

Watch for the Next Great Awakening

This is not a time to despair over the future. God has amazing surprises in store for us today.

We believe the church is standing on the verge of a great awakening. But to be able to help usher it in, Christians need to know what awakening, or “revival,” is. Many have prayed for revival without understanding what they are praying for.

Some think of revival in terms of a massive harvest of souls. When revival comes, the lost will crowd in and get saved. They picture a time of rapid church growth.

Other people describe revival in terms of repentance and holiness in the church. They think, When revival comes, everyone will weep and fall on the floor and repent of their sin, and the church will become holy.

Still others define revival in terms of societal change. In true revival, drunkenness, pornography and drug abuse go out of style. Crime is greatly reduced. A new level of morality in the nation releases a new level of prosperity. All these changes have accompanied most true revivals.

But if these are what we pray for when we seek revival, we don't really understand what revival is. Repentance, harvest and societal change are the results of revival. They are not the essence of it. If we are going to “pray in” revival, we need to understand what it is.

The simplest definition of revival is, “God visiting His

church.” My favorite quote about it comes from the Welsh revival. The Spirit of God visited one village and the town was transformed.

In the midst of all the changes, someone overheard two children talking. One remarked, “I don’t understand what’s happening in our town.” The other answered: “Don’t you know? Jesus lives here now!”

That is revival! After diligently studying revival for the last 25 years, I (Robert) have found that the one common denominator in every true revival is that people suddenly know they are in the presence of God.

When we talk about God’s presence coming into His church, some object, “But isn’t God always present?” Actually, the Bible describes different levels of God’s presence.

God’s omnipresence. When we speak of God’s omnipresence, we mean that God is present everywhere. No matter where you go, He is there.

God’s indwelling presence. When you trusted Jesus, the Holy Spirit came to live inside you. If you know Jesus, the Spirit of God is present in you in a way that is different from His general presence everywhere.

God’s manifest presence. God’s manifest presence becomes apparent when God reveals Himself in a given time and place in a way that is discernable to your physical senses. God is always here, but we don’t always discern Him. When God manifests His presence, He makes His presence known in a tangible way.

When God manifests His presence to His church corporately, we call it revival. Revival is the glory of God coming into His temple.

Imagine His coming to a college dormitory, an entire city or a nation. The presence of God comes down and people are changed. Out of God's presence, all the effects of revival flow:

1. His life is a magnet to draw the lost.
2. His holiness moves sinful believers to repentance.
3. His power brings healing, miracles and faith for answered prayer.

The Key to Revival

If you are praying for revival, the most important thing you can know is this: Revival is not an "it."

It is not a movement. It is not an activity. It is not an event.

Revival is Him. It is Jesus visiting His church.

Jesus has made us an offer. In Revelation 3:20, He says: "'Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in" (NKJV).

We often tell unbelievers that this means Jesus is knocking at the door of their hearts. That's not really what the verse is about.

It's about Jesus knocking at the door of His church. He is saying: "Let me in! If anyone will open the door I will come in and sit down and fellowship with you."

But how do we open the door?

Jeremiah 29:13 says, "You will seek Me and find Me, when you seek Me with all your heart." That is God's condition. Jesus wants to come to a people who are seeking Him with all their hearts.

Revival does not come from urging repentance (even though God wants us to repent). It does not result from seeking unity (although unity is important). It does not come from chasing after the harvest.

Revival is not found by seeking revival. Revival comes—God's presence comes—when God's people seek Him with all their hearts.

We believe God's presence is about to visit His church again. We believe the great revivals of the past were merely the first fruits, the foretaste, of what is to come. We believe God is about to bring the big one.

Since the early 1990s, God has been preparing the ground. He has removed obstacles to the flow of His Spirit. He has restored an understanding of His power and gifts.

We are in the final stages of preparation. Jesus is knocking. It's time to open the door and receive His presence.

God's Word gives very specific instructions on how to usher in His presence. Throughout history, when God's people have followed His instructions, His presence has come.

