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Based on The Heart of Revival by Nicky Gumbel © 1997

“Revive Us O Lord” – (Part 4)

What is the Vision?

Isaiah 54

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We are working our way through a series of messages called Revive Us O Lord.

What is Revival? It is spiritual refreshing. It is God pointing His finger at me.

What is the heart of Revival? – It is the love of Almighty God – “God loves you [*and me*] unconditionally, wholeheartedly, and continually.”

What is the message of Revival? – It is a message of contrasts that were fulfilled by Jesus Christ who died in our place so we could become the righteousness of God in Christ. Because of what He accomplished, we, who trust in Him, are the children of God and we have eternal life in Him.

Nicky Gumbel, the creator of the Alpha course and several other studies that we have used in our small groups, tells of a man named William Carey, who was led to Christ by a fellow shoemaker at age 14. Do they even have shoemakers anymore? I remember as a kid going to the shoemaker to have new heels or even souls put on pairs of shoes. Back then the shoes were made of such good leather that the heels and souls would wear out before the tops, so you could have them repaired. We used to get “taps” put on our heels to help them last longer (we just liked the noise they made when you walked – that was cool). One sign of getting old is that you go off on unrelated tangents and reminisce. Anyway – William Carey accepted Christ and began to burn with a desire *to know Jesus Christ and to make Him known*. Doesn’t that sound familiar? That is the motto of our church – **Knowing Jesus and Making Him Known** – in case you don’t realize it.

Well William Carey met with quite a bit of resistance getting this vision off the ground. The general Protestant church of his time (1800) didn’t share the same view. Carey had a vision for the lost of the “world” to find Jesus. He stressed that Jesus commissioned the church to “go,” and that included the entire globe – “to preach to all the inhabitants, without exception or limitation.” At this time, the churches had no mandate for foreign missions. John Calvin believed that the Great Commission was not limited – it said “Go Ye” and that means “you” and “now.” Carey then went on to preach a powerful sermon in the church of his time from this very chapter we are going to look at today – Isaiah 54. He ended with this powerful line:

“Expect great things from God – Attempt great things for God.”

Many sneered back then that the church sent a shoemaker (cobbler) to convert the world. As Yogi Berra once said – it was like déjà vu all over again. How did the people receive Jesus Christ in His day and location? “Isn’t this the Carpenter?”

William Carey is now known as the “father of modern missions.” He played a major role in many coming to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ all over the world. As a result, missionaries reached out into previously unknown corners of the world.

As we get into chapter 54 of Isaiah, the historical background is still “the exile.” Israel is in exile because they turned from God and His commands. *“Israel is compared to a woman who feels deserted, robbed of her children, husband, and home. But these are the very three things God is going to restore to her.”* (p. 81 – *The Heart of Revival*). The key element in this chapter is “response.” We need to look at the last week’s sermon and **respond** to what God has done through

His servant – **Messiah**. He has removed sin and made possible fruitfulness, peace, and righteousness. Today we will look at restoring the survivors of Israel.

THE COMMAND TO GROW AND TO GO – (Is. 54:1-3)

Look who is being spoken to here – the barren woman. To be barren was a disgrace in ancient Israel. Why would she be told to sing and rejoice? God is promising to give her more children than she can imagine. She is to expand her tent to accommodate the increase. This was the job of a woman back then. They took care of increasing and decreasing the size of the family tent as needed. It wasn't too tough. First they needed to stretch new skins to make up new sections – “*stretch your tent curtains wide.*” Then they needed to lengthen the holding ropes to accommodate the larger dimensions – “*lengthen your cords.*” Finally, to keep this whole expanded thing anchored to the ground so it won't blow away, they were to secure this thing - “*strengthen your stakes.*” They were about to spread out in every direction – “*to the right and to the left.*”

Today tents are made much differently and less accommodating. Tony (in the sound room) and I have spent many nights camping in tents with the scouts. We were never looking to expand our tent. We had all we could do to get through the nights as it was. We camped in the summer, winter, spring, and fall. The only thing we were looking to expand was the amount of warm clothing we could get inside the sleeping bag. A lot of churches are like this too. The major concern and the priority of the ministry is to keep the ones inside the church as comfortable as possible – that warm fuzzy fellowship of a few close brothers and sisters in Christ. But what is God looking for?

