

Awakening

1. Fire Fall

August 19-20, 2017

I washed my car last week. I know that doesn't sound like a big deal, but I couldn't remember the last time I had washed it before then. It could have been at the end of winter. Of course, when I first got the car, I washed it a lot. By hand. I treated it with tender loving care. But that was over 4 years ago. Back then I was pretty excited about my car. But now I barely remember to put gas in it.

That's the way it goes, though. Passion cools over time. Whether it is about a car, or anything else we might get excited about, passion can fade. The fire dies down if left alone.

Passion for God can cool, too. Without a fresh touch, our spiritual passion can die down. That's what happened to the people of Israel. Their passion for God had faded over the centuries. It had cooled off. It finally got to the point where God spoke to a prophet named Ezekiel and gave him a vision of the spiritual state of the people of Israel.

Ezekiel 37:1-2 *The hand of the LORD was on me, and he brought me out by the Spirit of the LORD and set me in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. ² He led me back and forth among them, and I saw a great many bones on the floor of the valley, bones that were very dry.*

By Ezekiel's time, the people of Israel had become so spiritually dead that they had been conquered and exiled. They were exiles in a foreign land, so they were dead as a nation. They were also spiritually empty and disconnected from God. They were 'dry bones.'

I confess, there have been times I have felt like dry bones, too. I have been following Jesus for over 40 years now, and there have been times that I lost my spiritual passion. Oh I still believed in God and in doing the right thing, but my hunger for God faded. Sin seemed more attractive. I didn't feel like praying. Reading the Bible seemed drier than reading a dictionary. The fact was that many people far from God did not move me. I'd go to worship services, but it was like going through the motions. My spirit was clogged up. Dry bones.

I have also seen churches, even denominations, going through the motions. Oh, they still hold worship services and conferences. They produce detailed reports of their activities and speak about God and all sorts of worthy causes, but the energy is manufactured. Sometimes they have heated arguments, but there is little true spiritual passion. God's mission is forgotten. Repentance and transformation are rare. Dry bones.

That's what Israel's condition was. Outwardly they were religious Jews, but really they were dry bones. **Ezekiel 37:3** *[The Lord] asked me, "Son of man, can these bones live?" I said, "Sovereign LORD, you alone know."* So is there any hope for spiritually dead people? Ezekiel didn't know. ⁴ *Then he said to me, "Prophecy to these bones and say to them, 'Dry bones, hear the word of the LORD!' ⁵ This is what the Sovereign LORD says to these bones: I will make breath enter you, and you will come to life. ⁶ I will attach tendons to you and make flesh come upon you and cover you with skin; I will put breath in you, and you will come to life. Then you will know that I am the LORD."*

Praise God, spiritually dry bones can live again! God told his prophet that he was going to breathe new life into his spiritually dead people. **God wants to revive the spiritually dead.** God wants to revive individuals and entire groups of believers. Over the years, God has repeatedly done that for me. When I have been dry, he has refreshed and renewed me. And throughout history God has repeatedly sent **revival** to churches and even to nations. He has made dry bones live again.

We don't use the word "revival" a lot these days. Say the word and some people think of tent meetings and a preacher yelling at people. Actually, the word simply means, "to bring to life again." **Revive = to bring to life again.** That was what God told Ezekiel he wanted to do for Israel - bring them to life again, spiritually. God showed Ezekiel a valley filled with skeletons taking on flesh and breath and living again. Revived. God was telling Ezekiel he was going to bring spiritual revival to Israel.

Throughout history God has revived his people time and time again. There have been times when the Holy Spirit has visited his people with a fresh vision of His glory and grace, showing how desperately we need God's mercy and how ready he is to offer it; times of special revealing of Himself in awesome holiness and irresistible power. Revival is when God takes the spiritual AED, attaches the paddles to the body of Christ, yells, "Clear!" Through the power of the Holy Spirit, He shocks his people back to life. Revival is when God sends spiritual awakening to an individual, a church or a region. God can even send revival to a whole country.

God has repeatedly sent waves of revival to our nation. The Great Awakening renewed the Church in the early 1700's. The Second Great Awakening came in the 1800's. There was also the Azusa Street revival in the early 1900's, the Jesus Movement started in the 1960's and there have been others since then.

Revival is a move of the Holy Spirit. A revival is the result of visitation of the Holy Spirit. It is when we experience the presence and power of God meeting us. That's what happens in Ezekiel 37.

