

## *Revive Us Again*

### **Psalm 85**

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“Will you not revive us again?” That is the question the psalmist poses to God this morning. The psalmist is looking for restoration, for renewal, for a rekindling of faith, and for revival of the spirit. Looking back at how God had acted in days before, how God had acted for his chosen people Israel, the psalmist sees revival as something that touches every part of life. The psalm refers to revival for the land (the earth); revival for the nation (Israel); and revival for the people (individual revival and revival for the whole community of faith). The psalmist is praying for whole sale revival. “Will you not revive us again?”

A dear friend of mine once shared his greatest ambition in life, and it involved revival. He was a graduate of Rice University in Houston, Texas. Rice has a huge football stadium, a stadium that once hosted the Super Bowl VIII in 1974 (the Miami Dolphins defeated the Minnesota Vikings by a score of 24-7). My friend told me his greatest ambition was to lead a revival at Rice Stadium. He had been to Billy Graham revivals where great crowds would fill a stadium and masses would rush forward to receive Christ to the strains of “Just as I am.” So it always brought me a special measure of joy when he would arrive early on a Sunday morning and I would hear him singing to himself, “Hallelujah! Thine the glory! Hallelujah! Amen! Hallelujah! Thine the glory! Revive us again!”

New England is rather famous for revival, this being the home of the Great Awakenings from back in the 1700s. I felt a bit of pride opening a few history books and reading about those seasons of revival which swept this part of the nation. One historians take on the Great Awakenings focuses on the understanding of many churches at the time that , “for each of the members, as a prerequisite for admission, must be able to narrate an experience of the new birth without which no one could enter the kingdom of heaven.”<sup>1</sup> As preachers would press the message of individual conversion signs of that conversion came in some dramatic and loud ways. Whereas “Calvin had held that the evidences

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<sup>1</sup> Kenneth Scott Latourette, “A History of Christianity Volume II: Reformation to the Present, p. 957.

that an individual was among the elect were adherence to correct doctrine, a worthy life, and faithful attendance on the sacraments. In New England it was maintained...(it also included) an experience of salvation.”<sup>2</sup>

The psalmist held that revival touched on all areas of life, and there is certainly an internal dynamic involved, a sense that we need that experience within our own hearts, a revival deep within us that touches every part of us. Revival might well arise from an internal recognition that something is amiss in our lives, a void, a hunger, an emptiness, an awareness that we have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. At the same time, the psalmist recognizes the longing for revival can be sparked by external circumstances.

When our kids were young and I was working as a youth minister hauling teens to various events, we decided to buy a 15 passenger van. When we moved to Texas that van came with us. One day Julie had taken our kids to Astroworld, a huge Six Flags amusement park in Houston. Our van was on its last legs at that point, and our air conditioning was not working. If these recent hot and humid days have had you feeling the heat, just imagine every day of summer being hotter and more humid and having a van with no air conditioning. Anyway, as Julie was leaving Astroworld she saw a large group of people standing by a car that was obviously not working. Julie pulled over and asked if they needed a ride and they eagerly accepted her invitation. They piled into the van and my Good Samaritan wife immediately set about getting to know her passengers. It turned out they were all members of an African-American church, and so she told them I was a pastor and everyone became fast friends. She noticed they were all sweating profusely in the van, so she apologized for our broken air conditioner. Well, the pastor of that African American church wouldn't have anything to do with her apology. He said, “I like it when it's hot. It reminds people of that hot place they don't want to go. It's easy to preach about conversion when it's hot.” Turn the heat up, and maybe revival will break out. Sometimes it is the external circumstances that lead to revival.

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid, 958.

A friend had me listen to a funny song. It was about a little boy who visited his grandma. He brought along a shoe box, and in that shoe box was a squirrel he had caught. Well, it turns out the boy brought the shoe box, and the squirrel, to the Baptist church where his grandma attended. As the song says, the squirrel got loose and from there, things went berserk. While the choir sang “I Surrender All” the squirrel ran up a man’s coveralls...and, well, here is the chorus:

*The day the squirrel went berserk in the First Baptist Church,  
in the sleepy little town of Pascagoula.  
It was a fight for survival that broke out in revival,  
they were jumping pews and singing “Hallelujah”!*<sup>3</sup>

That song spoke to me in a new way on the Sunday a wasp decided it was time to stir up the frozen chosen. For several weeks our church in Houston had a wasp that hovered near the ceiling. Then one Sunday the wasp started dive-bombing folks during the service. The fact that this was happening right in the middle of the sermon did not bother the wasp in the least.

