

Revival

⁶ "A son honors *his* father, And a servant *his* master. If then I am the Father, Where *is* My honor? And if I *am* a Master, Where *is* My reverence? Says the LORD of hosts To you priests who despise My name. Yet you say, 'In what way have we despised Your name?' ⁷ "You offer defiled food on My altar. But say, 'In what way have we defiled You?' By saying, 'The table of the LORD is contemptible.'

⁸ And when you offer the blind as a sacrifice, *Is it* not evil? And when you offer the lame and sick, *Is it* not evil? Offer it then to your governor! Would he be pleased with you? Would he accept you favorably?" Says the LORD of hosts.

⁹ "But now entreat God's favor, That He may be gracious to us. *While* this is being *done* by your hands, Will He accept you favorably?" Says the LORD of hosts.

¹⁰ "Who *is there* even among you who would shut the doors, So that you would not kindle fire *on* My altar in vain? I have no pleasure in you," Says the LORD of hosts, "Nor will I accept an offering from your hands.

¹¹ For from the rising of the sun, even to its going down, My name *shall be* great among the Gentiles; In every place incense *shall be* offered to My name, And a pure offering; For My name shall be great among the nations," Says the LORD of hosts. ¹² "But you profane it, In that you say, 'The table of the LORD is defiled; And its fruit, its food, *is* contemptible.' ¹³ You also say, 'Oh, what a weariness!' And you sneer at it," Says the LORD of hosts. "And you bring the stolen, the lame, and the sick; Thus you bring an offering! Should I accept this from your hand?" Says the LORD.

¹⁴ "But cursed *be* the deceiver Who has in his flock a male, And takes a vow, But sacrifices to the Lord what is blemished-- For I *am* a great King," Says the LORD of hosts, "And My name *is to be* feared among the nations. (Mal. 1:6-2:1)

For some time, revival has received a bad name. It has been wounded in the house of its friends. Those calling themselves revivalists have done all kinds of hysterics, histrionics and pyrotechnics that they have called revival. A lot of this began in the 19th century with a fellow named Charles Finney. Finney taught that the goal of a minister was to create an emotional crisis in every service, that would lead sinners and saints to an altar call of tears of sinners prayers or rededication. In the 190 years since Finney, church leaders have found more and more ways to try to create those crises: powerful music, trance-like atmospheres, guilt-tripping people, scaring people, bringing people to tears with stories, lighting and stage techniques learnt from Broadway, Nashville and Hollywood. And like Finney, people who successfully use these techniques will have results in their churches. People are moved, choked up, touched, maybe shamed. Commitments and rededications follow, and they conclude that because they are feeling their religion so much more deeply than before, that this is truly a work of God; it is true revival. They feel like they've been woken up, renewed. And who doesn't want to feel the things of God more deeply? Isn't this true revival or renewal?

Sometimes it is, sometimes it is not. We really only know as we watch the fruit of those meetings and services. Sadly, most often we find something people don't expect. It's the principle of easy come, easy go. The quicker and more sudden those religious feelings were evoked, the shorter they seem to last, after the service is over and the music has stopped. Those feelings that felt so powerful during the service become more and more of a distant memory. As they fade, some Christians try the futile approach of trying to get those feelings back, hoping that another church service or song or sermon will ignite those tears or that ecstasy again. When it doesn't, they're confused, a bit perplexed, perhaps discouraged. Those commitments they made, which they made sincerely at the time, seem to have less and less hold on them. Weeks or months later, they remember with some guilt and some regret that they aren't keeping those commitments anymore. Why? Easy come, easy go. If the religious feelings were stirred up with manipulative techniques, they will fade almost as quickly as they were manufactured. If I have a grumpy sullen child at home, I can tickle her ribs and she will suddenly laugh, but I haven't dealt with her heart that is sinful. I just manipulated an almost involuntary response. Almost as soon as the tickling is over, the grumpiness will return. So it is with so much that goes by the name revival: people are manipulated to almost involuntary emotion, but then they go back to where they were.

That kind of manipulation is revivalism, but not revival. Revivalism is a movement descended from Charles Finney.