Ezekiel 37:7-10 ⁷ *So I prophesied as I was commanded. And as I was prophesying, there was a noise, a rattling sound, and the bones came together, bone to bone. ⁸ I looked, and tendons and flesh appeared on them and skin covered them, but there was no breath in them.*

The breath of God represents the Spirit of God. “Breath” and “spirit” are the same word in Hebrew. When the Spirit comes, there is life. Without the Spirit of God, there is no life. ⁹ *Then he said to me, “Prophecy to the breath; prophesy, son of man, and say to it, ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Come, breath, from the four winds and breathe into these slain, that they may live.’” ¹⁰ So I prophesied as he commanded me, and breath entered them; they came to life and stood up on their feet—a vast army.*

The *breath of God* revives his people, it brings them back to life. This passage says this repeatedly. In verse 5 He says, *I will make breath enter you, and you will come to life.* He repeats that again in verse 6, *I will make breath enter you, and you will come to life.* Verse 9, *breathe into these slain, that they may live.* Verse 10, *breath entered them; they came to life and stood up.* It is the Spirit that brings life. When revival comes, it is because the Spirit comes.

In Acts 2, the Holy Spirit came on the believers and that caused a major revival. If we want to be revived as believers, we must open ourselves to the Holy Spirit. When a church is revived, it is the work of the Holy Spirit.

Here is **what to expect in an awakening**. Note that all Revivals are not the same, so we can’t describe exactly what happens. But here are a few common marks.

First, we will experience renewed love and obedience to Jesus. In a true revival, lives change. People don’t just have an emotional experience at a service; they live differently after the service is done. When individuals are revived they have a deeper hunger to know Christ, they have a love for worship to be in his presence and they have a desire to meet Him in prayer and scripture. Their self-indulgent habits change from less swearing and drunkenness to how to spend their free time. They treat others with more love. They are generous with their money and possessions.

When the awakening happens on wider scale, the attendance at worship rises, because people are seeking God; they respond to preaching. Entire towns can change when it’s widespread!

In 1970 there was an unexpected move of God’s Spirit at Asbury College. At a Tuesday morning student Chapel, a college administrator briefly shared his story of coming to faith. Then he invited the students to talk about their own experiences with Jesus. One student responded to his offer. Then another. Then another. Then they started pouring to the altar. Students and faculty members

started quietly praying, weeping and singing. They went to others that they had wronged and asked for forgiveness. The chapel service didn't end after an hour. People didn't want to leave; they were afraid they would miss something wonderful.

Two days later the Chapel was still packed with 1,500 people experiencing God. The college president slipped into the chapel after 2 a.m. to see what was going on. He sat on the back row. A student approached him and confessed she had been a habitual liar. She said she needed to make it right with people she had wronged. That convinced Dr. Kinlaw that the revival was legitimate.

Acts 2 tells us that when the Holy Spirit came on the first disciples, that they immediately spoke about Jesus. That's what happens when the fire falls. Individual believers share their faith with others. Churches grow and multiply because members are sharing Jesus with others.

That happened in Wales in 1904. Evan Roberts was coal miner and Sunday school teacher until he felt prompted to go to Bible College. One night he went to a special service with some other students. At the end, the speaker prayed, "Oh Lord, bend us!" Evan knelt and prayed: "Oh God, bend me!" Evan was giving God permission to lead him wherever he wanted. Evan started praying for his nation. He asked his roommate, "Do you think God could give me 100,000 converts?" That's almost 5% of the population! It would be like an American Bible college student asking, "Do you think God could give me 15 million souls?" But that's what Evan asked for -- 100,000 people.

Evan asked to speak to the young people of his church. So the pastor gave the OK and 18 showed up. Evan challenged people to get ready for the baptism of the Holy Spirit, calling for people to make a public statement of faith. A week later, a powerful movement of the Holy Spirit began. The church was filled for services every night. They prayed, they worshipped through song, they confessed their sin to each other and shared what Jesus had done for them. They weren't there to hear a speaker or leader. Sometimes, even Roberts spoke a little, but not always. They all came to be in the unmistakable presence of God.

The revival spread from town to town. In the next 5 months, 100,000 became followers of Christ. It impacted the whole nation. Some men, who for years spent their entire pay checks at bars, started to take all of it home. Houses became decently furnished, women and children started to wear decent clothing. The taverns were practically empty because everyone was at worship most nights. The graffiti on bridges and walls used to be mostly obscenities, but then they were covered with Bible verses and worship song lyrics. People sang hymns in the streets.

Coal production dropped for a while because so many coal miners came to Christ. They worked harder than ever, but they stopped swearing at their

mules, and the mules didn't understand what they were supposed to do! One newspaper later wrote, "Let it be known that drunkards, swearers, gamblers of most abandoned and hopeless type became holy men." Many who before had just believed in God were transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit.

When the fire falls, conversions happen. In fact, I came to Christ in the latter part of a move of God's Spirit called the Jesus Movement.

