heading here evangelism is not the same as revival let me mention a great revival that occurred in Kirchhoff shop in 1630 that's the place between

Glasgow and Edinburgh on the right hand side if you're facing eastward and travelling along the motorway the church is sharp you can still see the graveyard and the church although the church is not the one that was there in the grave I'm talking about the preacher was a young man David Livingston it was a Monday night of a communion a thanksgiving night and he was preaching to a large audience in the open air he was extremely nervous because there was a young man and there were famous ministers presence and it was a very large and well experienced congregation there were many outstanding Christians presence as well as of course many unconverted people he had actually intended to walk away from the meeting the night before he quietly stole away from the gathering and began to walk a few miles over the Heather Moors and then the word of God came to him and he felt rebuke for his unbelief and he went back to his duties and he was preaching from Ezekiel 36 then will I pour pure water upon you and he preached for about three quarters of an hour or an hour and he was just about to finish his sermon because he completed saying all that he had prepared to say when the rain began to fall and the people began to put on their capes to protect themselves you understand from the rain and suddenly the Holy Spirit came upon him and upon them and this is what he began to say to them well well he said you people you're protecting yourself from a few drops of rain and how will you protect yourself from the wrath of

God in the last day when the fire falls upon you and you've not got a redeemer or a protection from the judgment of camp those of you he meant who were not yet converted and Christians and an extraordinary scene occurred it wasn't just his words or his persuasiveness the power of God in true revival came down upon that meeting and it was calculated that no fewer than 500 people were converted to God on that occasion through the remarks of that one preacher and that one sermon now that is what we call revival it is not something that man does the man had no intention of preaching in that way when he started as I told you he actually was very nervous but you see this was the work of God oh that thou wouldst rend the heavens that thou wouldst come down and God did that at the Kirk a shot so revival is not simply evangelism now that's not to deny that there is a place for evangelistic events and for having special events

I'm not decrying that all I'm saying is we must never equate the two that is confusing and misleading one other brief point under this heading revival is not simply one or two conversions it's a wonderful thing of course even when one person has converted we rejoice in that it does a lot of good it helps to revive a congregation even when one person comes to Christ I don't think all of you appreciate this but even just when you come to church it helps the Lord's people when you're absent they mourn when they see your faith there and you sitting in your place they are glad when a person is brought to faith in Christ the Lord's people are greatly enriched and enlivened spiritually and so is a congregation but what I'm saying is now that's not revival revival is that on a far wider scale now the great pattern of revival is of course is in Acts 2 the day of Pentecost and I want to say something about that because some thinkers and some speakers take the point of view that

Pentecost was in every sense unrepeatable and absolutely unique what in modern parlance is called a one-off event now I don't take that view nor did our forefathers before us it was certainly not the common view of our greatest thinkers and writers and preachers before us the view they took about Pentecost was something like this God promises in the New Testament age I will pour my spirit upon all flesh now that began to happen at Pentecost but it was not completed at Pentecost God did not pour out his spirit upon all flesh at Pentecost this was just a token of what was to happen continually repeatedly over and over again in history so that you see there were many subsequent outpouring similar to Pentecost we're not interested in the tongue speaking and the healing and things of that sort that's a very very minor interest to us but what is of interest is when

[20 : 11] God's spirit comes down upon men in this wonderful way and you know what happened at Pentecost in Acts 2 when they heard the preaching of Peter and the others they were pricked in their hearts they were convinced of their sins and they were constrained to cry out what are we to do where are we to go to find relief from this burden of guilt and sin and they were pointed of course to Christ as being the saviour now then that is what revival is it's not just a conversion of one or two or ten it is this amazing and widespread work of the spirit of God so I've tried to say a little there about what revival is not it's not simply reformation it's not simply evangelism it's not merely one or two conversions and now the second heading what revival is now revival is first of all a powerful action of

God at work in a community now let me point you to some things in this chapter which give us a description of revival the prophet's words in verse 1 are this oh that thou wouldest rend the heavens now to rend something is to tear it and what he's asking God to do is this he's praying to God and he's saying oh God we're in such a condition of need the church is so barren the church is so dead the church is so powerless everywhere oh God take hold of the heavens with both hands as a man would take hold of a piece of material or cloth and rend it in thunder like this and oh thyself come down upon us pour upon us this power from above and you see the illustration in verse 1 at the end so that the mountains may flow down this is an illustration of a volcano or something the mountains are flowing down at the presence of God as when the melting fire burneth the fire causeth the waters to boil now all of that is a description of something absolutely supernatural and titanic heavens rent mountains melting sea boiling and surging so you see this is the conception the Bible gives us of revival

God doing it God's power and what is so important is it's not something that anybody can produce or engineer this is clear for instance at verse 3 when thou didst terrible things which we look not for now that's it which we look not for in other words this overwhelmed us this took us by surprise and so revival you see is the powerful working of God and it is the presence of God that's the word he's talking about that thou O God would have come down thy presence known and felt within the congregation now one of the wonderful features of true spiritual revival is that men can feel that God is present in that meeting this is something that they will tell you even unconverted people when revival occurs there is a sense of the presence of God for instance in the great revival in north wales at the very beginning of this century the people were so aware of the presence of God in a little village called

