

Revival

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[0 : 00] 65 at verse 4. Turn us, O God, of our salvation, and call thine anger toward us to cease. 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?

Wilt thou be angry with us? Now this psalm clearly deals with the subject of religious revival. And that is the theme that we have begun this recent series of sermons in the morning upon. Last time we looked at the subject under the general heading what do we mean by religious revival? And you would remember that we noticed that from time to time in the history of his church God has brought in a wonderful change.

Perhaps sometimes in one congregation. sometimes in a whole town or district. But at other times, as in 1859 and 60 in Britain, the whole land was transformed.

[1 : 36] Northern Ireland was absolutely aflame and afire with the word of God. Hundreds upon hundreds were being blessed and converted.

But the same was true in Scotland to a lesser extent and it was true in Wales and to a lesser extent true in England.

And this was not something that man manipulated. It wasn't the result of economic forces or sociological changes or renewed cultural outlooks.

It wasn't because of an educational promotion scheme by the government of the day. This was God himself coming down with the blessing of his grace.

Let me give you one example of what happened in 1859. One of the prominent preachers of the Free Church of Scotland. Just to take one example of very, very many.

[2 : 39] Had been conducting open air services in the Dumfries area for about 19 years during his summer holiday down there.

And as far as he knew, nobody had been blessed or brought to Christ through his preaching in the previous years. But in this year of revival in 1859 and 60 he said he was hearing that the word of God was going from family to family.

Family worship was being started in home upon home. Moral evil was almost disappearing and fading away for a time.

And you can see the effect of revival by looking at the statistics. The numbers of prayer meetings which suddenly multiplied throughout the churches of the day.

The way in which illegitimate birth for instance came down very suddenly because people had a regard to the commandments of God. Now I'm looking at the subject of religious revival of course not as entertainment although it is highly entertaining and it's most thrilling far more entertaining far more thrilling than reading fiction or watching some modern play.

[4 : 05] Because this is real. This is the power of God changing the lives of men and nations creating a desire for God where before there was none.

So I want today to look at a very practical part of the subject how can you and I promote and advance religious revival.

Well of course there's a sense in which we cannot because it is God's work. But we mustn't become hyper-Calvinistic. In other words we mustn't become fatalistic.

As the good professor was saying the other night though I had no intention of quoting him but it's perfectly true we believe in the immovable purposes of God but at the same time we believe that the Lord hears the prayer of his true earnest people.

So there is something that we can do and from this psalm I want to look at some of the things that you and I can and ought to be doing in order to cry out to God to have this experience of religious

revival become a reality in our nation in our churches once again.

[5 : 27] The first thing is in verse 1 Lord thou hast been favourable unto thy land Lord thou hast been favourable unto thy land and thou hast brought back the captivity of Jacob.

Now how does that verse become to us a help to show us how we may promote religious revival? Well I want to show you how.

It is because it tells us that the writer here who was praying for revival had first of all sat down and he had thought about what God had done in the past.

He had thought about previous acts of God's power and as a consequence of thinking of what God was able to do in the past he was now crying out to God to do it all over again.

We have to get to know what God has done in days of old. We have to remember our spiritual history. You know it's a remarkable fact that when people begin to take an interest in revival they immediately start to pray for it all over again.

[6 : 52] Let me mention one perfect example of this and I don't think you will find a better example anywhere in the literature of revival and of course there is a great voluminous literature on the subject of religious revival.

Well listen to this in 1839 in the town of Killisye near the Campsy Hills just to the north east of Glasgow in Killisye there was a service going on and the preacher was a young man called W.C. Burns William Chalmers Burns he later went to China as a missionary and he was the great hero of Dr.

Hudson Taylor of the China Indian Mission Hudson Taylor thought of Burns as being the ideal and perfect missionary and he modeled himself in many ways on Burns Williams for this was before Burns went to China he was now preaching in his father's church there were too many for the building if I remember so they were in the open air I think that is correct and this is what he did he was preaching on the subject of revival he was burdened you see to see revival come again into Scotland and so he began to tell the people what had happened the previous century in that very parish of Killside in the days of Whitfield and the 18th century evangelical revival the 1740s in fact and William Charles Burns described the way the Holy Ghost had come down on the people and the way in which thousands of people from all over Scotland were meeting in that congregation so that from being a few hundreds in strength it literally became 10 and 20,000 in strength when Whitfield preached there on one occasion in the open air he calculated there could have been even 30,000 people there and the people were just enthralled with the presence of God they were being blessed their souls were being fed they needed to have a church service every day of the week the minister was never free from people coming to the man asking how they could be saved well that was Kilsith in the 18th century now let's go back again to William Chalmers Burns he's now preaching a whole century later and he's telling the people of Kilsith who've forgotten these things because people forget their history what had happened a hundred years before and listen to this as he was telling the people what had happened a century earlier it happened all over again the spirit of God came upon the people and they were being blessed and they were being converted right before his very eyes hard hearts were being melted like snow before the fire or wax before the sun old sinners and old backsliders were being brought to

