

## **What is revival?**

**by Roger Fay**

In evaluating revivals we must reason from valid theology. And if we are to be Evangelicals and not mystics, our authority must be Scripture, not just experience.

The fundamental theological question must be: 'What is a biblical revival?' Acts 2 provides the normative answer.

Revival is a surge of life from the Holy Spirit, bringing grace to undeserving, sinful people through the faithful proclamation of Jesus Christ, crucified, risen and ascended. It will bring conviction of sin, regeneration, repentance, faith and love.

### **Effective preaching**

In Old Testament times, the word 'revival' (Psalm 85; Habakkuk 3; Ezra 9) strongly implied that — along with the manifestation of God's overwhelming presence — there was a 'turning of captivity', a restoration of Israel's national integrity, and a purification of temple worship.

Viewed through New Testament eyes, this equates to a powerful and effective preaching of the gospel of grace. Why? Because the city of Zion, the temple (its structure and worship), and the Shekinah glory, all speak of Jesus Christ — both of his glorious person and his saving work.

Only when these are in view — when a revival uplifts him — are we entitled to call it biblical.

Biblical revival will major on the exclusive mediatorship and sovereign grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. For when the Holy Spirit is truly at work, he unerringly glorifies Christ and leads us to do the same (John 16:13-14).

### **Biblical revival**

In short, biblical revival is marked, at least at some stage, by faithful proclamation of 'the unsearchable riches of Christ' (Ephesians 3:8).

Judged by these standards, there have been relatively few genuine revivals in church history. Examples would be the movements under the ministry of the Reformers, the Puritans, George Whitefield, Jonathan Edwards and C. H. Spurgeon.

But — and this could apply to 1904 — there have also been revivals where some (though all too few) of these gospel elements have been present along with an admixture of human error. Yet, in the sovereign mercy and providence of God, there has still been powerful blessing from on high.

The ministries of Jonah in Nineveh, of Arminian Methodists in Great Britain and America, and of Girolamo Savonarola in Florence, are cases in point.

Perhaps these imperfect phenomena need their own name to mark their significance — maybe 'awakening' would be a better term than revival.

Much more biblical evaluation is needed before we can really grasp what happened in 'the 1904 Revival'.

**Roger Fay**

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