

Practicing This One Thing:
How to Pray for Revival
Isaiah 63:18-65:8

October 8, 2017

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Text Introduction: On August 13, I asked you to accept a challenge with me. We have been calling our challenge, “This One Thing.” This is a call to prayer. Jesus said, “My house shall be a House of Prayer.” It’s the one thing to call the meeting house of God. The disciples asked, “Jesus, teach us to pray.” It’s the one thing the disciples asked Jesus to teach them.

On that Sunday, August 13, I asked you to take three action steps with me. First, we would agree to pray about “one thing” each week. I also challenged us to adopt a prayer activity of our own. Some of you have started, and I am thankful. Others will join us as you feel the prompting of the Holy Spirit.

The other challenge was to prioritize October 8-11 for four days of Prayer Revival. Today is October 8. I want to talk to you today about how to pray for revival.

On August 13, I told you the story about Jeremiah Calvin Lanphier. The year 1856 marked the thirteenth straight year of decline among the major denominations of the United States. In 1857 a businessman left his career to become a missionary in New York City. The man was Lanphier. Noticing the downcast countenance of businessmen in NYC, Lanphier decided upon a noon time prayer meeting to invite others to come and pray with him. (Roy Fish, *When Heaven Touched Earth: The Awakening of 1858 and Its Effects on Baptists*, p. 33) Actually, I have now read a subsequent account of this call to prayer which suggests that Lanphier stood on the street and prayed, “Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?” The Lord’s answer was to call people to pray. (Alvin Reid, “A Lone Man and United Prayer: Jeremiah Lanphier and the Prayer Revival,” AlvinReid.Com, January 29, 2014.)

“It is God’s will through His wonderful grace, that the prayers of His saints should be one of the great principal means of carrying on the designs of Christ’s kingdom in the world. When God has something very great to accomplish for His church, it is His will that there should precede it the extraordinary prayers of His people . . . ” (Jonathan Edwards as quoted by Alvin Reid. Reid, “Prayer for Revival,” AlvinReid.com, June 11, 2014.)

So, how do we pray for revival? Let’s consider this Isaiah text.

Text: Your holy people had a possession
for a little while,
but our enemies have trampled down
Your sanctuary.

¹⁹ We have become like those You never ruled over,
like those not called by Your name.

64 If only You would tear the heavens open
and come down,
so that mountains would quake at Your presence—

² as fire kindles the brushwood,
and fire causes water to boil—
to make Your name known to Your enemies,
so that nations will tremble at Your presence!
³ When You did awesome works
that we did not expect,
You came down,
and the mountains quaked at Your presence.
⁴ From ancient times no one has heard,
no one has listened,
no eye has seen any God except You,
who acts on behalf of the one who waits for Him.
⁵ You welcome the one who joyfully does what is right;
they remember You in Your ways.
But we have sinned, and You were angry.
How can we be saved if we remain in our sins?
⁶ All of us have become like something unclean,
and all our righteous acts are like a polluted garment;
all of us wither like a leaf,
and our iniquities carry us away like the wind.
⁷ No one calls on Your name,
striving to take hold of You.
For You have hidden Your face from us
and made us melt because of our iniquity.
⁸ Yet LORD, You are our Father;
we are the clay, and You are our potter;
we all are the work of Your hands.
⁹ LORD, do not be terribly angry
or remember our iniquity forever.
Please look—all of us are Your people!
¹⁰ Your holy cities have become a wilderness;
Zion has become a wilderness,
Jerusalem a desolation.
¹¹ Our holy and beautiful temple,
where our fathers praised You,
has been burned with fire,
and all that was dear to us lies in ruins.
¹² LORD, after all this, will You restrain Yourself?
Will You keep silent and afflict severely?

65 “I was sought by those who did not ask;
I was found by those who did not seek Me.
I said: Here I am, here I am,
to a nation that was not called by My name.
² I spread out My hands all day long
to a rebellious people
who walk in the wrong path,
following their own thoughts.

³These people continually provoke Me
to My face,
sacrificing in gardens,
burning incense on bricks,
⁴sitting among the graves,
spending nights in secret places,
eating the meat of pigs,
and putting polluted broth in their bowls.
⁵They say, 'Keep to yourself,
don't come near me, for I am too holy for you!'
These practices are smoke in My nostrils,
a fire that burns all day long.
⁶It is written before Me:
I will not keep silent, but I will repay;
I will repay them fully
⁷for your iniquities and the iniquities
of your fathers together,"
says the LORD.
"Because they burned incense on the mountains
and reproached Me on the hills,
I will reward them fully
for their former deeds."
⁸The LORD says this:
As the new wine is found in a bunch of grapes,
and one says, 'Don't destroy it,
for there's some good in it,'
so I will act because of My servants
and not destroy them all.

Introduction: We call Isaiah a prophetic book. More precisely, we call Isaiah, along with Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, and Daniel, **major prophets**. The remaining books of the Old Testament are called minor prophets. The terms major and minor refer to the size of these books, not the degree of their importance. (Lamentations is considered with these books as a major prophet because it is written by Jeremiah.)

