

O Lord, Revive Your Work

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Habakkuk 3:1–3 (NKJV) “A prayer of Habakkuk the prophet, on Shigionoth. ² O LORD, I have heard Your speech and was afraid; O LORD, revive Your work in the midst of the years! In the midst of the years make it known; in wrath remember mercy. ³ God came from Teman, the Holy One from Mount Paran. Selah His glory covered the heavens, and the earth was full of His praise.”

Great Awakenings are often preceded by rude awakenings. Like the approaching hoof beats of an alien army set on destruction, so the prophet heard the oracles of approaching divine judgment. The prophet declared, “I have heard Your speech and was afraid.” In his despair, he cried: “O LORD, revive Your work in the midst of the years! In the midst of the years, make it known; in wrath remember mercy.” There comes a time that things are so spiritually bankrupt and morally corrupt that spiritual renewal is the only hope of rescue.

In the study of church history, we discover a reoccurring pattern in spiritual renewal. In an article in Christian History Magazine, entitled “Spiritual Awakenings in America”, these patterns are outlined. I will reference these patterns in this article.¹ First, spiritual renewals “are usually preceded by a time of spiritual depression, apathy and gross sin, in which a majority of nominal Christians are hardly different from the members of secular society, and the churches seem to be asleep. The causes of each decline differ widely, but when the prophetic voice and moral leadership of the Church has been stilled for some time, social evils are usually rampant.” Eighteenth Century England is a primary example. During this time in England, alcoholism was at an all-time high. Society was filled with injustice, barbarity, sin, and debauchery. Capital punishment was used routinely for trivial crimes. Slavery was practiced throughout the British Empire. To make matters worse, the churches were out of touch. In his book “The Tale of Two Cities”, Charles Dickens’ opening sentence describes clearly the difference between two cities in the late 1700’s—Paris, France which experienced a blood revolution and London, England which experienced revival: “It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way—in short, the period was so far like the present period that some of its noisiest authorities insisted on its being received, for good or for evil, in the superlative degree of comparison only.” God intervened by sending what we call The Evangelical Awakening led by John Wesley and George Whitefield aroused the English conscience which in turn activated political solutions to cure many of these social ills and saved England from the bloody revolution experienced in France.

Today church members are hardly distinguishable from members of secular society. Consider the sad condition of the church today. We have a lot of fashion but little passion. We have many worshipers but little worship. We have many ministers but few messengers. We have many preachers but few prophets. We have many pacifiers but few pastors. We have many talkers but few teachers. We have many gossips but little gospel. We have many praisers but few pray-ers. We have many singers but few clingers. We have many interferers but few intercessors. We have many organizers but few agonizers. We have many fellowshippers but few followers. We have many performers but few pursuers. We have many customers but few converts. We have many tippers but few tithers. We have many “Christians” but little Christianity. We have many congregations but few real Churches. We have many professors but few possessors. We have many watchers but few workers. We have much teaching but little Truth. We have many doctrines but few disciples. We have much activity but little productivity. We have much play time but little pray time. We have many Church buildings but few Church builders. We have much knowledge about God but little knowledge of God. We have much information but little transformation. We have promoted church growth without spiritual growth. We have promoted membership without conversion. We have promoted prosperity without principles. We have promoted grace without the Gospel. We have promoted deliverance without discipleship. We have promoted popularity without purity. We have promoted charisma without character. We have promoted hype over holiness. We have promoted experience without encounter. We have promoted programs without power. We have promoted heaven but ignored hell. We have promoted “revivalism” without revival. We need revival!

¹ *Patterns of Spiritual Renewal*, Christian History Magazine, *Spiritual Awakenings in North America*, Volume VIII, No. 3, Issue 23 (Worcester, PA: Christian History Magazine, 1989), p. 7

A second pattern of spiritual renewal is that “an individual or small group of God’s people begins to be aware of their sins and backslidden condition, and vows to forsake all that is displeasing to God.” Christians begin to recall past outpourings, and long to see them again. Interestingly, it is occasionally discovered that God was sovereignly working simultaneously among Christians in different parts of the country without their knowledge or awareness of one another.

A third pattern of spiritual renewal is that “as some Christians begin to yearn for a manifestation of God’s power, a leader or leaders arise with prophetic insight into the causes and remedies, and a new awareness of the holy and pure character of the Lord is present.” As these leaders raise the standard of holiness, the degeneration of the culture is exposed and a hunger to live holy lives is stimulated in the lives of God’s people. These leaders find that there is a renewed and shared eagerness in many of God’s people to embrace and follow God in the season of outpouring.

A fourth pattern of spiritual renewal is that “the awakening of Christians occurs. Many understand and take part in a higher spiritual life.” The renewal of Christians may or may not result in the evangelism of the lost. For instance, during the Reformation the main thrust of the outpouring was to restore the truth of the Gospel and Biblical doctrine to the church. It is wrong to equate “revivalism” with “evangelicalism”. In every genuine outpouring of God’s Spirit there will be an increase in conversion among the lost. But often the case is that society has already been saturated with the Gospel with little impact. In such cases the need is not evangelism but an outpouring of the Spirit like rain to germinate the seeds already sown. This was the case in the Welsh revival of 1905.

Revival is the remedy for the sick church whereas mass evangelism is the remedy offered to the lost. Spiritual awakening refers to a spiritual renewal that results in a widespread awareness and openness to God, the Gospel, and the Church among those who were formerly ignorant, unbelieving, or hostile. During a spiritual awakening the church is renewed and the work of evangelism is promoted with great effectiveness. Spiritual awakening might be described as a season of great harvest that is joyfully seized by a renewed church in its season of opportunity.

A fifth pattern of spiritual renewal is that spiritual awakening “may be God’s means of preparing and strengthening His people for future challenges or trials. Throughout history, renewal has often come before persecutions and severe trials that God sent to test and teach His people.” God will cleanse His church before He judges the world: “For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God?”²

Spiritual renewal is the merciful intervention of God to give people an opportunity to repent and to return so that His judgment might be averted. Now is the time for God’s people to hear the approaching hoof beats of judgment and to cry out, “O LORD, revive Your work!”

² 1 Peter 4:17 (NKJV)