Several members tried to restore the decency and order of our service by taking a swat at the unwelcome insect. But this wasp could fly. He started high above the congregation near the stained glass window and zigged and zagged until he was on the opposite side of the sanctuary. At this point he headed directly toward an alert member. This member swung his hand in self-defense, hit the wasp, and sent the winged intruder straight toward another member who was waiting to use his bulletin in ways never imagined by the worship committee. With swift action the bulletin squashed the wasp, and in a triumphal display the member raised both hands to sky in a victory celebration. The congregation broke out in cheers and loud applause. The euphoria was shared by the one in the pulpit, as I jumped up and down with joy.

It was a fight for survival that broke out in revival,  
they were jumping pews and singing *Hallelujah!*

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<sup>3</sup> *Mississippi Squirrel Revival*, by Ray Stevens

“Will you not revive us again?” That is the prayer of the psalmist. O God, whether by means that are external or means that are internal, will you not revive us again? It turns out for the psalmist the desire and longing for revival is both external and internal. The opening verses remember a time previous when God had restored the land and forgiven the iniquity of the people, covering all their sins. But now things are in a bad way externally. Commentators believe this psalm might have been written in the days of the exile, when the walls of the city had been breached, the temple destroyed, and the people carried off to captivity. O God, revive us again. Fix this broken world in which we live. Things are in an equally bad way internally. Things that belong together, things that are signs of wholeness in our relationship with God, are isolated, separated, and far from each other. Love and faithfulness are far apart. Righteousness and peace are on opposite sides of a vast chasm. Internally things are a mess. And so the psalmist cries out in prayer to God, “Will you not revive us again?”

I wonder if there aren't many here this morning that look at the external state of things in our nation and our world and see a whole bunch of brokenness and discord and violence and enmity. I wonder if there aren't many here this morning that look at the internal state of things and long for righteousness and peace and love and faithfulness to be drawn together deep within your soul, who long for renewal and restoration and yes, revival, to spring forth in a way that awakens and refreshes our spirit. I wonder if there aren't many of us here this morning who echo the prayer of the psalmist, “Will you not revive us again?”

If you are longing for revival, a revival that touches all aspects of life, external and internal, a revival that heals the land and the nation and the whole earth and all people and a revival that breaths fresh life and new beginnings to the deepest part of your soul, if you are longing for revival, come spend a few minutes with the psalmist. Although there are many avenues we can pursue for revival, avenues that include politics and elections and special interest groups and clubs and causes, pay attention to whom the psalmist turns to in hopes of revival. The psalmist turns to God. This is not to speak against being involved in politics and elections and special interests and clubs and causes. And yet this is to

confess that the people of God, the people of the Bible, the people who call Jesus Lord, have discovered the eternal truth. Some may trust in chariots, but we trust in the Lord our God. We have found that salvation is in no other name than Jesus Christ. The Lord is the maker of the heavens and earth. The earth is the Lord's and everything in it. When we seek revival we seek the Lord.

If you are longing for revival, join the psalmist in pouring your heart and your pleas and petitions out to God. Pray for revival. But let your prayer be more than just telling God what is needed. Let your prayer for revival be shaped by God. Don't miss the place in the psalm that says, "I will listen to what God the Lord will say." When we pray for revival, we do well to listen to what God the Lord says. The word of God holds the key to revival. Revival is loving the Lord our God with all our heart and soul and strength. Revival is loving our neighbor as we love ourselves. Revival is doing justice and loving mercy and walking humbly with our God. Revival is trusting in the Lord our God with all our heart. Revival is not leaning on our own understanding. Revival is acknowledging God in all our ways and letting him direct our paths.