We've looked at three levels of God's presence: His omnipresence, His indwelling presence and His manifest presence.

But there is a fourth level of God's presence. The fourth level is His dwelling presence, or Shekinah.

God's manifest presence can be pictured as a brief visitation of the Spirit. God's Spirit comes and "visits" us for a moment, a day or a year. It's a time of tremendous blessing and change, but then it ends.

God loves to visit us, but He wants more than that. He wants to dwell with us. He wants to make His habitation with us.

God wants His presence to abide in the midst of His people. When that happens—when His glory comes to dwell with us—we call it His Shekinah glory.

The word Shekinah comes from the Hebrew verb shakan, which means "to dwell." The Shekinah is not just a visitation; it is God's presence dwelling continuously in a given place.

What does it take for God to dwell in our midst? The answer is found in Exodus 25:8. In this verse, God tells Moses, "'Let them construct a sanctuary for Me, so that I may dwell among them.'"

The word "sanctuary" means a holy place, a special place, a

“set apart” place. God says that if His people will prepare the place, His presence will come.

The word “dwell” in this passage is shakan. God says, “Prepare a place for Me, so that My Shekinah can live among My people.”

God wants His presence to dwell with us. Our responsibility is to prepare a place. He wants us to make a special place in our hearts where His presence can dwell.

He wants our homes to be places where His glory dwells. He wants the church to be a sanctuary filled with His Shekinah. When someone comes into your home or church, they should be able to say, “I sense that God is here.”

God gave specific instructions on how to “build” a special place where His presence can abide. He said, in essence, “I am giving you a pattern to follow: The tabernacle must be marked by continual worship, continual thanksgiving, continual fellowship with the Spirit and continual prayer” (see Ex. 29:42-46).

To understand how to experience God’s Shekinah, we must see two things. First, where there is prayer, praise and thanksgiving, God’s presence will come.

We all have experienced that. That is visitation. We all have experienced times in the midst of praise and worship when the atmosphere changes and, suddenly, God is there.

The second principle is this: Where there is continual prayer, praise and thanksgiving, God’s presence will dwell. Where the

presence of God dwells in power, there is revival and everything is changed.

Ushering in His Presence

This is what happened in the days of the early church. Miracles were a frequent occurrence because of the hours the disciples spent daily in prayer. They met to pray every morning and evening. There were also times of prayer during the day, and watches of prayer throughout the night.

Just as there were set times for sacrifice in the temple, so there were set times for a “sacrifice of praise” in the church. This was one of the most distinguishing characteristics of the early church. They would come together and praise and worship God throughout the day and night. That’s why it says in Acts 1 they continually devoted themselves to prayer (see v. 14).

The disciples divided the day and night into “watches” based on the vigils of the Roman military. They did this wherever the church was established. Hebrews 13:15 says they continually offered up a sacrifice of praise.

The purpose was to keep the fire of the Spirit continually burning. For more than 300 years, wherever the church was planted, they would seek the presence of God through continual watches of prayer. Out of that ministry to God, the power flowed.

The early church was a temple in which the Shekinah glory of God was evident.

The key to fulfilling our mission as a church is to dwell in

the presence of God, continually experiencing His power and love. That's why the No. 1 ministry of the church is not a ministry to people; it's a ministry to God. We minister to God through continual prayer and praise.

In the book of Acts, we read that the church was "ministering to the Lord." When we minister to God in the daily watches, He comes and dwells with us. As He dwells with us, He releases the power we need to minister to people.

God is calling His people to stand watch in prayer that His glory may come.

Right now, allow God to release faith in your heart for revival. Thank Him that He is coming to His people. Thank Him that He is preparing His church to host His presence.

Claim the promise of Hosea 6:2-3: "He will revive us; on the third day He will raise us up, that we may live in His sight. Let us know, let us pursue the knowledge of the Lord. His going forth is established as the morning; He will come to us like the rain, like the latter and former rain to the earth."

As we watch we will see God's presence revealed. As we watch we will see revival return. The next great awakening is at hand. It's time to watch!

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