God longs for the church to expand and grow. There are three things we need to address for this to happen:

- 1- **We need to build strong bases** (v. 2) - - “*strengthen your stakes*”. How can we strengthen our foundation? “We can strengthen our love and devotion to God through prayer, through studying the Bible, through building home groups, running training courses, and every other method that helps to strengthen the church.” (p. 83). While this is taking place and being built, we go out to reach the community.
- 2- **We are called to have more children** (v. 1) - - We have the same calling in the church today as the people of Israel had thousands of years ago – “to be a light and a blessing to the rest of the world.” (p. 83). God never changes. His will for His people then is the same as His will for His people today. We pray in the Lord's Prayer – *Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven*. What is God's will for us? **2 Peter 3:9 – “The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.”** He wants everyone out there to come to know Him through Jesus Christ our Lord. God has made His will in this regard very clear. We can trust God's promise and rejoice (v. 1) – knowing that as we follow through on this promise, more people will be added to His church.
- 3- **We are required to have a wide vision** (v. 3) - - The gospel of Jesus Christ is public truth for the entire world.

The **1974 Lausanne Covenant** stated this regarding evangelization: “*To evangelize is to spread the good news that Jesus Christ died for our sins and was raised from the dead according to the Scriptures, and that as the reigning Lord he now offers the forgiveness of sins and the liberating gift of the Spirit to all who repent and believe. ... The results of evangelism include obedience to Christ, incorporation into His church, and responsible service in the world.*”

While about 1/3 of the population of the world professes to be Christian, there are 2/3 out there (at least) who do not know about Jesus Christ and the salvation He offers by His sacrifice and the shedding of His blood. We have the message of life and salvation for the world entrusted to us by God. We can't just sit around and play “church” and selfishly enjoy what we have.

We need to get the message out!

Leslie Newbigin – *“Participation in Christ means participation in His mission to the world, and therefore true pastoral care, true training in the Christian life, and true use of the means of grace will be precisely in and for the discharge of this missionary task. ...”*

Reaching out to the world around us is NOT “empire building.” It is a response to God’s call to see the kingdom of God coming in power. (p. 85). This is not the task of any one particular church or denomination. As we work together for the common good, we begin to see this goal as a reality. Look at the ALPHA course for example. It is run – as is – in every denomination around the world fulfilling the great commission. The **1966 Berlin Congress on Evangelism** stated, *“Our goal is nothing short of the evangelization of the human race in this generation.”* **Billy Graham** said, *“The evangelistic harvest is always urgent. The destiny of men and of nations is always being decided. Every generation is crucial; every generation is strategic. But we are not responsible for the past generation, and we cannot bear full responsibility for the next one. However, we do have our generation. God will hold us responsible at the Judgment Seat of Christ for how well we fulfilled our responsibilities and took advantage of our opportunities.”* (p. 85).

This is not the task of the clergy only. **Pope John Paul II** stated in 1990 at Vera Cruz, Mexico, *“The work of proclaiming the Gospel to all nations is a responsibility which falls to all and to each one of those who by the Lord’s grace are and call themselves Christians.”* **Billy Graham** said, *“I believe one of the greatest priorities of the Church today is to mobilize the laity to do the work of evangelism.”*

THE IMPORTANCE OF GETTING OUR PRIORITIES RIGHT – (Is. 54:4-10)