But biblical revival itself is something different. The Bible clearly has the idea. The word translated *revive* (hayah) is found 14 times in the psalms (9 times in psalm 119 alone). If we want to be strict about it, the word *revive* means to come alive, and God's people don't need to come alive again; they are already made alive by grace. But the Bible usually uses this word for believers, and in the New Testament the word is more often "Awake"

⁴ Awake to righteousness, and do not sin; (1 Cor. 15:34)

¹¹ And *do* this, knowing the time, that now *it is* high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation *is* nearer than when we *first* believed. (Rom. 13:11)

¹⁴ Therefore He says: "Awake, you who sleep, Arise from the dead, And Christ will give you light." (Eph. 5:14)

Believers at times, need revival, awakening.

The Bible does not describe the Christian life as a series of emotional crises and perpetual, weekly rededications. It does not teach what Charles Finney taught. But it does teach that God's people can sometimes enter into periods of spiritual stagnation, where instead of growing, we become dull. Believers can enter periods of spiritual dullness, where the things of God become dreary and boring and tiresome, and the things of this world seem alluring, exciting and inviting. Believers can enter periods of spiritual slumber, where they are almost asleep to the Word, to prayer, to the church, to worship, to fellowship, to holiness, to making disciples. They are awake to many things, but like a nocturnal animal, they seem awake only to things of the night, and not things of the light of Christ.

Biblical revival is when God's grace intervenes to change this in His people: sometimes individually, and sometimes corporately. Revival is the reawakening of God's people, the repentance of spiritual dullness and laziness and disinterest and renewal of love for God. It is needed because of inevitable decline, because of sins that have become habits, because of a growing and deepening worldliness.

I remind you of some examples of this in Scripture. Some of the churches in Revelation 2 and 3 needed this kind of revival and awakening. The church at Ephesus had right doctrine and right discernment, but had left their first love. Their heads were clear, but their hearts were cold. The church at Pergamos had allowed the world and false teaching to infiltrate the church. The church at Thyatira had gone further, and the compromise had become corrupting and had corroded their values. The church at Sardis had become a corpse. Most were spiritually dead, and only a few remained who were loyal to Christ. The lukewarm church at Laodicea had so allowed wealth and luxury to blind them, that they could not tell that their self-righteousness and self-sufficiency had locked Christ outside the door of His own church. Their Lord's Supper did not have the Lord. Those churches needed revival and reawakening.

But the mistake that Finney made, and that of many others, is that because they misdiagnose the disease, they prescribe the wrong remedy. Revivalists see people are bored in church, so they conclude the remedy is to make church exciting. That's like a consulting a doctor because you have an itch, and then the doctor simply reaches over and scratches you.

Revivalists notice people don't seem as moved by God as they do by movies and pop music. So they make pop music and movies about Jesus. This is like the doctor noticing that the child is fixated by the lollipops on his desk, and giving him the lollipop and sending him on his way. Revivalism treats symptoms, scratches itches, gives spiritual lollipops, but does not deal with the disease.

What is the disease that biblical revival cures? What is the real problem, and what is the cure?

One of the Scriptures that helps us see both the symptoms of spiritual decline but also the true cure

is in Malachi 1.

Malachi is written to Judah 400 years before Christ. They are back in the land after the 70-year captivity in Babylon. The Temple has been rebuilt under Zerubbabel in 516 B.C. Ezra comes back and brings about some spiritual renewal in around 458 B.C., followed by Nehemiah in 445, to rebuild the walls. Nehemiah had to return to Persia in 433, but came back in 424. Malachi is probably written at some point between Nehemiah's absences.

The Babylonian captivity seemed to have cured Israel permanently of polytheism. Israel is not lapsing back into the worship of the gods of the Persians. But what they began falling into, and were deeply entrenched in by the time Messiah came, was a dead formalism, a coldness in their religious ritualism. Indifference and apathy are the symptoms of a spiritual cancer eating away at Judah.

In many ways, they are one of the best pictures in the Bible of the people of God needing revival. In verses 6-14 we see two parts to God's complaint against Israel: the signs of their spiritual regression, and the secret of spiritual revival.

