

Text: Romans 1:1-32

Title: "Me and our church's next revival"

Time: 3/7/2021 am; 5/3/2022 pm; 10/2/2022 am

Place: Hill Village Bible Church; Bible Baptist Church, New Hartford, NY; NBBC.

Introduction: I must be honest that this assignment was at first an intimidating one for me. When my pastor friend first asked me to give six messages on the topic of revival, he was asking a pastor who only has a few more members than that in his church.

As exciting as the study of revival can be, and my heart has been intensely encouraged by this opportunity from the Lord, when we look around at our churches, our state, our region, and our nation, we can find ourselves lamenting with McCheyne of old when he preached his message, "Why Is God a Stranger in the Land?"

So, I have not tried to teach you what I know from personal experience about revival. My goal has been instead to share with you what I have discovered from Scripture and Church History on this work of God.

You may remember that we defined revival as 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.

I cannot explain to you how I have experienced making this work of God a reality in my church, in my town, in my state, or in my nation. But I can tell you from personal experience, about the times that this work of God happened to me as an individual.

One of the takeaways I found in my preparation for our time together was this. Each of us has an opportunity to do something about our own personal revival today, which may not be as open to us in the same way when it comes to a church-wide great awakening or a nation-wide great awakening. I do believe that I am correct to understand that before the Lord I am less responsible for these other revivals than I am for a Kevin-Hobi great awakening.

C. H. Spurgeon spoke of this truth in his sermon, "Spiritual Revival – The Need of the Church": "In this matter, we should begin at home. We too often flog the Church when the whip should be laid on our own shoulders. We drag the Church, like a colossal culprit, to the altar. We bind her hands fast and try to execute her at once, or, at least, we find fault with her where there is none and magnify her little errors, while we too often forget our own imperfections. Let us, therefore, commence with ourselves, remembering that we are a part of the Church and that our own need of revival is, in some measure, the cause of that need in the Church at large."

And so this morning, I want each of us to focus on our own potential for revival as an individual child of God and part of Christ's church. When it comes to the possibility of the revival of my heart, with man it is impossible but with God all things are possible. When God revives my heart, it will bring surprising changes, and it will come through the effect that revival's preaching, praying, and love have on my

life. It will come in answer to Habakkuk's prayer made my own: "Oh Lord, revive your work!" (3:2). "Begin that work in me."

In Romans 1, Paul describes the world in which he lived and ministered as a world in great need of revival, a world very much like the one we find ourselves in today (vv. 18-32). This passage is a description of the opposite of revival. Theologians call it *reprobation* (v. 28), and it is God's judicial work of hardening through giving people over to great success in the pursuit of their pleasurable self-destruction. Our nation is experiencing reprobation, not revival.

So Paul's gospel ministry confronted the same kind of world ours does today, and his example tells each of us what we can do as individuals when it comes to encouraging the return of revival to a world like ours.

I. We can determine to be separated unto the gospel (vv. 1-6).

Illustration: Our mission as believers in this world is often described in athletic terms in the Scripture. Certainly, in order to play athletics at a high level in our society today, great giftedness has to be coupled with great dedication, focus, and hard work.

I have a pastor friend whose son plays defensive end on the Cincinnati football team. He told me that recruiters told his son in high school that he needed to stop playing basketball so he could gain more weight to get ready for football at Ohio State. Athletes who want to perform at this level have to be willing to sacrifice other pleasures and separate themselves with focus to this one goal.

Application: The Apostle Paul felt that way first and foremost about the gospel (v. 1). It is easy to see how this was true in Paul's case. Scripture speaks of his being separated from his mother's womb for the gospel in Gal. 1:15, of being separated at the moment of his salvation on the Damascus road for the gospel in Acts 9:15, and of being separated by the Holy Spirit for gospel ministry with Barnabas when he was sent out by the church of Antioch in Acts 13:2.

We would all agree that it is right and proper to view Paul's life as separated to the gospel. But did you notice what Paul says about all of the believers in the church at Rome in verse 6? He says, "ye also are the called." In verse 1 he says he was called. And in verse 6 he says that every believer in the church of Rome was called.

So, the first thing you and I can do as individuals when it comes to our world's need for revival is to look at our lives, our time, talents, and treasure as though they exist for the singular purpose of furthering of the gospel, as separated unto the gospel of God. Each of us have this calling.

We need to view our relationship to the ministry of the gospel the way a college football player has to view his relationship to football. Whatever our vocation, each of us can make the decision that we are going to accept the calling to be separated unto the gospel in order to address the need for revival in our world today. Is that a decision that you have made?

