

Revival Scenes

by Henry T. Blackaby

We have several generations who know nothing, experientially, of true revival and spiritual awakening. The following are descriptions of prominent features of revival scenes, which should stir your hearts to long for their repetition in our day.

Pervasive, Fervent Praying

All revival begins, and continues, in the prayer meeting. Some have also called prayer the "great fruit of revival." In times of revival, thousands may be found on their knees for hours, lifting up their heartfelt cries, with thanksgiving, to heaven.

The accounts of revivals abound with illustrations of pervasive and fervent praying. In George Whitefield's time, overwhelmed by the Presence of God, people would pray and cry out to God throughout the night. Following a young girl's prayer, a youth meeting in South Africa was filled with the Presence of God, and the young people continued to pray for hours, issuing in the greatest revival during Andrew Murray's ministry. The great Moravian revival of 1727 began in prayer, and so overwhelmed were the people with the Presence of God, they were convicted to pray 24 hours a day, 7 days a week—and this lasted over 100 years, with astounding results around the world. In the 1904 revival in Wales, prayer was deep and crushing in the coal mines, in homes, in barns, along the roads, and in almost every place where people met. In Ulster (1859), more than 100 prayer meetings began instantly, even in graveyards and gravel pits. In New York City (1857), more than 30,000 people gathered daily to pray, and were "filled with the awesome Presence of God." Near the end of a prayer meeting in the city of Arnol, on the Scottish Isle of Lewis (1940's), a local blacksmith cried out: "Lord, Your honour is at stake!" At that moment the house shook and "dishes rattled...as wave after wave of Divine Power swept through the house." When this group of people closed the prayer meeting and went outside, they found the community alive with the Presence of God; it was 5 a.m. in the morning.

Powerful, Scriptural Preaching.

Powerful preaching is a hallmark of true revival. Revival preachers demonstrate their commitment to the authority and sufficiency of the Scriptures, with bold, urgent, and uncompromising preaching, as they set before God's people the way of life and death. Powerful, Spirit-filled sermons concerning sin, Christ and the cross penetrate the hearts of the saved and lost alike with the realities of eternity. Concerning a sermon Whitefield preached in Scotland (1742), one present reported: "During the time of divine worship, solemn, profound reverence overspread every countenance. Many cry out in the bitterness of their soul. Some...from the stoutest men, to the most tender child, shake and tremble and a few fall down as dead....when the ...preacher speaks of redeeming Love, and talks of the precious Savior...all seem to breathe after Him...."

Agonizing, Uninhibited Confessions.

When Holy God draws near in true revival, people come under terrible conviction of sin. The outstanding feature of spiritual awakening has been the profound consciousness of the Presence and holiness of God, "so overwhelming at times that people were afraid to open their mouths lest they utter words that would bring upon them the judgments of God. Sinners, overwhelmed by the Divine Presence, would fall helplessly, crying for mercy." Under the crushing gravity of even the smallest sins, people may be found for hours groaning and in awful distress, weeping bitterly and uncontrollably, sighing and sobbing anxiously and painfully. Entire congregations deal face-to-face with God about their sins, in open brokenness and contrition, with urgent prayers of repentance, pleading to God for mercy. Under deep conviction, missionaries, pastors, elders, and evangelists are found publicly confessing their sins. A missionary in Korea in 1907 wrote: "As the prayer continued, a spirit of heaviness and sorrow for sin came upon the audience. On one side, someone began to weep, and in a moment the whole audience was weeping. Man after man would rise, confess his sins, break down and weep, and then throw himself down on the floor and beat the floor with his fists in perfect agony of conviction." All are painfully (and joyfully) aware that this deep conviction is solely the work of God in their midst, and find great peace and joy in forgiveness.

Countless, Radical Conversions.

During true revival, thousands of lost people are suddenly swept into the Kingdom of God. Scenes of the lost coming to the Savior in great, and unprecedented numbers, are common. In the eastern states, during the revivals of 1858, conversions and baptisms quadrupled. During the Great Awakening in New England in the 1700's, between 25,000 and 30,000 were converted. When God visited Wales in 1859, it is estimated that 110,000 were added to the churches. In Korea between 1906 and 1910 the net gain of all the churches was nearly 80,000.

Revival conversions demonstrate the radical act of becoming a new creation in Christ. Crime in awakened communities falls dramatically, sins and worldly pleasures are abandoned, and joyful worship and service to Christ and demonstrable love for one another become the way of life. Of one Parish where Duncan Campbell was used of God in the late 1940's, we read: "Revival had surely come! Campbell conducted four services nightly (for 5 weeks)—at 7 p.m., 10 p.m., midnight, and 3 a.m., returning home between 5 and 6 am.... Simultaneously (with 'desperate praying') the Spirit of God swept through the village. People could not sleep; houses were lit all night; people walked the streets in great conviction; others knelt by their bedsides crying for God to pardon them!.... Within 48 hours the drinking house was closed. Today it is in ruins. Fourteen young men who had been drinking there, were gloriously converted....; within 48 hours nearly every young person between the ages of 12 and 20 had surrendered to Christ, and it was reckoned that every young man between the ages of 18 and 35 could be found in the prayer meetings!"

The above scenes are the common experience of all true revivals: Persevering prayer, mighty preaching, agonizing confessions followed by the joy of forgiveness, and this pervading the believing and unbelieving community alike. O Lord, in mercy, visit again your people in our day.

For further reading, see *Revival, A People Saturated with God*, by Brian H. Edwards (Evangelical Press, 1990).