



DUDLEY'S MONTHLY MESSAGE

ACTS 2 | EZEKIEL 37

JUNE 2022

WHAT KIND OF REVIVAL?

There is no magic formula we can work to force God to send the revival we order, but there is a distinct pattern of how God has worked to bring life to dead situations. We can align with His pattern and trust Him to do what He longs to do through us.

As Christians survey current societal issues, it is common to hear cries for a revival. What does that mean? What does that look like and how does it happen? We are somewhat aware of periods in church history when there was a quickening of the Spirit with accompanying changes in people and society. Some of these revivals affected regions, some nations, and some the whole world. Each revival had its own distinctions, but they all had influence on the various structures of society. We aren't sure how they happened and what caused them. Was it an arbitrary act of God? A result of enough people meeting certain conditions? A cycle of life following decay and dryness?... We always look for what

circumstances we enacted to bring about the revival. Often we ascribe causation to actions that either had little or nothing to do with the event or that were the fruit of it rather than the cause. We can be as naive as the little boy who swore to his sister that he could stop the sun from shining: "When I close my eyes, the sun stops shining," he declared.

WHAT DOES REVIVAL LOOK LIKE?

The word "revival" indicates that there is life that had been waning and now is renewed. Personal revival is a return to the life that God intended His people to enjoy. A healthy human is walking in an increasing

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enjoyment of the fellowship with God the Father made possible by the Son and revealed by the Spirit. There is joy regardless of circumstances. There is purpose that gives meaning to each moment. There is fulfillment in serving as partners with God as He fulfills His mission on earth. When something distracts us from the blessings of grace through Christ Jesus, we lose the delight and ultimately the energy to keep going. Any hoped-for revival that bypasses such a fellowship with God is idolatrous.

A revived church is a conscious community of believers in Jesus Christ where the gospel of the New Testament is central to the proclamation and practice of truth. All programs and metrics are subject to this one center. The proclaimed gospel liberates captive souls. The practiced gospel empowers the forgiven to live as Jesus modeled. Any accompanying religious or emotional experiences must never be exalted above the centrality of the announcement and belief in the finished work of Jesus, though a renewed vision of the majesty of the gospel does excite every fiber of our being. It refreshes the rationale and releases the emotions that have been long pent up. No

wonder there are various expressions of joy and worship. It does “get a hold on you.”

WAS THE EARLY CHURCH HEALTHY?

The early church was young, but had the markings of a healthy community. It was not perfect in the sense of being free from flaws. After all, it was filled with both immature and sinful people. But Jesus as the head of His church began it on a solid and everlasting foundation. We can see the essentials of healthy life in what we call the Great Commission. John's account of that event is a little different from the synoptic gospels, though not contrary to them. After the resurrection and before the day of Pentecost, Jesus appeared to His disciples who were hiding behind closed doors. He showed them His hands and side and pronounced peace to them:

When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.” And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said

to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld."
(John 20:20-23 ESV)

A week later they were again behind closed doors. Thomas was with them and was convinced that Jesus was resurrected. Approximately 40 days later, the full breath of God came upon them at the feast of Pentecost, and they were no longer hiding behind closed doors. Instead they went through the land boldly speaking the gospel that announces the forgiveness of sins (*see Acts 2*). There are several ingredients in this narrative that reveal the essentials to spiritual health after the cross of Jesus. These disciples were chosen and called by Jesus. They were His. They had been cleansed by the word He had spoken and the blood that He shed. They were commissioned by the ultimate authority and sent with a specific mission and a clear message. As they kept those essentials in order, they and the church grew in health. When something distracted from these essentials, life was diminished. With the passing of time and the business of church-life, baggage is kept around and begins to pull us down. Our attention and focus gets

clouded and we get away from the joy of being called, cleansed, commissioned, and empowered by love. Revival restores that state of gratefulness and graciousness.

When Jesus breathed on the disciples and said "Receive the Holy Spirit," He was reflecting on a text familiar with them all. Ezekiel was a prophet to the exiled Israelites of the 6th century BC. They had lost the privileges of being God's chosen people and were as desolate as dry bones scattered in the desert. They were not an army. They had no destiny. They were like dead and dry bones. In a vision, God instructed Ezekiel to proclaim His word to the dry scattered bones he saw (*see Ezekiel 37*). In this episode, we can see a familiar pattern of God bringing life back to a hopeless, dead, scattered group of bones. The situation was impossible as far as human solutions were considered. The unique act of proclaiming the words of God brought the bones together, and pronouncing the work of the Spirit completed the job of making the desperate, dead army a living army ready to do the will of God.

Many today would declare that the

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landscape is littered with dry bones. God's church seems very anemic. Even the leaders are burning out, falling out, or being kicked out. The nations are suffering the loss of an effective church. Without salt and light, society is decaying and falling apart. Politics is exalted, while preaching the gospel is marginalized. We have tried better organization, more entertainment, relevant gatherings, and competitive technology. Bones are still dry, and the army is not ready to fight. Like a swarm of locusts, the demons of deception are sweeping through our education, family, and government structures, unchallenged by the army of God.

Ezekiel obeyed God and there was a return of exiles to the land of Israel, but the fulfillment of his prophecy came as Jesus, the final word of God, came to earth. He lived an obedient life, died a sacrificial death, was raised from the dead by the Spirit, ascended to the right hand of God, empowered Peter to proclaim the full word of God as fulfilled in Him, and sent the Holy Spirit to indwell and empower the previously despondent and dry disciples. They arose and went out boldly to follow the pattern. They proclaimed the

gospel of the finished work of Christ. They trusted the Spirit to affirm the Word. They saw regions change throughout the known world. Every time in history when the gospel is central to proclamation and applied in the power of the Spirit, health happens. This is God's pattern. Magnify Jesus! Trust the Spirit to work! Go forth in boldness expecting God to affirm His word and vindicate His people. Remember He has all authority in heaven and earth. He has authorized us and empowered us to do the mission we are called to.

There is no magic formula we can work to force God to send the revival we order, but there is a distinct pattern of how God has worked to bring life to dead situations. We can align with His pattern and trust Him to do what He longs to do through us.



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