It seems rather odd, but when revival breaks out, some people won't like it. When individuals come alive in Christ, some of their friends will react saying "What's up with you? You're not the same anymore! You're a Jesus-freak now?" Whenever revivals break out in large numbers of people, it attracts criticism not just from unbelievers, but also from religious leaders. In Acts 2, the Holy Spirit came in power, and by-standers ridiculed the disciples, calling them drunk.

Before John Wesley had his conversion experience, he was welcome to speak in any Church of England pulpit. After his conversion, he was banned from speaking in virtually every church. He and the early Methodist preachers preached outside and in the fields because they were scorned by the upper class and attacked with rocks and violence by the working class.

They were called "enthusiasts" because when Wesley would preach, unusual things happened. Even though he just read his sermon from a paper, the crowds reacted with tears, crying out, falling on the ground, trembling, violent shaking or laughter. Some criticized that, but God was at work.

The Azusa Street revival in Los Angeles was similar. While many were being deeply transformed by an encounter with the Holy Spirit, others were criticizing what was happening. The hippies who came to Christ in the Jesus Movement were often unwelcome in established churches because of their dress and music.

We can't produce revival, but we can invite it. We can't plan or schedule God's Spirit to fall. Ezekiel said that God the only one who can bring revival. He is the one who pulls the bones together and puts tendons on them. He is the only one who can put the breath of life in those dead bodies. At yet, he used Ezekiel in the process, too.

Waiting for revival is not as passive as it seems. It is like going to sleep. We can't force ourselves to sleep, as anyone with insomnia will tell you. But we can put ourselves in a posture to receive sleep. We turn out the lights, lie down in a comfortable position, close our eyes, breathe slowly and put activities of the day out our minds. Then at some point, sleep arrives. Sleep is a gift to be received, and yet we can invite it.

To invite a move of God's Spirit, we must sincerely repent. Several years ago Clare DeGraaf spoke at our church about "*The Ten Second Rule.*" He

said the rule is a secret to keeping our faith growing. The rule is simple: as soon as you are reasonably certain that God wants you to do something, within 10 seconds make a commitment to do it. Don't wait. Don't put it off. Don't negotiate. Just do it. Clare said that following it was a sure-fire way to stay spiritually fresh and growing.

I believe that is true, because responding to what God says is the essence of faith. But the reverse is also true: when we *don't* do what God is telling us, it is a sure-fire way to decrease our passion for God and become dry bones. If we routinely put off what God says to do until we forget about it, then our passion for Jesus will decrease. He says, "It's time to stop that habit" and we say, "Yes, I should stop that habit, sometime." That hurts our ability to stay close to God. In fact, failure to do what He says is called sin and it damages our relationship with God.

We have all done this. We have all sinned. That is why we all need to "repent." "Repent" is a biblical word that means to change our minds and do something different. It's not just a feeling bad; it's about changing our minds and doing something different. For example: There's someone who enjoys talking in a cruel way about the people they work with behind their backs. Then one day, they realize this isn't pleasing to God. So they ask God for forgiveness and stop doing it. When the conversation turns to other people, they just change the subject. That is repenting.

There is no revival or awakening without repentance. *We can't get closer to God and disobey him at the same time.* The risen Jesus told the church at Ephesus that they needed to repent. **Revelation 2:4-5** *Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken the love you had at first.⁵ Consider how far you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first.* Jesus said they had lost their first love, and he says the remedy for it. *If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place.* To open to the Holy Spirit, make it a habit to say "yes."

Second, seek God. Seek him. Not just an *experience* of Him, but *Him*. A revival is an expression of an outpouring of the Holy Spirit, who is God present with us. So seek God here and now. Go after him. Pursue him.

There are two basic ways to do this. **First through Prayer.** Every great revival started with God's people praying. The Second Great Awakening began after a Methodist preacher asked his small churches to fast every third Saturday and pray for revival. Shortly after that, thousands started coming to Christ. To invite the Spirit to renew you and to renew our land, pray with an open heart, asking God to point out our sin and our shame. Next week Terry Teykl will be with us talking about this, so I'll not say more today.

Second through Fasting. One way to invite the Spirit's reviving is to choose to abstain from food for a spiritual purpose. Fasting is a drop the fork moment, where we declare we desire God more than food. We recognize our need. If you want to invite the Spirit to renew you and to renew our church and our area, I invite you to choose to skip one or more meals. Pray when you would otherwise be eating, and see what God will do.

The Second Law of Thermodynamics is that left to themselves, "things fall apart." Left to ourselves, we lose our spiritual vitality, but God is always ready to restore us. In fact, He asks us to seek Him for it