I. The Signs of Spiritual Regression

7 "You offer defiled food on My altar. 8 And when you offer the blind as a sacrifice, Is it not evil? And when you offer the lame and sick, Is it not evil?"

13b "And you bring the stolen, the lame, and the sick; Thus you bring an offering!"

14 "But cursed be the deceiver Who has in his flock a male, And takes a vow, But sacrifices to the Lord what is blemished."

Here is the symptom that the Jews of Malachi's day were in need of revival: their worship.

What kind of animals did Israel bring to God to sacrifice in their newly-built Temple? Animals that were blind, lame, sick, blemished, and even stolen. In the first place, this was plain disobedience.

God had a standard in the Mosaic law of what kind of animals were allowed to be sacrificed to him.

Lev 22:20 "Whatever has a defect, you shall not offer, for it shall not be acceptable on your behalf."

Lev 22:24 "You shall not offer to the LORD what is bruised or crushed, or torn or cut; nor shall you make any offering of them in your land."

In the second place, even in the human realm, you wouldn't give these kinds of animals as a gift. In an agricultural economy, animals were a source of exchange, so the kind of animal you gave expressed the quality of the gift. To give a diseased, lame, blemished animal was an insult. This was the kind of animal that was probably not going to be very productive; blind and lame oxen don't plough well. Your own family won't want to eat a diseased sheep. Milk from sick cows or goats isn't what you'd feed your children. And you'd probably keep the one-eyed, limping, slack-jawed goat out of sight when you had visitors.

8 And when you offer the blind as a sacrifice, Is it not evil? And when you offer the lame and sick, Is it not evil? Offer it then to your governor! Would he be pleased with you? Would he accept you favorably?" Says the LORD of hosts.

God says, if you doubt that this is unacceptable, try this experiment. Try offering this to your human authorities. Go to the Persian governor of Judah, with your gift-wrapped three-legged goat. Arrive at his palace and smilingly present the cow with mad-cow disease causing it to walk spastically. Bring your cross-eyed sheep with flies nesting in its nostrils and lay it at his feet. Will he accept it? Will he feel honoured, revered, respected? Or will he sense you are trying to insult him, and possibly have you executed on the spot?

Imagine receiving for your birthday a half-eaten box of chocolates, or a book with scribbles and coffee-stains in it, or clothes with sweat stains under the armpits or a tool or a gadget or a computer that doesn't work at all. Would you receive that gladly? Would you give that to your best friend? Normal social etiquette and courtesy say, don't give people whom you respect throwaways, leftovers, junk as a gift.

In other words, these priests, and the people that brought these animals, had completely inverted the whole idea of sacrifice. They were not giving what cost them, what expressed value. They were giving what they didn't want anyway. They were giving what they themselves would not keep. This is the opposite of sacrifice. And so it is the opposite of worship.

That's how they worshipped on the outside. But the Bible gives us a glimpse of what was happening on the inside.

12b In that you say, 'The table of the LORD is defiled; And its fruit, its food, is contemptible.' 13 You also say, 'Oh, what a weariness!' And you sneer at it," Says the LORD of hosts.

The table of the LORD stands here for the whole of ritual worship of Israel, the sacrifices, the shewbread, the fires, the kindling of incense. In verse 7 and 12, they regard the whole exercise with contempt. They regard it lightly, they dismiss it, they scorn it.

Dismissive contempt. Verse 13 sums it up – Oh, what a weariness! How tiresome it is to worship Yah. The worship and service of God has become a burden, a heaviness, an interruption to my life.

If worship is worthship, then it is the statement of how much we think God is worth. The symptoms of inferior sacrifice and apathetic attitude shows that these Israelites did not value God very highly.

The Christian doesn't bring animals to God, because Christ is our once-for-all sacrifice. But once we are in Christ, our whole lives are to become a living sacrifice to God. Romans 12:1 tells us to present our bodies as living sacrifices unto God.

How do you know when what you are offering is like the Israelites, a people needing revival, awakening? Have the things of God become to you a weariness? Are spiritual disciplines drudgery and dullness? Reading and praying the Word in private, memorising the Word, publicly hearing and singing and praying the Word, is it burdensome? Do you do it only when urged, and then only with the leftovers of your time, leftovers of your energy?