The prophet moves from an image of a growing family back to the analogy of marriage (as we have seen over the last couple of weeks). In our first section today we saw an emphasis on fruitfulness, but here it is PEACE. The opening words of this section of text are – **“Do not be afraid.”(v.4)**. This phrase – this command from God occurs 366 times in the Bible – that’s a reminder once per day including leap year. When God reveals His awesome plans we have a tendency to fear, but there is no need to. God is assuring them and us that the past weaknesses and failures are behind us. Listen to these words – *“Do not fear disgrace; you will not be humiliated. You will forget the shame of your youth and remember no more the reproach of your widowhood.”* (v. 4). There’s no reason to fear because *“your Maker is your husband.”* (v. 5). We have seen Isaiah use the analogy of our relationship with God being like a wife with a husband as a common one in Scripture: (Hosea 1-3; Is. 62:5; Jer. 2:2; Ez. 16:8; Mk. 2:19). The prophets had said that Israel was like an unfaithful wife.

- 1- **God will restore their relationship with Him** - - *“For a brief moment I abandoned you, but with deep compassion I will bring you back”* (v. 7). Israel is in exile at this point, but even the exile and the separation they feel in the flesh is insignificant against the greatness of God’s love and reconciliation by which He will take His people back.
- 2- **His kindness is endless and everlasting compared to the short burst of anger at his people’s sin** - - *“In a surge of anger I hid my face from you for a moment, but with everlasting kindness I will have compassion on you, says the Lord your Redeemer”* (v.8).
- 3- **There is permanence to His love** - - *“To me this is like the days of Noah, when I swore that the waters of Noah would never again cover the earth. So now I have sworn not to be angry with you, never to rebuke you again.”* (v. 9). If you remember the great flood of Noah’s time, God made a covenant with Noah that He would NEVER again destroy the land by a flood, and He set His BOW in the sky as a reminder of that covenant. Here He swears again never to punish Israel (and the church) again like that. He is making a covenant of love and peace with His people here again.

We saw last week that this is all dependent on the work of the servant, for *“the punishment that brought us PEACE was upon Him.”* (Is. 53:5).
SHALOM – “peace” – a sense of well-being of every kind.

The temptation to go after other gods is always present for the people of God. Don’t you feel the pull in your life – your personal life? There is so much now to seek after. I have had people say to me that things are so much worse now – so much more available – and so much more decadent. There’s pornography, the internet, homosexuality, and all kinds of promiscuity right in our face. It’s so hard to steer clear of all that - isn’t it? Do you think it was any less prevalent back then? I have learned that things haven’t really changed all that much in many thousands of years. The fact is that there was and is and always will be a strong temptation for following something other than God. “The temptation to go after other gods is an ever-present one.” (p. 87). It may be obvious –like money, sex, power, or it may be more subtle like even serving God in some way. Anything that we put before God can become an idol for us, even our ministry or service to the church of God. Our primary love **MUST** be for our Maker, who is our husband – anything else is adultery.

THE PROMISE OF VICTORY – (Is. 54:11-17)

In this section of the chapter, the prophet moves from the family to the image of the home and the city. The keyword in this section is **“righteousness”** (v. 14). We see in the text a rebuilding of the city of Jerusalem. It reminds us of the book of Nehemiah, where the rebuilding of the walls of the city is taken to represent the building of the church of Jesus Christ.

1 - God promises that the glory of Jerusalem will be restored - - Listen to what God is promising. He is talking about the splendor of a city that reflects His glory. *“O afflicted city, lashed by storms and not comforted, I will build you with stones of turquoise, your foundations with sapphires. I will make your battlements of rubies, your gates of sparkling jewels, and all your walls of precious stones.”* (v. 11-12).

2 - God promises wonderful privileges for the people of that city - - The prophet said back in Is. 50:4 – *“He wakens me morning by morning, wakens my ear to listen like one being taught.”* In our text the answer is given – *“All your sons will be **taught by the Lord**, and great will be your children’s peace”* (v. 13). They will be given all they need for rebuilding, and God will show them what to do.

