

September 17, 2006

“Revive Us, O Lord!” (Part 1: What is Revival?)

Isaiah 40: 1-11

[**Click here for notes in the bulletin**](#)

I wanted to talk to you about revival...Spiritual revival. When I say revival what do you think of? Most probably remember the days when an evangelist or other special speaker would visit the church and hold special meetings over a weekend.

I heard of one traveling evangelist who always put on a grand finale at his revival meetings, When he was to preach at a church, he would secretly hire a small boy to sit in the ceiling rafters with a dove in a cage. Toward the end of his sermon, the preacher would shout for the Holy Spirit to come down, and the boy in the rafters would dutifully release the dove.

At one revival meeting, however, nothing happened when the preacher called for the Holy Spirit to descend. He again raised his arms and exclaimed: "Come down, Holy Spirit!" Still no sign of the dove.

The preacher then heard the anxious voice of a small boy call down from the rafters: "Sir, a big black cat just ate the Holy Spirit. Shall I throw down the cat?"

What is Revival?

Obviously, I am not talking about special meetings with a guest speaker. What I am talking about is a need for spiritual reform, spiritual renewal, spiritual restoration...a time of spiritual refreshing. Perhaps the best definition I have heard for revival came from Duncan Campbell. He described revival as “a community saturated with God.” One time a guest preacher came to a church I was attending and had us point to ourselves and say, “Revival is God pointing His finger at me!” Revival must start with you. Yet, revival involves more than personal renewal. Nicky Gumble has written, “As individuals come alive to the reality of Christ, and this experience is multiplied in the lives of others, the church feels a new unity of faith and purpose. As hearts are filled with the love of Christ, the dynamic for a compelling evangelism is born. Society inevitably feel the impact of the renewal. Restitutions are made. Broken homes are reunited. Public moral standards improve. (Nicky Gumbel, *The Heart of Revival*).

Why is Revival Needed?

We are going to be looking at the second half of the book of Isaiah which starts with chapter 40. At this point in Israel history the Israelites are in exile in Babylon. Babylonia was the region of modern-day Iraq (southern Iraq). Babylon was the political and religious capital of Babylonia and its empire (located about 50 miles south of where Baghdad is today). In 605 B.C. the Babylonian empire took control of Israel, and after a failed Jewish rebellion, Jerusalem fell in March or 597 B.C., leaving Israel humiliated, frustrated, depressed, bewildered and desolate (The Heart of Revival page 18). It is into this situation that the prophet Isaiah speaks and his message is, “The exile will be over soon.”

The message of exile and the need for restoration is of great relevance to us today. Human beings are in a state of spiritual exile. All have sinned and have been separated from God, and need a Savior. The Bible reveals that through Jesus, God seeks to deliver us from captivity to sin. In a more specific sense, modern Western culture is undergoing a kind of exile experience. Our society has attempted to shut out God, and in many ways has succeeded, with disastrous results (as you can see every time you read the newspapers or hear the news). And what about the church? Doesn't the church also show signs of needing revival?

Is Revival Coming?

Isaiah gives us hope. He tells us to lift up our eyes and see what God is doing and what He is about to do. We are told to stop looking down at our problems and to look up at God. There are 4 voices in the first eleven verses of Isaiah 40. They shout with excitement and encouragement, messages of hope for our spiritual revival:

1. The first voice shouts: "Sins are pardoned, sad days are gone!"

Isa 40:1-2 NLT

"Comfort, comfort my people," says your God. 2 "Speak tenderly to Jerusalem. Tell her that her sad days are gone and that her sins are pardoned. Yes, the LORD has punished her in full for all her sins."

Many people today have made a mess of their lives and would love the opportunity to make a new start. Here in these verses *God* speaks and He speaks to "*my people*," and He says to them, "your sad days are over." Notice the repetition of the word "comfort." This suggests emotional intensity. The Hebrew word for "tell" means "keeps telling." In other words, God is speaking with intense love to His people, speaking to their hearts. He keeps telling them sad days are over, you are pardoned, Jesus has paid the price for your sins.

The Israelites were not in exile because the Babylonian gods were stronger than the God of Israel. The exile was caused by sin. Sin causes exile from the presence of God in our society today and causing exile from the presence of God in your life today. But God says to you, the "sad days are gone." The same is true for you. You no longer need to be in exile, banished from God. God is telling His ministers to comfort His people. He is telling me to speak tenderly to you and tell you, your sins are pardoned, the warfare is over. Be comforted, the sin that causes your sad days is pardoned by Jesus. Your sad days are over. Cheer up, your sins are forgiven.