Does your attendance on the Word only happen when it's comfortable and convenient? Does giving to the Lord, giving your service and time to the church, giving the Word out to unbelievers, feel taxing, and you do so with deep reluctance? Doesn't that sound like someone who has left their first love, who is neither hot nor cold, but now lukewarm?

Here's a simple test for us all: take your attitudes and actions towards God displayed at church, towards His Word, towards communing with Him, be it in your punctuality, your regularity, your attention, your diligence, and use those same attitudes and actions with your corporate employer, or your schoolwork, or your sport. Would it get you promoted, or demoted? Would you get A's or F's? Would you come first or stone last? Worship is worthship. The Israelites thought God was worth leftovers. When we come to that place, we need revival.

II. The Secret of Spiritual Revival

6 "A son honors his father, And a servant his master. If then I am the Father, Where is My honor? And if I am a Master, Where is My reverence? Says the LORD of hosts To you priests who despise My name.

Now before we look at what God actually prescribes for their revival, notice what He does not do. He does not say, "You priests need to figure out how to make the sacrifices more entertaining for the people." He does not say, "You people need to try harder to feel more deeply, you need to dig deeper, scrunch up your faces more." He does not say, "You need more activity. We need more sacrifices, and more ways to keep you busy. We need more programmes at the Temple, especially for the youth and the kids." And He does not say, "Work more! Try harder! Perform better!" They did need to do better, but just telling them to do more won't make much difference.

No, God knows the real problem is their view of Him.

God says in verse 6 to the priests in particular, and to Israel in general, "You have no fear for me. You feel no reverence for Me. You do not give Me what is expected and normal in human relationships." In human families, children are to show honour and respect for parents. In human society, servants, subordinates are to show respect and honour to their masters or managers. God says, I actually am a Father, and a Master, but I am not receiving honour and reverence. God was the father of Israel, and the Master of Israel, but He received no respect and honour from them.

What is missing from Israel? The fear of the Lord. The fear of the Lord is at the heart of revival.

Does that sound strange? Only because we think of revival as noise and excitement and chattering. But in the New Testament, whenever God's grace was particularly manifest, do you know what the text records? Fear. Reverence. Awe.

When the Lord did some of His greatest miracles, we read

And they were all amazed, and they glorified God and were filled with fear, saying, "We have seen strange things today!" (Lk. 5:26)

Luk 7:16 And fear gripped them all, and they began glorifying God, saying, "A great prophet has arisen among us!" and, "God has visited His people!"

⁴¹ And they feared exceedingly, and said to one another, "Who can this be, that even the wind and the sea obey Him!" (Mk. 4:41)

In Acts 2 when we read of this thriving Jerusalem church, we read; ⁴² And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. ⁴³ Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. (Acts 2:42-43)

The great difference between this kind of reverence and the phony emotionalism of revivalism is that true reverence, true awe and fear is a deep and sober affection rooted in who God is, and grown and deepened. True reverence for God is a weighty, serious, profound response to God that is more than a feeling you feel. It instead becomes a sense of God's importance, greatness, beauty, loveliness that affects every part of the Christian life. The fear of the Lord is what we experience the clearer our view becomes of who God is.

And it isn't an Old Testament thing.

The New Testament mentions at least three crucial areas that the fear of the Lord affects.

First, it is at the heart of acceptable worship. ² Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, **let us have grace**, by which we may worship God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. ²⁹ For our God *is* a consuming fire. (Heb. 12:28-29)

Second, it is the atmosphere for spiritual growth and sanctification.

2 Corinthians 7:1 Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God. (2 Cor. 7:1)

¹² Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; (Phil. 2:12)

Third, it powers evangelism.

But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always *be* ready to *give* a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear; (1 Pet. 3:15)

No wonder a true revival changes worship, and results in holier lives, and brings about conversions. Because when a deep fear of the Lord begins to affect a soul, or a church, their worship is filled with awe and wonder, their hatred of sin grows, their love of souls deepens. Not because of one tearful altar call, but because of a growing sense of the weightiness of God.