3 – God promises his protection - - *“In righteousness you will be established”* (v. 14). The work of the servant of Is. 53 was to “justify many.” All the children of God are righteous in His sight, and God promises His protection.

A - He promises that “tyranny will be far from you” (v. 14a). The tyranny he speaks of here is internal to the community – a disturbance of society from within. “Today one of the main threats to the Church is the internal threat of disunity.” (p. 89).

B – He promises that – “Terror will be far removed; it will not come near you” (v. 14a), (v. 15) – *“If anyone does attack you, it will not be my doing.”* God is sovereign and no attack against His people can succeed. We are told that even the weapons that are created by the hands of man are under God’s control. He is sovereign over the intention behind the attack according to our text. He created the destroyer who destroys or brings havoc. In other words, God permits, overrules, and brings good out of evil.

C – He is sovereign over the outcome - - ***“No weapon forged against you will prevail, and you will refute every tongue that accuses you”*** (v. 17). Listen to this ... *“This is the heritage of the servants of the LORD”* (v. 17c). Isaiah has used the word servant in the singular up to this point, but here he says – “servants” – plural. “The saving work of the ‘Servant’ creates ‘servants’ who will be vindicated or saved by God, which means delivered, given salvation. Literally, it means, “made righteous,” as we saw last week. The ‘servants’ status before Almighty God is most honorable.

Have you ever faced a situation that seemed so negative you couldn’t understand why God would allow such a thing to happen to you only to find Him using you in that situation to minister to someone else that could only have been reached by you at that time? God in sovereignty was bringing good out of the situation. I could share many stories of this occurring in my life over the past twenty-five plus years of walking with the Lord. I remember once while I was in Sloan Kettering Hospital after major surgery thinking about my situation and why God would allow that to happen to me. Then a young man walked into my room and asked if I were a Christian out of the blue. He said he was walking by and felt he needed to come in and say hello and when he saw the bible on my night table he knew why. We shared the Word together and I prayed for him each day I was there. He was a new believer going through his own cancer battle. A few weeks later, he called me to say he was in a room with another Christian who had the same cancer I had and was very anxious about the surgery he was facing the next day. He asked if I would speak to him on the phone and pray with him – which I did and we developed a friendship for several years after that. God didn’t give me cancer; He didn’t put me in the situation I was in. He did use the situation for His good purposes by His sovereignty. **No weapon formed against His servants will prevail.**

The situations we face are part of a bigger battle. It’s spiritual warfare, and it is part of the overall battle the Church faces on a regular basis. Revival is the will of God, but it is also something that is always opposed. Through the centuries, every revival has met fierce opposition. John Wesley and the Methodists had windows broken and houses, shops, and workshops shamelessly looted, etc. **Arthur Wallis wrote**, *“If we find a revival that is not spoken against, we had better look again to ensure that it is a revival.”* The Christian faith is opposed in many ways today and has been since the first century church.

Paul wrote, **2 Cor 4:8-9** - ***“We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed...”***

He went on to say, 2 Cor 4:16-18 – “Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.”

Paul was able to speak with such confidence because of the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. He knew and wrote that the same Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead will also raise us up with Jesus. Because of the resurrection, we are confident that ***“no weapon forged against us will prevail.”*** God’s vision is often bigger than ours. God has a worldwide vision and we shouldn’t settle for anything less. He wants worldwide revival, and He has prepared us and protected us for just that. He desires to bring this vision about, and He has the power to do it. He is sovereign and ultimately will not allow anything to stand in His way.

Paul wrote in **Rom. 8:28** – ***“In all things God works for the good of those who love him and are called according to his purpose.”*** Our vision should be what Jesus called us to: ***“go and make disciples of all nations.”*** We need to respond to this call and this vision. As William Carey said, ***“we are to expect great things from God and attempt great things for God.”***

We are: to Grow and Go – to get our Priorities Right – and know we are Promised Victory by God.