Croce near Wrexham that for instance just to take one tiny detail the football team never put on their strip of their football strip their football clothes they never put them on for a whole year now that's not because playing football is a sin I'm not saying that and that's not what they thought the reason was there was such a sense of the presence of God that at that time it felt out of place to put on clothes for playing football it was like whistling in the church of God it was out of place God was almost to be felt in the whole town people had travelled from different parts of England to go to that place to the Ross near Wrexham when they were travelling on the train they used to witness that they were getting near to this town they felt a strange calm coming over their spirit it was a soul heaven was dwelling there in that part of

Wales now this used to be true of Ayrshire and the south west of Scotland there was a sense of the presence of God the covenants used to say this in their writings Jesus Christ is dwelling more in the south of Scotland than anywhere else on earth it was true in those days Christ moved on that's one of the lessons he isn't here anymore like that and I wish I could take my glasses off and put my handkerchief over my face and could weep with you for half an hour the greatest loss we have is that Christ is not with us in the south of Scotland as once he was this is the great tragedy and my friend who in the world sees it who in the world knows it our great tragedy is not our lack of employment it's not that the pound is fluctuating or the bank of England going up and down our great tragedy is that Jesus Christ is not dwelling in our midst so that men can see them that's why they won't come to church during the day when he rends the heavens and comes down there comes thousands will come from all parts of the land and they want to know what this presence of

[26 : 37] God is you see in true revival man is aware of the presence of God look at the end of verse 2 that the nations may tremble at thy presence or the middle of verse 2 to make thy name known to thine adversary now that's very interesting when God comes down to a people how do you know what do people do when God comes down in this fence what is the proof that God is present in the church service that's a very important question you don't all start jumping and shouting and clapping your hands the proof that God has come into a place like this is to be found there in verse 2 and nations may tremble at thy presence this is always true you have it in

Acts chapter 2 and it is borne out by every subsequent revival in history when God comes down in this way men feel a sense of awe they're aware of sublime powers at work they don't turn to their neighbor and give a holy cuddle and a kiss as you see in some sort of religious gathering there's nothing matey or chummy comes in people forget where they are they become aware of eternity sometimes they sit for hours in their seats praying to God they don't want to go home that's a miracle people forget the Sunday roast but there you are they're aware of God and they tremble oh no I come quickly to my third point just in a few words our great need of revival today why do we need it well it's so clear from a verse like verse 11 the prophet here is praying to

God isn't it interesting the whole chapter is a chapter of prayer every word in this chapter is addressed to God it's not prophecy in a sense it's prayer the whole lot of it and in verse 11 he's arguing his case with God and he's saying to the Lord oh God we need revival because of the state of our nation and of our land verse 11 our holy and our beautiful house that's the temple where our father praised thee is burnt up with fire and all our pleasant things are laid waste my friends do we not surely find ourselves identifying with these words of the prophet every spiritual mind feels the same doesn't matter where you go but take this very town of air I've only been here nearly 14 years but when I came there were churches with large congregations that had vanished the church building of the sand gates now used for commercial purposes and where the minister's fist used to smite on the pulpit is now the auctioneer's hammer knocking down second hand furniture another place with a DIY use another place for teaching dancing another place for musicals and theatricals another place for civic theatre well what does it mean another place under the underpass theatrical costumes

I went into it not long ago just to fill my spirit with a sense of prayer where the word of God had been preached where our fathers worshipped it's all destroyed where the building wasn't being used there's no reason why it shouldn't be ah yes but is it not something with tabs of your house our holy and our beautiful house where our fathers worshipped thee it's all destroyed where is the worship now where's the gospel where's the truth where's the power where are people being converted tell me do you know this have you heard this before let me tell you this what's happening in our country today there are more Muslims in Britain today than Baptists and Methodists put together let me tell you another one two mosques being built in Britain every three weeks our holy and our beautiful house how are we going to put this right it won't come about by setting up more committees it won't come about by people organizing some little method of spreading the gospel in this way or in that for myself

I'm brought to do what this apostle what this prophet here does to try out to God and that's what he's doing prayer for revival oh that thou wouldst rend the heavens and come down and as I close I leave you with verse seven the prophet or the apostle rather is saying this there is none that calleth upon thy name that stirrth up himself to take hold of thee for thou hast hid thy face from us and hast consumed us because of our iniquities what's the saying he's saying to God the times call for urgent intercession and prayer but there is so little of it indeed he says there's not a single one that's stirring up himself to call upon God don't we find ourselves right here Isaiah 64 might have been written this very morning about this very town and about this very nation and therefore my beloved brethren

[32 : 56] I would urge you take this burden upon yourself in secret and collectively and believe that God has written these things to inspire and encourage us oh that thou would rend the heavens that thou wouldst come down thyself with God these things are possible it is a glorious vision never let a day go by without many a time calling upon God to do for his church everywhere what he promises to do in such a passage as this