

Text: 1 John 4:1-8

Title: "What is Revival?"

Time: 3/12/21 pm

Place: Hill Village Bible Church

Introduction: This evening we want to begin by trying to understand what we mean by the assigned topic *revival*. What is revival? There are a couple of ways we can answer that question.

One way is to explain what is happening in our church, where we are currently experiencing revival. Jonathan Edwards did this in a commencement address he delivered to the faculty and students of Yale University in September of 1741. The address was titled, *The Distinguishing Marks of a Work of the Spirit of God, Applied to that Uncommon Operation that Has Lately Appeared on the Minds of the People of New England: with a Particular Consideration of the Extraordinary Circumstances with which This Work Is Attended*.

Jonathan Edwards was the pastor of The Church of Christ at Northampton, MA. Northampton had existed for just over 80 years. Edwards succeeded his grandfather, Solomon Stoddard, who had pastored the flock of God there for nearly sixty of those 80 years. This church had experienced a revival in response to a series of sermons Edwards preached on justification by faith in 1734-35. The pastor was 31 years old and had become the pastor five years earlier at the age of 26.

In the early 1740s, revival had come again to New England, and Edwards had come to New Haven to explain and even defend what was happening. When his *Distinguishing Marks* address was published, it included a "Preface to the Reader" written by a Pastor William Cooper, a "colleague pastor" or associate pastor of The Brattle Street Church in Boston. His church also had experienced revival. He once declared about this time that more "people . . . in concern about their souls"

had come to him in one week than had come to him in his preceding twenty-four years of ministry.

Pastor Cooper describes the fitness of Jonathan Edwards to the task of explaining what revival is: "The Reverend Author is known to be 'a scribe instructed unto the kingdom of heaven;' the place where he has been called to exercise his ministry has been famous for experimental religion; and he has had opportunities to observe this work in many places where it has powerfully appeared, and to converse with numbers that have been the subjects of it. These things qualify him for this undertaking above most."

Would it not be nice if Pastor Boyce could have asked Pastor Edwards to come speak on revival instead of Pastor Hobi? I think it would have, and I am sure that you do too. But before we become too discouraged that it is me speaking on revival and not him, I want us to take comfort in something that Edwards wrote in his explanation of revival: "My design therefore at this time is to show what are the true, certain, and distinguishing evidences of a work of the Spirit of God, by which we may safely proceed in judging of any operation we find in ourselves, or see in others. And here I would observe, that we are to take the Scriptures as our guide in such cases." Edwards points his readers to 1 John 4.

We may not be able to explain what revival is by giving an account of our personal ministry experience, but we can do what Edwards says to do. We can take the Scriptures as our guide in this case.

As we do so this evening in answer to the question, "What is revival?", I want us to see what I am going to call four classrooms in Scripture's schoolhouse of revival, where we will learn together what revival is. Scripture's schoolhouse of revival includes an English class, an Art class, a Math class, and finally a Science class.

I. English class – what does the word *revival* mean in Scripture?

Illustration: I was taught the Hebrew language by a professor named Randy Jaegli. One of the things we would have to do in that class is memorize the meaning of Hebrew words, and we would have quizzes periodically on our Hebrew vocabulary. Dr. Jaegli would point out that when it came to our grade in that class, we needed to excel in these vocabulary quizzes. He would explain to us that “you can almost teach a chimpanzee to learn Hebrew vocabulary.”

Application: Well, I always questioned the truthfulness of that assertion as I struggled through those vocabulary quizzes, but hopefully as we try to understand this vocabulary word *revival*, we will be dealing with something simple that we can all remember.

Our English word simply comes from the Latin *vivo* meaning *to live* and the prefix *re-* meaning *again*. So, *revive* means *to live again*. Noah Webster, whose 1828 *American Dictionary of the English Language*, was published just as our nation’s Second Great Awakening was ending, includes this definition for the noun *revival*: “Renewed and more active attention to religion; an awakening of men to their spiritual concerns.”

Our New Testaments were originally written in Greek, and there is a parallel Greek word that is used there. It is *anazao*. *Zao* means *I live* and *ana-* means *again*. Both *anazao* and *revive* mean *to live again*. The Greek word is used five times in the New Testament evidence. In Rom. 7:9 Paul explains that sin becomes alive again whenever he is convicted by the commandment of God. He is speaking metaphorically about how the commandment helps us know that we are sinners. The word is used literally in Rev. 20:5 and Rom. 14:9. In the first passage, it speaks of the dead bodies of unbelievers becoming alive again in resurrection in preparation for their judgment.

The verse in Romans is a reference to the resurrection of the body of Christ. The body that died, arose and lived again.

The last two usages are in a passage that applies directly to the answer to our question about what revival is. It is used by the Lord Jesus in His parable about the prodigal son (Luke 15). You will remember the story. A younger son has greedily demanded his inheritance from a loving father prematurely, and upon receiving it he wastes it all on riotous living (v. 13). Starving with less food than the pigs he fed, the younger son returns to the loving arms of his father, who exclaims, "For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found" (v. 24). He repeats his description of this happy turn of events in verse 32.

So, our vocabulary lesson on the word *revival* has taught us that there is a kind of power available to spiritually dead people that can make them live again. Prodigals, who are greedy, riotous, wasteful, selfish, and destitute, can find forgiveness in the love of a once-betrayed Father. Revival is the power of God's love for sinners and of His joy at their repentance, which is able to make them live again (Luke 15:1-2, 10).

II. Art class - what are some pictures of revival in Scripture?

Illustration: Another close parallel to the word *revival* in Scripture is the word *regeneration*. *Regenerate* means to *give-birth again*. The passage where we learn the most about being born again is John 3, where Jesus told the Jewish religious leader Nicodemus, "You must be born again" (v. 7).