2. The second voice shouts: "God is coming, prepare the way!"

Isa 40:3-5 NLT

Listen! I hear the voice of someone shouting, "Make a highway for the LORD through the wilderness. Make a straight, smooth road through the desert for our God. 4 Fill the valleys and level the hills. Straighten out the curves and smooth off the rough spots. 5

Then the glory of the LORD will be revealed, and all people will see it together. The LORD has spoken!"

These verses were quoted by John the Baptist who calls for repentance and faith in preparation of receiving pardon of sin through Jesus the Son of God. Deep down in every human being, consciously or unconsciously there is a longing to experience the presence of God. Listen! John says, God has come, behold Jesus, who takes away the sin of the world.

In many parts of the world, people prepare for the visit of a King or other royal visitor or leader by building roads, flattening the bumps, and filling in the potholes. God is coming to show mercy. We must get into a frame of spirit that is prepared to receive Him. Repentance is the way of preparing for Him. What do you need to make straight in your life (what do you need to straighten out in your life)? What rough spots do you need to smooth out. What valleys need to be filled in? What hills need to be leveled? Listen! It is time to prepare for the Lord. You must be willing to turn from sin and turn to Jesus. Then, as it says in verse 5, the glory of the Lord will be revealed. The NT tells us that the glory of the Lord is revealed in Jesus. Verses 3-5 promises God's presence to those who turn from sin and trust in Jesus. Now is the time to prepare yourselves, that God may come and renew you.

3. The third voice shouts: "Trust God's Word, it stands forever!"

Isa 40:6-8 NLT

A voice said, "Shout!"

I asked, "What should I shout?"

"Shout that people are like the grass that dies away. Their beauty fades as quickly as the beauty of flowers in a field. 7 The grass withers, and the flowers fade beneath the breath of the LORD. And so it is with people. 8 The grass withers, and the flowers fade, but the word of our God stands forever."

There is a quest today for something that can be trusted. For something that is permanent. These verses tell us "the word of our God stands forever." Today in our culture a generation is growing up deprived of security. There is more and more doubt as to what if anything can really offer meaning or purpose to our lives. The things our society seek are things that will not last...they all pass away. Our very lives are not permanent. Like the grass that dies away...beauty, so worshipped in our society, fades as quickly as the beauty of the flowers in a field. Is there anything that is permanent? Is there anything that does not change? Is there anything we can trust? Yes, "the word of God stands forever."

Voltaire, the 18th century critic of Christianity, wrote at that time that within 100 years the Bible would be obsolete and would have gone out of circulation altogether. Within 100 years of his death, his own residence (where he had lived) had been converted into a Bible depot, publishing Bibles by the hour. (Heart of Revival, page 27).

But it is not just the book that continues to exist and be a best seller, it is the words of the Bible that last forever and continue to give hope. They are words of life. Within the Bible we find words to give our life meaning, purpose and security. We can trust when it tells us that God has come in the person of Jesus to pardon our sins and give us spiritual life.

4. The forty voice shouts: “Look at God!”

Isa 40:9-11 NLT

Messenger of good news, shout to Zion from the mountaintops! Shout louder to Jerusalem--do not be afraid. Tell the towns of Judah, "Your God is coming!" 10 Yes, the Sovereign LORD is coming in all his glorious power. He will rule with awesome strength. See, he brings his reward with him as he comes. 11 He will feed his flock like a shepherd. He will carry the lambs in his arms, holding them close to his heart. He will gently lead the mother sheep with their young.

How is a new start possible for our lives? How can we know the presence of the Lord? How do we hear the word of God? The prophet points to the answer: Your God is coming! He has glorious power. He gives life and words of life. He will rule with awesome strength and brings His reward with Him as He comes. He is close to His people (He will feed His flock like a shepherd). He shows mercy and love (He will carry the lambs in His arms, holding them close to His heart). God is all powerful and all loving. Only Jesus can give us spiritual life. Don't trust in anything else for life. Look at God, He is your hope.

I have good news for you today. Today your sadness can be over. Your sadness is due to being exiled from God and sin is causing that exile. But God wants to pardon your sin if you will turn or turn again to Jesus. His word can be trusted. Everything else in this life will pass away. Look at God. He is powerful and loving. He can change or renew your life. He desires to carry you and hold you close to His heart and gently lead you. Your God is coming! Prepare, receive Him, and be revived.