Isaiah 1:1 indicates that Isaiah preached these prophetic messages contained in the book during the reigns of Uzziah (also called Azariah), Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah. Second Kings 15-20 gives us a reference point for the time of Isaiah's prophecy. The years covered are 740 B.C. to at least 701 B.C. Some would say that there is evidence that Isaiah's prophetic ministry lasted until nearly 680 B.C. We must remind ourselves that this time frame puts us in the midst of the divided kingdom (Israel in the North, Judah in the South). In fact, even though Isaiah's prophecy is focused on Judah in the South, the fall of the Northern kingdom would have happened during his ministry. "Judah faces extinction at the hands of the cruel Assyrians. In this crucial hour of national emergency, God sends Isaiah—a unique man with an unpleasant message. The nation of Judah is rotten to the core and ripe for judgment. Her habitual sins of idolatry, hypocrisy, injustice and corruption have not escaped the notice of her holy God. His righteous wrath will soon fall upon king and commoner alike, that all might learn that the Lord Almighty cannot and will not be mocked." (*The Daily Walk Bible*, p. 809.)

Here's a Basic Outline of the Whole Book:

Chapters 1-39 Judgment

Chapters 40-66 Comfort

So, Isaiah 63-65 is obviously in the portion of comfort. We might say here is Isaiah's hope for his nation. The portion we have read is a prayer. It guides us in our attempt to pray for revival. I want you to see four principles to guide us in praying for revival.

Recognize the Desperation of our Situation

Isaiah 63:18-19 address the desperation of the situation in Isaiah's time.

Isaiah's tone is reminiscent of the Psalmist's tone as revealed in Psalm 42. Psalm 42:1-3 says,

As a deer longs for streams of water,
so I long for You, God.
² I thirst for God, the living God.
When can I come and appear before God?
³ My tears have been my food day and night,
while all day long people say to me,
"Where is your God?"

My fear is that we will not desire revival until we become desperate about our situation. The reason for the Psalmist's desperation is the apparent "absence of God." "While they say to me all day long, "Where is your God?" This must indicate the mockery of the watching world. Doesn't our world do that today? The watching world continues to ask, "Where is your God?"

Instead of admitting that there is an absence of God, we make excuses for God not being seen. We say things like "Well, we don't have all the evidence." Or, we might say, "God doesn't work like He used to work." We might say, "Well, people don't respond like they did years ago." As long as we accept these excuses, there will be no agonizing, no desperation over the absence of God.

We must come to that place where we would say, "God, unless you show up, there is no hope." That's desperation. That kind of desperation leads us to have tears as our food day and night.

And today, we might conclude, "If we are not desperate now, when will we ever be desperate?"

Recognize the Definition of Revival

We cannot pray for that which we don't know, so we need a definition for revival. There are many ways to define revival, but I am struck by the imagery in this text. Consider Isaiah 64:1-4. We might conclude this simple definition of revival:

Revival is God coming down!

That is the picture that we see in the Old Testament with Moses when God visited him in a burning bush. That's the picture we see in the incarnation of Jesus. That's the picture we see in the coming of the Holy Spirit. In a figurative sense, we need the Heavens to open and God come down.

Here's what I think. We need to experience that which we know to be sure is the visitation of God. We cannot accept a false substitute for revival. Revival is not a great service. Revival is not an emotional experience. Revival leaves us forever changed.

Revival is Isaiah hearing as Isaiah 6 reveals, the angels saying to one another:

Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of Hosts;
His glory fills the whole earth.

Revival is Isaiah then saying:

Woe is me for I am ruined
because I am a man of unclean lips
and live among a people of unclean lips,
and because my eyes have seen the King,
the LORD of Hosts.

Revival is Isaiah then hearing the Lord say,

Who should I send?
Who will go for Us?

And revival is Isaiah then saying:

Here I am. Send me.

"When did you last hear anyone praying for revival, praying that God might open the windows of heaven and pour out His Spirit? When God sends revival He can do more in a single day than in fifty years of all our organization. That is the verdict of sheer history which emerges clearly from the long story of the Church." (D. Martin Lloyd-Jones, who died in 1981, as quoted by Reid.)

Recognize the Demand for Repentance.

Consider Isaiah 64:5-8.

Here is the hard truth:

We will never experience revival until there is repentance.

"Have you noticed how much praying for revival has been going on of late—and how little revival has resulted? I believe the problem is that we have been trying to substitute praying for obeying, and it simply will not work." (Tozer, as quoted by Alvin Reid.)

Our first task is to search our hearts and repent of sin. We are going to do this in our prayer revival. It is not fun, but we must.

Reevaluate the Desire for Revival

The Lord answered Isaiah as revealed in Isaiah 65. Look at verse 1. The Lord says, “Here I am.”

Leonard Ravenhill, author of *Why Revival Tarries*, said, “The only reason that we don’t experience revival is because we are willing to live without it.”

Dr. R. A. Torrey said:

“I have a theory...that there is not a church, chapel, or mission on earth where you cannot have revival, provided there is a little nucleus of faithful people who will hold onto God until He comes down. First, let a few Christians—there need not be many—get thoroughly right with God themselves. This is the prime essential. If this is not done, the rest, I’m sorry to say, cannot be done, and it will come to nothing. Second, let them bind themselves together to pray for revival until God opens the heavens and comes down. Third, let them put themselves at the disposal of God to use them as He sees fit in winning others to Christ. That’s all. This is sure to bring revival in any church or community. I have given this prescription around the world. It has been taken by many churches and many communities, and in no instance has it ever failed, and it cannot fail.”

So What?

In the words of Lanphier, “Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?”