

Why We Don't See Revival Today

On Dec. 7, 1941, Japan launched a surprise attack on the United States at Pearl Harbor. Our nation lost 2,403 Americans in that devastating blow to our Pacific fleet. The following day, President Franklin Roosevelt addressed the nation, calling the assault "a day which will live in infamy." That attack would thrust America into a global conflict that would last four long years and cost our nation over 400,000 lives.

America was at war. Draft notices began arriving in mailboxes of homes across America. You can only imagine that gut-sinking feeling a mother must have felt when she found the notice addressed to her son in her mail. Yes, she knew the cause to be just, but this was her boy. No matter how honorable the fight, it could not remove that crushing anxiety that precedes a request for such a sacrifice.

This was the reality thousands of families were facing. This was especially true in Seneca, South Carolina on what was known as the Utica Cotton Mill Hill. The hill was a tight-knit community that found its bond in the cotton mill they all worked in and the church they all attended. Together, these families were sending their boys off to war. And these mothers and fathers turned to the only place they could during this difficult season: God.

They sought out a place of solitude where they could go and bare their souls before the Lord as they lifted their boys up in prayer. Right outside the village, past a cemetery and down in a ravine next to a creek, they would erect an altar to the Lord where anyone could come and lay their burdens down.

It became a daily occurrence for these God-fearing men to rise

early in the morning with heavy hearts for their far-away sons. After work, they would make their way into the woods to go pray. Along the way, they would pick up a rock that represented the size of their burden. They would then carry that rock, lay it on the altar and cry out to the Lord for hours into the night. As their sons warred on a foreign field, these fathers were warring in prayer.

There is no denying the power of prayer. In the four years of America's involvement in the war, no lives were lost on that mill hill. All their boys returned home.

When the war ended in 1945, the tradition of the rock altar continued. They would come praying daily for healing and for breakthrough. Sometimes the burden these men carried was so great that the rock itself was too large for one man to lift. Others would have to come and assist them. They would literally carry one another's burdens.

The most prominent prayer at that altar was for the souls of friends and family. They came daily to pray for revival. In the 1950s, God answered a decade's worth of prayer around the altar, sending wave after wave of revival through their church on East Main Street.

The church began to see explosive growth. There was a fervency to see neighbors and loved ones saved. Men and women were coming to the church and finding freedom from addictions. During this move of God, it was common for those working on the different shifts in the mill to witness to their co-workers. They would share the gospel with them, then carry them straight to the altar as soon as work was over. This spirit of revival spread throughout the county touching and igniting something fresh within every spirit filled church.

It wasn't long before an evangelist by the name of A.S. Worley, partnered with J.W. Whitlow, the pastor of East Main Street Church of God, to start a revival center in the

neighboring town of Walhalla. They rented an old barn in the center of the town that was once used to dry out tobacco. They cleaned up the space and set it up for services. Crowds came from the upstate of South Carolina, North Carolina and Georgia as signs, wonders and miracles became a daily occurrence.

When you entered the old tobacco barn, you'd immediately notice dozens of abandoned crutches, canes, slings, wheelchairs and stretchers hanging from the ceiling. These were "trophies of grace" that were no longer needed by their former owners. They stood as powerful silent testimonies of God's healing power.

There was one evening when a gentleman was brought to the revival by ambulance and carried in on a stretcher. Suffering from an aggressive cancer, he had been told he had days to live. The doctors had given him up for dead. That night, Pastor Whitlow was ministering. He seemed unfazed as the gentleman was brought in. Being a small town, most of the people there that night knew the man and the seriousness of his condition. They wondered if tonight would be the night that their friend received a much-needed miracle.

As brother Whitlow brought the service to a close, he walked straight over to the man and said, "'Silver and gold have I none, but such as I have, I give to thee.' In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk!" At that word, the man was instantly healed. He sprung up from the stretcher and began rejoicing before the Lord. That man lived a long healthy life afterwards.

This amazing revival, as well as the explosion of the spirit-filled churches in and around Seneca, can all be traced back to the prayers offered up at that old rock altar. In many ways, those stones became the foundation for the revival that shook this community.

It is unfortunate that over time that old rock altar was

abandoned. As the years passed, fewer and fewer people ventured out there to pray. Soon it was lost to the woods and forgotten. Likewise, the fires that once burned through the churches in the upstate died down. What a shame.

Those men of God who gathered around that altar showed us how to seek revival. Night after night, they would come and intercede. They knew how to tarry long in prayer, and as a result, the Lord answered with signs, wonders and miracles.

My friend, if revival tarries today, it is because we have failed to tarry before the Lord. Revival comes as a response. It is heaven's answer to our effectual fervent prayers offered from a broken and contrite heart. Truly, if we desire to see a move of God, we need not look far. Revival can always be found at an altar.

Just a few weeks ago, I was honored to gather around the old rock altar with four pastors and members of six separate congregations. All of these churches were connected through their history to this pile of stones. We had made it a priority to search it out and meet in the woods to pray. We came to rebuild the altar and lay up some new stones of our own.

The presence of the Lord was so powerful that afternoon. We repented for division and divisiveness. We asked God to send revival once again to the upstate of South Carolina. The prayers offered at that altar 80 years ago brought a response. I have no doubt there are still prayers waiting to be answered today.

I wonder might there be an old abandoned altar near you? No, it doesn't have to be a pile of rocks out in the woods. Perhaps it is waiting for you in your church, at your bedside or near the spot you are currently reading this.

My friend, it is time that we return to and rebuild the altar. Time to revisit the sacred sites where God visited powerfully

in the past and remember the wonders of the Lord. It is time to build some new altars as well. To set aside a meeting place between God and man. A place to come lay down our lives as living sacrifices and invite the Lord to come fill us with power from on high.

I am certain, that just as we found that pile of stones had been patiently waiting on us, there is an altar waiting on you. So go ahead: Lay up another stone, pray one more prayer and expect God to move once again. {eo}