[9 : 58] Jesus in the meeting the spirit of God was convicting people of their need of faith and of repentance now we need that today not simply in the air free church of Scotland but in all the churches of air and in all the churches of our land we need my friends to remember our history and to recall that God has done these things in the past because if our churches in Scotland do not see this kind of thing happen again then all that can happen is that churches will hold on to their numbers only by compromise now you see there are two things churches can do in a time of declension they can either hold to their principles and many people will drift away because they don't like principles and they don't like firmness and doctrine and truth so many good churches will lose a lot of the people and there will be small churches not so faithful believers other churches will say to themselves well we cannot possibly tolerate to see our people go so we've got to let the standards down and down we must keep the people they say at all costs no matter how far the standards go down we've got to keep our people and you see they become more and more liberal more and more shallow until in the end the preacher then preached half of the

Bible because he would upset the people and he would just have to keep his mouth shut and say things which he knows are smooth and agreeable to pat them on the back and keep the whole thing in a sense of apparent unity now that's happening in many places today what's going to bring out

the multitudes in their homes to the churches of God that's the great thing well it is this power of the Holy Spirit so let's get to know what God has done in the past and let's remember it now the second thing which we can do to promote revival is in verses 2 and 3 thou hast forgiven the iniquity of thy people thou hast covered all their sins thou hast taken away all thy wrath or anger thou hast turned thyself from the fierceness of thine anger now what is this here in verses 2 and 3 will you notice my beloved friends revival is always closely related to the sins of the church and the forgiveness of the sins of the church now let's make certain things clear because there are

Christians who have never ever in their lives thought in terms of such a concept as this there are many Christians and they think well God is angry with the world because they are sinners but it never occurs to them to think that God could ever be angry with Christians or with the church in this world but I say to you that is a great mistake God is frequently angry with Christians and he is frequently angry with churches let me prove the point God was angry with Moses you remember that occasion when Moses was impatient with the people he was told to speak to the rock and you remember he was impatient that day and he took his rod and he smote against the rock and said you rebels must I take water out of here for you do you remember how God rebuked Moses God was very angry with Moses for being impatient with his own people and he never got into the promised land you know the story well

David the same the sword shall never depart out of thy house for the way he dealt with Bathsheba and her husband and so on therefore God is angry with Christians and God can be angry with churches we get this in Revelation chapters 2 and 3 think of the church of Laodicea that was a church it wasn't the world and the Lord Jesus Christ said about the church of Laodicea be zealous and repent if thou wilt not repent I will spew thee out of my mouth now that is God or Jesus Christ who is God of course the son angry with churches my beloved I want to tell you something today which is a very unwelcome doctrine to some ears but which is essential if we are to promote true revival and that is God is angry with the churches in Scotland and in Britain today that's our problem the problem is not that we don't have great preachers and great theologians the problem is God is not with us as we need to have him with us we have grieved him how have we grieved him well we don't know and it didn't happen yesterday morning it's been like this for a century my own view is it came upon us when those ministers of several generations ago began to bring their critical thoughts to bear upon the word of God higher criticism of the word of God to me that was the sin of sins which provoked the Holy Spirit to go away do you know how the New

Testament puts this it says grieve not the Holy Spirit do not quench the Holy Spirit you see the Holy Spirit is the source of power in our preaching and in our praying and in our living now when the Holy Spirit is grieved or quenched or offended or blasphemed against what happens is this he withdraws his power he doesn't put forth his energies through preaching or through the witness of his people you see preaching of itself cannot convert anybody it is the Holy Spirit who takes the word and blesses it to people in testimony or in preaching that leads to conversions and to blessing and to spiritual feeding but when the Holy Spirit withholds his power then the blessing is also withheld and that is the problem and we must get back to this conception that is in the psalm of God being angry with his people my friends have we got that vision does it matter to you today that God is offended because of the sins which have been going on for a long time not simply in the world but in the church and has it ever occurred to you that there are things which we ought to put right in our own lives things which we ought to put right in our own congregations did you ever think of it like this that you or I could be one of the causes why there is so little blessing in our times do you remember [17:09] Achan in the camp of Israel Achan who had sinned in secret nobody in Israel knew but his secret sin was the cause of the removal of the blessing from Israel no wonder Robert Murray McChain put it like this when speaking to his people he said pray for me he said because your greatest need of the congregation is my personal holiness and the holier I am the more the blessing will come on you that is a wonderful truth that McChain expressed a holy minister is a great instrument in the hands of a holy God and that's what this passage refers to my friends the secret of revival is this if only I could turn God away from his anger and that therefore immediately takes me to the concept of prayer doesn't it so then thirdly what are the signs of God's anger against a visible church well the signs are when we are prayerless when we become dead when we have no vision for the conversion of the world when we become like the world when we have no zeal for the things of the spirit when we put our own lives and our own families before the life of

God's church and the family of faith when we are all out for our own things and the things of God have to take back seat that is a sign that God's spirit is withdrawn from the church my friends I do not need to labour the point that the Holy Spirit proves to us that he is offended because take this town of air how few there are in this town in any of the churches that are really praying how few how few there are that can pray I wonder how many there are that God knows about in this town who have ever said themselves to go onto their knees for one half an hour or one whole hour and to pray in secret to