Revival recognizes there are things that are wrong in our world that only God can make right. Revival is praying to the God who removes the obstacles in our world and in our lives that keep love and faithfulness and righteousness and peace isolated and separated and fragmented as our souls are wearied and worried. Revival is God acting to remove the obstacles, or better yet The Obstacle that causes this fragmentation, separation, and isolation. The Obstacle is sin, and God's grace and mercy remove that great obstacle so that we can experience revival deep within our souls. In revival love and faithfulness meet together...that's nice. What comes next is even nicer. "Righteousness and peace kiss each other." In revival righteousness and peace kiss each other.

Revival comes as God removes that great obstacle of sin. The way God removes that obstacle moves this prayer from one simply of the psalmist to a prayer of the New Testament, of the New Covenant, of the Son of God who came to take away the sin of the world. Martin Luther quotes from Psalm 85 in his commentary on Galatians. He quotes from Psalm 85 as he reflects on the precious gift of forgiveness, of God

removing The Obstacle. “For the grace of God the Father and of our Lord Jesus Christ takes away sins...Thus the peace of God brightens, calms, and gladdens a man’s heart as he stands secretly in God’s presence. And, as has been said elsewhere, grace takes away the guilt, and peace takes away the punishment, so that in this way righteousness and peace kiss each other.”<sup>4</sup>

Jesus Christ, the very one God sent to remove The Obstacle of sin from our lives and from the world, teaches us a prayer that is actually a profound prayer asking for revival. In the Lord’s Prayer Jesus teaches us to pray for God’s kingdom to come and God’s will to be done. When we pray for the kingdom of God to come, we are praying for God’s kingdom to come on this earth, for the reconciliation of human beings, the practice of justice and righteousness and forgiveness and kindness to sweep over the lands. We are praying for revival to be seen in external ways, ways that touch the fabric of our lives and bring healing to the nations and peace on earth. And we are praying for the internal, for the revival of human hearts, for the breath of God to breathe new life into places that have lost hope, that are filled with grief, where sadness and despair have established a home, where sorrow and heartbreak have robbed us of joy. We are praying that into the emptiness and pain there would be new creation, those old things would be gone and new life would come. And we are praying for that great and glorious day when God’s kingdom comes in all of its fullness, when everything, every single thing is made new and the kingdom of God is restored.

After Jesus teaches his disciples the Lord’s Prayer he tells them prayer is like coming to a friend at midnight and asking for help for another friend. The point of that illustration seems to be that God is available all the time to hear our prayer, to meet our need, to act in our lives. But will we come to God at midnight. Will we be like the psalmist who prays, “Will you not revive us again?” Will we ask, and seek, and knock. When it is midnight, when all other hope is gone, when the darkness reigns supreme, will we come to God and pray, “Revive us again.”

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<sup>4</sup> “Luther’s Works: Lectures on Galatians”, p. 170.

This morning it feels like it is midnight. Sadness and anger and hatred and disregard for life and for creation and for our Creator, all these things are present in overwhelming measure. It is midnight. There are external things that cry out and say, "It is midnight." And my guess is there is enough sadness in our hearts about personal losses and failures and disappointments and shortcomings that internally many are saying, "It is midnight". I want to make a commitment to pray at midnight. I don't know when the next thing will happen that will break our hearts or cause us to grieve or send waves of terror through our midst. But there is a good chance it will happen again. It has been midnight before and it will be midnight again.

My prayer for revival is going to begin in a small way. I am going to make a commitment to coming here at 6:00 pm every Wednesday evening and praying for revival. Vespers starts at 6:30 pm, so the prayer will be no more than a half hour. It will be a simple prayer, asking for God's kingdom to come and God's will to be done. Whatever has happened the week that we pray we will lay before God. I tried to find a good way to justify praying at 6:00 pm when Jesus says pray at midnight. I checked on what time it would be here when it is midnight in Jerusalem, but that didn't work. Still, since we have Vespers every week at 6:30, and 6:00 felt like a good beginning time, I found a measure of peace with the realization it is midnight somewhere. Unfortunately, it is always midnight somewhere and for someone. Some person or some place is always facing loss and hardship and disappointment and despair.

And so at 6:00 on Wednesday I'm going to pray. You are invited to pray with me. Here or from wherever you are. Are you pick your own time and your own place. But the psalmist said pray for revival. Jesus said pray for the kingdom to come and for God's will to be done. Jesus said come at midnight. Ask, seek, knock. He is here. He is listening. Let's come to him at midnight. Let's pray together, "Revive us again."