When Nicodemus asked what this means, Jesus marveled that he was a teacher of the Old Testament and had to ask that question. In his answer to Nicodemus, Jesus pointed to two pictures of regeneration or revival we find in the Old Testament - being born of water and being born of the Spirit or the wind.

Application: Let's take these two in reverse order. We find the wind picturing revival in Ezek. 37:1-14. The ultimate salvation of the nation of Israel is here described in terms of the power of wind, breath, and Spirit. We see something of the means of revival here, as Ezekiel is commanded to prophesy first to the bones (v. 4), and then to the wind, a picture of prayer to the Holy Spirit (v. 9). Jesus told Nicodemus that the wind blows when people are born again, just like is shall when Israel is resurrected.

The second OT picture of regeneration that Jesus refers to is water. We find water as a picture of living again in the form of rain showers as well as dew. Ezek. 34:26 promises "there shall be showers of blessing" in Israel's future when the Lord makes the nation spiritually alive again. Psalm 133 speaks of the Lord's commanding the blessing of eternal life in terms of a refreshing dew. The oil of this Psalm again reminds us that it is work of God's Spirit, and the Psalm also teaches us that this blessed dew looks for a place where brethren are dwelling together in unity.

III. Math class – what are the numbers of revival in Scripture?

Illustration: I mentioned early that Jonathan Edwards's church first experienced revival in 1734-35. In 1736 he published an account of these blessings titled, *Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God in the Conversion of Many Hundred Souls in Northampton, and the Neighboring Towns and Villages*. That phrase *many hundreds of souls* is striking because Northampton was a town of only 200 families then.

I was in the middle of reading some of this history when my wife and I were asked to visit with a lady in our town who is battling cancer. Her house was located in a neighborhood neither of us knew existed, where there were a number of beautiful homes with families living inside. As we traveled through that surprisingly big neighborhood, my wife mentioned to me

that all these families need a good church. Because of the reading I had been doing, my response to her was that if revival came, they all would be in a church like ours this Sunday.

Application: Imagine a world in which one after another, all those on your church's prayer list for salvation began coming to Christ, and not only coming to Christ but asking to be baptized and to join your church. And imagine that they became disciple makers themselves so that there was this multiplying effect when it comes to the Word of God, the disciples of Christ, and local churches like ours. That is the mathematics of revival. Those are its numbers.

We see this truth especially in the ministry of the early church in Acts. We are told in Acts 6:1, 7 that the number of disciples multiplied. Then we are told in Acts 9:31 that local churches multiplied. And finally, in Acts 12:24 we learn that the Word of God multiplied. This is what the power of revival, God's joy and love in the salvation of sinners, can do. These are the numbers that the wind and the water can produce.

IV. Science class – what are the marks of revival in Scripture?

Illustration: I take my reference to *marks* from Edwards's address to Yale. In the same month his address was published, David Brainard was expelled from Yale for mentioning in private to one of his fellow-students that he believed that a tutor of theirs was as "destitute of grace as this chair." Congregationalists were becoming divided by the revival, Old Lights against New Lights, and Edwards, who would later house Brainard during his sickness and publish his diary, spoke of the distinguishing marks of true revival to defend this work of God from its critics. He turns to 1 John 4 and mentions five distinguishing marks of revival.

1. True revival raises the esteem of people for Jesus Christ (1 John 4:1-3, 15).

Edwards: "This implies a confessing not only that there was such a person who appeared in Palestine and did and suffered those things that are recorded of him, but that he was Christ, i.e., The Son of God, anointed to be Lord and Saviour, as the name Jesus Christ implies."

2. True revival diminishes the hold of Satan's kingdom on the lives of people (1 John 4:4-5).

Edwards: "The influence of the Spirit of God is yet more abundantly manifest, if persons have their hearts drawn off from the world, and weaned from the objects of their worldly lusts, and taken off from worldly pursuits, by the sense that they have of the excellency of divine things, and the affection they have to those spiritual enjoyments of another world, that are promised in the gospel."

3. True revival causes people to love and trust the Holy Scriptures (1 John 4:6a).

Edwards: "The apostle's argument here equally reaches all that in the same sense are of God; that is, all those that God has appointed and inspired to deliver to his church its rule of faith and practice; all the prophets and apostles, whose doctrine God has made the foundation on which he has built his church, as in Eph. 2:20; in a word, all the penmen of the Holy Scriptures."

4. True revival causes people to love truth and reject error (1 John 4:6b).

Edwards: "Whatever spirit removes our darkness, and brings us to the light, undeceives us, and, by convincing us of the truth, doth us a kindness. If I am brought to a sight of truth, and am made sensible of things as they really are, my duty is immediately to thank God for it."

5. True revival causes people to love God and the brethren (1 John 4:7-8).

Edwards: “The surest character of true divine supernatural love – distinguishing it from counterfeits that arise from a natural self-love – is, that the Christian virtue of humility shines in it; that which above all others renounces, abases, and annihilates what we term self.”

Conclusion: From what we have learned in Scripture’s school-house of revival this evening, I would like to conclude with an answer to our question, “What Is Revival?”. Revival is a work of the Holy Spirit by which He causes dead and dying souls to live again spiritually, expressing the Father’s love for sinners and His joy in their salvation, blowing powerfully like wind and descending refreshingly like rain, multiplying the Word of God, disciples of Christ, and local churches, and marking these multiplied disciples and churches with the exaltation of Jesus Christ, lastingly changed lives, hunger for their Bibles, a commitment to truth over falsehood, and a selfless love for God and the brethren. Revival is something we need today.

“A man came – I think it was actually in Philadelphia – on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, ‘Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.’ That is the distinction – the sermon, and the ‘lightning and the thunder.’ To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters.”

– David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

Preachers and Preaching