God that he would turn away from his anger and bless this town again of air and bless the churches of this town you see you can't do that unless you have a true conception of God if you hold to the false theory that God is never angry with the church then you never begin to think like this and you see there are many many people I'm sorry to have to say this but it is true the early Christian or Plymouth brethren they have this wrong theory whether they still do I'm not able to say but they used to have this wrong theory that the Christian need not confess his sins because they're all forgiven sins of a Christian are pardoned so you don't spend a lot of time confessing your sin as a Christian that is the theory of the early Christian brethren I hope they've got over that by now but if you hold to that theory then you can't really pray for revival in this sense because you don't believe that God is angry with the church and therefore you never cry out to him to remove his anger but turn now if you will to verse 4 and see how different this is from the word of God turn us oh God of our salvation and call thine anger toward us to cease 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 and this is one of the great things in the psalms and in the word of

God that they don't treat God in a way to flatter him they treat God straight and honest and they know that he is a holy and a greatly holy God that the sins of the church are real sins now it is true that God does not ever deal with the church as he deals with the world and we need to have this point explained when God is angry with the world of unbelievers he is angry with them as a righteous judge and when God is angry with the church he is angry as a father not a judge to destroy and condemn but a father to chasten and humble and it should be to you more bitter than death if you are a Christian that there is so little felt of God's presence in our times it should be like wormwood and like gall to your soul to see

God so little glorified in our day and so the prayer of the psalmist arises because of his holy love for God he yearns to see God exalted he yearns to see the multitudes of men and women coming to put their trust in the Lord Jesus Christ in a place a little bit north of Eyre in Eyre called Glen Garnock more or less on the railway line in that great revival of 1859 Glen Garnock received a wonderful visitation of the Spirit of God the people in the Free Church of Scotland were being harassed by Roman Catholics in that valley at the time in their open air witness and so on one particular evening they withdrew and came into a school house it was quite full of people and the minister was there and they went on praying and pleading with

[23 : 39] God for the blessing to come down you see this was not something they did of their own spontaneity only there was a sense of God's presence with them they were already hearing reports just across the water in Ulster and then across the ocean in northern and North America there were tremendous scenes of revival taking place and as you would expect the people of Scotland were beginning to be kindled with a desire for the same thing 20,000 people met in a Glasgow green to listen to reports of conversions in Northern Ireland in the open air and that kind of thing was not peculiar to Glasgow but on this night that I refer to in Glen Garnock I can show you the newspaper report that I have gleaned from the old papers if you're interested to read it for yourself the minister was conducting the meeting and he was just about to finish the meeting when he felt compelled to offer prayer and he said I prayed such a prayer that night that I had never prayed in my life when I opened my eyes the people were tremendously affected by the presence of God some of them were weeping for their sins some of them were remembering their wickedness before God and they were crying out for mercy and they were praying to the

Lord to take pity upon their souls well you can't do that by psychological gimmickry that was God's work and it went on till after midnight now that my friends is what happens when the Lord blesses his people turns again the captivity of his people and so I lay this upon you today nothing will make the church so prosperous nothing will make the Lord's people so happy and so glad as when this spirit of reviving comes down let me just point to a verse or two before I close and bring these things before you look for instance if you will at verse 9 surely his salvation is nigh them that fear him that

glory may dwell in our land look at that glory dwelling in our land do you know this my friends that in the good old days when the gospel and the church were strong in great Britain you could feel the presence of

God in the country as a whole calling missionaries who had served in China or Africa or India or other places when they came home by ship to the shores of Britain this was in the days before airplanes they used to say as we got near to good old England or dear old Scotland I felt a burden lift off my mind I felt I was in a place where God dwells Samuel Rutherford in his day talking about this part of Scotland says Jesus Christ is pleased to dwell here as he dwells nowhere else the presence of Christ can sometimes be geographical the glory was having its habitation in our land well I know that you care about these things it is our duty to care about these things God requires it of us my friends are we going to sing the psalms and not enter into the spirit of the psalms surely we don't use the psalms merely as a tradition no no

God forbid it is because we believe it is the word of God and there are lessons here which are enshrined in these words which are timeless and of eternal value for the cause of Christ and the people of faith so I urge you today think back of what God has done and then stir yourself up to cry in terms of this song wilt thou not revive us again that thy people may be glad and rejoice in thee and you can take the word for it of our forefathers when revival breaks out the people of God know a heavenliness and a happiness and a fellowship and an ecstasy one with another and with the new converts which is a very heaven upon earth spiritual joy fills the hearts of the people and then oh the singing and oh the praying and oh the gladness when God comes down

I want you to catch the vision and to begin to pray for these things every day you live and many times a day as you go down the high street pray for these things and as your head lies on the pillow at night remember to cry out to God for these things pray for it until it comes into your soul as a red hot poker emblazoning truth across the tablets of your heart and pray for it and give God no rest until he will take away his anger say to him oh God we cannot live without thee thou art the life of my soul give us our hearts desire come down may glory have its habitation in this land again revive us oh God that thy people may rejoice in thee amen