II. We can determine to love our local church (vv. 7-15).

Illustration: I would like to refer back to Ebenezer Porter's Andover lectures on revival in 1832 after the Second Great Awakening. He mentions the primacy of the local church in God's work of revival: "Any system of means for the pro-

motion of religion which will supersede or essentially impair the influence of a regular, local ministry, must ultimately be deleterious to the church" [*Letters On Revival*, 91].

"For any institution that is plainly of divine appointment there can be no proper substitute. Any human arrangement, for example, that supersedes the Christian Sabbath, or that prevents the regular worship of local churches, or the regular influence of local ministers, on that day, is an assumption that we are wiser than God" [95].

Asahel Nettleton was the George Whitfield of his day. His leadership gave the Second Great Awakening a stable endurance that was not enjoyed as well in the First. Porter explains the difference in terms of Nettleton's commitment to the primacy of the local church: "This distinguished itinerant found no difficulty to labour as an assistant of stated pastor, without making himself their rival. If in any instance he could not conscientiously coincide in the views, or cooperate in the measures, of a pastor among whose charge he was invited to labour, he did not sow dissension in that church, nor seek to detach their affections from their minister; but quietly withdrew to another place" [94].

Application: Paul never sought gospel ministry that left New Testament local churches behind or that rivaled their ministry. He longs to be with them. It is his purpose to impart his gifts to them and to receive theirs from them. He wants to have a fruitful gospel ministry among them.

And Porter also recognized in his description of the revivals of the Second Great Awakening that you cannot properly love local churches without a fervent love for the pastors of those churches. He writes that revival happens in a place "where many an anxious sinner has valued beyond all price

the privilege of opening his heart in private to a beloved pastor.

“No organization, though devised by God himself, can be expected to operate in our depraved world, without some difficulties. . . . But that will be a day of calamity to our churches, should such a day come, when they shall be willing to exchange a stated pastorship for itinerant and occasional ministrations” [92]. In our day, most of those “itinerant and occasional” substitutions for pastors in the lives of believers are found online or on the radio.

When it comes to the revival of our own heart, we can determine to love our local church and our pastor(s). Do we possess this love?

III. We can determine to not be ashamed (vv. 16-17).

Illustration: On February 16, 2021, Pastor James Coates of Gracelife Church in Edmonton, Alberta was incarcerated by civil authorities. James’s crime was his church attendance. As a matter of conscience, James believes that in-person church attendance is necessary for the believer, not optional. I happen to agree with my brother on that score (Heb. 10:21-26).

This put James in conflict with a Canadian bureaucracy’s mandate that limited churches to 15% of their building capacity in their effort to battle the Corona virus. James’s wife’s name is Erin, and they have been blessed with two boys, one 18 years old at the time, and the other 11. James spent a month and six days incarcerated in a Canadian prison for his stand.

Application: In Acts 23 the Apostle Paul explained to the Jewish Sanhedrin of his day that one of the non-negotiables of his ministry was that he had lived with a clear conscience before God (v. 1). Those leaders had Paul punched in the mouth.

James Coates was held in jail for over a month in order to maintain a clear conscience before God. A simple slap in the face would have been easier. Whatever you may think about in-person worship in times of pandemic caution, the facts of this case are clear that a brother spent time in jail in a Western democracy for obeying his conscience, for seeking to do what Paul said was a non-negotiable for his ministry – to live with a clear conscience before his God.

And so, we are getting closer to the kind of world in which Paul said, “I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ.” Are you ashamed of Christ? Are you ashamed of the gospel? Are you ashamed of your local church? Are you ashamed of the conscience of Pastor Coates? If so, who is shaming you? It is not the Lord.

One thing you can determine to do in the face of your church’s need for revival is to not be ashamed of the gospel, to believe that it is still the power of God unto salvation, and to speak up for truth as it is being trampled in our streets. You can determine to obey God with a clear conscience, and to stand with all those who are sincerely seeking to do the same in the face of governmental persecution.

Conclusion: For who knows what the Lord might begin to do with one or two church members here, who see their lives as separated unto God’s gospel ministry, who love their local church fervently and selflessly, and who are not ashamed of the gospel come what may?

Ours is a time and place like Paul's Rome, a time and place more acquainted with reprobation than with revival. Most days of ministry are like our day. Jonathan's day was like that. Saul had been beaten by the Philistines, Israel's army was on the run, and Jonathan turned to his armor bearer and reminded him: "God is not restrained whether to save by many or by few." Jonathan's unrestrained God is our God, the God of revival.

To whom might we turn and tell this truth?—"God is not restrained to save. Let's give our life to this fight."

It will have to be someone like Paul, who said of the difficulties of the battle: "But none of these things move me, neither count I my life as dear to myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord, to testify the gospel of the grace of God" (Acts 20:24).

"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