

## “Revive Us Again”

In this series on Psalm 85, we’ve been looking at the topic of revival, e.g., what is revival, who does it affect, and how does it come about? Outside the pages of Holy Scripture, it’s likely that no one in the history of the church has taught us more about revival than 18<sup>th</sup> century pastor, author, and theologian, Jonathan Edwards. Edwards was instrumental in the revival that took place in America known as the “First Great Awakening.” He writes, “The work (of revival) soon made glorious alteration in the town.... It seemed that the people were full of the presence of God. It was never so full of love nor so full of joy and yet so full of distress (over sin) as it was then.... The congregation was alive in God’s service. Everyone intent on the public worship. Every hearer eager to drink in the words of the minister as they came from his mouth... Some weeping with sorrow and distress, others with joy and love, others with pity and concern for the souls of their neighbors.”

That’s a beautiful picture of the working of the Holy Spirit in revival and how an entire town was positively affected. But, even on a smaller scale, the same Spirit is at work in individual lives. When the Holy Spirit is at work in the hearts and lives of God’s people, we’ll know true love, joy, desires for the Scriptures, as well as desires for worship and for holiness. In everything that I’ve just noted, we see this in the words of the Psalmist as he cries out to God. “Will you not revive us again, that your people may rejoice in you? Show us your steadfast love, O LORD, and grant us your salvation.” (Psalm 85:6-7) Clearly, revival touches on initial salvation for lost sinners. And yet, it also touches on growth in holiness for those who are already children of God.

We’ve seen already that, to help the Psalmist deal with his *present afflictions*, he gives thanks to God for *past mercies*. In my most recent article, we also looked at *future glory*. This refers not merely to our life in heaven one day. Future glory also pertains to here and now as God is at work in our lives in the difficulties that we are currently facing. For example, “Steadfast love and faithfulness meet; righteousness and peace kiss each other. Faithfulness springs up from the ground, and righteousness looks down from the sky.” (Ps. 85:10-11) This portion of the passage points us forward in redemptive history to Jesus Christ. “Steadfast love and faithfulness meet,” can also be translated, “mercy and truth are met together.” In a beautiful way, mercy and peace come together perfectly in Jesus Christ. Jesus is perfect “righteousness” and he is the “prince of peace” who comes to bring peace between sinful man and a holy God. “Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” (Romans 5:1)

In verse 12 we read, “Yes, the LORD will give what is good and our land will yield its increase.” One Old Testament scholar has written about these verses, “Notice that earthly goods flow from God *after* spiritual life has been restored; God’s concern for our spiritual revival takes precedence over merely outward or earthly blessings.” God is very concerned with our spiritual life, and he delights to “revive us again” according to his perfect plan and his perfect timing. He is at work in our lives by the power of the Spirit working through the word of God, the Scriptures. Dr. Sinclair Ferguson, in his book entitled, “The Holy Spirit” writes, “The ministry of the Holy Spirit in reshaping us to be more like Christ can be said to be the central function of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Christian believer.” In agreement with this truth, I want to give a

brief list of ways in which the Holy Spirit is at work to revive us, as needed, in our individual lives and in Christ's Church. This list is important, but it's not meant to be exhaustive.

—The Spirit brings life to the Spiritually dead (John 3; 6:63; Ephesians 2:1). Your new life in Christ begins with a mighty work of the Holy Spirit working through the Word. We want to pray for this work of God's Spirit in the lives of our covenant children for justification and sanctification, and others we know and love as well as those we don't know.

—The saving work of the Spirit cannot be separated from our need, and God's requirement, to join in faithful membership with a local body of believers (Hebrews 10:24-25; 13:17). Therefore, any desire to stay away from a faithful church is not the work of the Spirit. This truth of the connection to the church touches on Paul's analogy of the body and the teaching on the gifts of the Spirit in 1 Corinthians 12. The Spirit gives gifts to the body for use in the body; any thought of *isolation* from the local church, including not using our gifts in the local church, is not the work of the Spirit.

—The Spirit points us to Jesus Christ in all his beauty and glory (John 15:26; 16:14). We should, in an ongoing way, want to know Christ more deeply. This leads to the next point:

—The Spirit comes to us as the Spirit of truth (John 14:17). The Holy Spirit gives us a hunger for God's word as well as bringing guidance, comfort and conviction through the word.

—The Spirit is also the Spirit of holiness. This means that the Spirit works in us so that we desire to grow in our likeness to Jesus Christ in word and deed. You can be sure that our desires and actions to turn from sin and turn to Christ in repentance is the work of the Spirit (Romans 8:13).

—The Spirit prompts our desire for worship (Philippians 3:3).

These are very practical truths that are biblical and don't rely *merely* on experiences or feelings that may or may not be trustworthy. May we continue to pray daily for the Spirit's work of revival in our individual lives and in the Church.

Rev. Dr. Steve Jones is the pastor of Westminster Presbyterian Church PCA in Paxton, Illinois.