Last year, I decided to do a study on this. I wanted to find out how often the Bible spoke about the fear of the Lord. I started just looking up the words fear of the Lord, fear God, fear Him, fear His name. But I soon realised sometimes the Bible also used the words tremble, and dread, reverence, awe, awesome, and honour. It even extended to words like astonished, actions like fell on His face, bowed, was afraid. So I kept recording every verse that had one of these words or ideas if it was associated with God. I didn't finish the study, but where I stopped I'd already recorded 28 pages of verses, around 600 texts. Why is this so prominent? Why aren't there 600 verses on loving God? Because fearing God, reverencing God is the way you love our God. It is the quality of the love we give Him. It is a deep, joyful, reverential, weighty regard for the value of God.

This is the beginning of wisdom. It is the whole duty of man. It is what it looks like to love God with all our hearts.

When God diminishes in value to us, as it did to the Israelites, our worship declines, our service declines, our sanctification declines and our evangelism declines. Because at the very heart of life is worship, and at the heart of worship is worthship: how much you value God, how weighty He is.

So notice how God deals with their lack of reverence. He confronts them with His nature. He confronts them with His majesty, the very thing that drives out apathy and replaces it with awe, the attribute that drives out irreverence with astonished humility.

11 For from the rising of the sun, even to its going down, My name shall be great among the Gentiles; In every place incense shall be offered to My name, And a pure offering; For My name shall be great among the nations," Says the LORD of hosts.

14 For I am a great King," Says the LORD of hosts, "And My name is to be feared among the nations.

What is it about God that Israel had forgotten, that many in the modern church have forgotten?

Verse 11 and 14, God says, I am not a petty ruler of a provincial kingdom. I am not some obscure deity ruling over some little section of the world. I am not an obscure chief of some little patch of land.

I am the King of Creation. I am the Absolute Monarch of the Universe. Not a small ruler. Not your Persian governor. Seven times in these nine verses (24 times in the whole book) God is called "the

LORD of hosts." Yehovah Tzva'ot. Triune I AM of Armies. He who rules the angelic hosts, and He who rules the starry host.

Far beyond you and your slack worship, Israel, my name is going to be great among the Gentiles. There is coming a time, Israel, when my worship will be global. As the Earth turns and as dawn breaks, people called by my name will open their eyes, and begin praying and acknowledging and honouring and praising. And they will continue to do that as they live before Me, as the sun moves overhead to afternoon, till it sets. And all the while as the Earth turns, believers are waking and praising, a non-stop relay of praise, 24 hours a day. Already, through the spread of the Gospel, we have Israel's God loved, acknowledged and honoured by people from Tonga all the way to Alaska in hundred of languages.

And yet the ultimate fulfillment of this awaits a day when Israel's Messiah sits on David's throne in Jerusalem, and from East to West, North to South, there is worship of the Triune God.

God is confronting Israel with their small view of Him. That's why their religious lives are so dreary, because their god is so small. Small god, small interest in him. Small god, small desire to worship. Small god, small desire to know Him and make Him known.

The cure for irreverence, is to recognise God's revealed majesty in Scripture. Later on in this book, in 3:16, we read of a book of remembrance was written before Him For those who fear the LORD And who meditate on His name. (Mal 3:16)

There is no shortcut, no quick-fix, no gimmick that will give you an understanding of the majesty of God except patient meditation on His name, seeking God where and how He has revealed Himself. In short, it is knowing God. Charles Spurgeon said, "If we want revivals, we must revive our reverence for the Word of God."

So in the next messages, we need to explore what the fear of the Lord is, how the fear of the Lord is both revealed and sought, what we should do and not do if we want fear to come upon every soul in our church. Today we can simply pause and ask, am I like those people in Malachi? Casual, sloppy, indifferent, becoming bored with the things of God. If so, those outward symptoms are indicative of an inward problem: a low and small view of God. Revival will not be certain songs sung or music played on a Sunday. It will be a deepening knowledge of the majesty of our God. It will come as you set your heart to pursue and know God as He is.