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HOW SPIRITUAL RENEWAL COMES

2 Chronicles 29

By

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Kings of Judah Lesson 10

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America desperately needs spiritual renewal or revival! Most of us would say, "Amen!" to that statement. The city of *Flagstaff* needs revival! "Preach it, brother!" The *NAU campus* needs revival! "You've got that right!"

The *churches of Flagstaff* need revival! "Yes, all the churches need to catch on fire!" *Flagstaff Christian Fellowship* needs revival! "Well, there may be some here who need it." *You and I* need individual revival! "Now, just a minute! You've gone too far!"

We're all for revival "out there," but when it gets too close to home, we begin to get a bit nervous. Revival implies that the thing needing reviving isn't real healthy--paramedics don't revive someone walking down the street in good health! Revival also implies change. That threatens us because, even if we're not doing real well spiritually, we tend to get comfortable with the predictable.

But I suggest that we all are in constant need of continuing spiritual renewal. Every day the world, the flesh, and the devil seek to pull us back into a spiritual lethargy that chokes the new life we received through the "washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit" (Titus 3:5). Like silver exposed to the elements, we grow tarnished and dull spiritually. Thus we constantly need renewal or revival.

But we need it not only individually, but corporately, as God's people. Corporate revival happens when God's Spirit moves on a group of His people, often on many groups in the same region at the same time, bringing a new awareness of God's holiness, of our own sinfulness, and of His abundant grace. It always results in God's people confessing and forsaking sin, of an increase of the conversion of sinners, and of great joy in the Lord.

No one can plan or program true revival; it is a sovereign act of God. You can hang a sign out in front of the church proclaiming, "Revival This Week," but that doesn't mean it will happen. It is

from first to last a work of God. But at the same time, there are conditions we can meet as His people so that if He should choose to move in a mighty way, His power would not be hindered. They are essential factors if we want to walk in daily freshness with our Lord. We can see three important factors of spiritual renewal in the revival that happened under the good king Hezekiah (2 Chron. 29):

Spiritual renewal comes through commitment
and cleansing, and expresses itself in celebration.

We see Hezekiah's *commitment* to the Lord in 29:1-11; the *cleansing* of the priests and the temple in 29:12-24; and the *celebration* of God's people in worship in 29:25-36.

1. Spiritual renewal comes through commitment to the Lord (29:1-11).

To understand this story, you have to remember the previous chapter and the dismal spiritual situation in Judah under the wicked King Ahaz, Hezekiah's father. He began by introducing idol worship alongside the worship of God and ended by closing the doors of the Temple, sacrificing to the gods of Damascus, and establishing centers of idol worship in every Judean town.

Because of Ahaz's apostasy, the Lord stirred up enemies against him from every side. The Philistines were invading from the west; the Edomites were taking territory to the east. But the most ominous threat was from the north, where Ahaz had tried to buy the friendship of Tiglath-Pileser of Assyria. That held him at a distance long enough for him to polish off the northern kingdom of Israel and their neighbor to the north, Syria. But feeding the monster only made him stronger, and now he was threatening Judah. The Assyrian army was known for its brutality and awesome power. If they overran Judah, thousands would be slaughtered, families would be torn apart, people would be hauled into captivity as slaves, and the worship of God among His people would be a thing of the past.

If you were Hezekiah, taking the leadership of a nation under those conditions, what would be your first priority? In light of this desperate historical setting, the words of verse 3 take on heightened significance: "In the first year of his reign, in the first month,

he opened the doors of the house of the Lord and repaired them.” Then he calls the priests and Levites and charges them to consecrate themselves (first) and the Lord’s house (second) (29:5) to reverse the awful conditions introduced by his father. He shares with them what is in his heart, namely, to make a covenant with the Lord God (29:10), and repeats his charge to them, “Do not be negligent now, for the Lord has chosen you to stand before Him to minister to Him” (29:11). Hezekiah’s first priority in the face of a national crisis was to call the nation and its leaders back to the proper commitment to God. We can learn several things from his example:

- A. Commitment to God is the most pressing need in a time of pressing need.

When you face a crisis, the natural human response is to focus on the crisis. If you’re a king facing a military threat, the thing to do is to strengthen your army. If you face a health crisis, the first thing to do is get medical attention. If you’ve lost your job, your first priority is to focus on finding another job. If your marriage is in trouble, focus on your marriage. If your teenager is rebellious, focus on dealing with your teenager.

Don’t misunderstand: I’m not saying that we should ignore pressing problems. They demand our attention and we would be negligent not to attend to them. But I am arguing that Hezekiah’s example shows us that the most pressing need in a time of need is to renew our commitment to the Lord. Only *after* we have done that are we free to seek His mind on how to deal with the pressing problem. Often the very reason God sends the problem is to get us to stop and get our priorities back in line. Once we’ve done that, He often deals with the problem in ways we never could have, even if we had put all our efforts into solving it.

- B. Commitment to God brings hope into the darkest of situations.

Hezekiah could have looked around and thought, “Things are grim. My father shut down the temple. Idolatry is rampant. He lost a lot of our territory to other nations. And we’re under the thumb of Tiglath-Pileser. Why try?” He could have grown very depressed and have been paralyzed into doing nothing. But instead he com-

mitted himself to follow the Lord. He rallied the priests to re-open the temple for worship. He called the nation back to God. And as soon as God breaks into any situation, the darkness is dispelled by the light of His presence.

Down through history, God has broken into the worst of situations to bring hope and light when, humanly speaking, things are hopeless. At the time of the Reformation, spiritual conditions were abysmal. The Roman Catholic church was corrupt beyond description. Then God converted a German monk named Martin Luther and a French lawyer named John Calvin. Through these men and many others, the good news that Christ died for sinners and that His forgiveness and eternal life are a free gift to all who will trust in Him began to be proclaimed. Hope broke into a darkened, hopeless situation! The same thing happened during the English revival in the 18th century with the Wesleys and George Whitefield. Some historians argue that England would have faced a bloody revolution similar to that in France if that revival had not taken place.

It applies to our nation at this time. We see sin abounding. People are flaunting their degradation. Religious liberties are being taken from us. The Judeo-Christian base which used to underlie our legal and political systems has been eroded. Even the Christian church seems anemic and polluted with sin, from the leadership level on down. But if we, as God's people, will commit ourselves fully to Him, there is hope! If God will break into the church and nation with His light, there is no limit to what can happen.

It also applies to you personally. Perhaps you're in a hopeless, discouraging situation. You've given every ounce of your effort to trying to deal with it, all to no avail. But can you conceive of any problem that is too big for God? If God breaks through into your situation, there is hope. The main thing is that we renew our commitment to Him.

Adoniram Judson, the great pioneer missionary to Burma, was suffering from fever in a stinking, rat-infested prison. He had seen little fruit for his years of hard work and sacrifice. He had gone through many setbacks and hardships. A letter from a friend arrived which asked, "Judson, how's the outlook?" He replied, "The

outlook is as bright as the promises of God.” Commitment to God brings hope into the darkest of situations.

- C. Commitment to God always involves a radical commitment to His Word.

By a radical commitment to God’s Word, I mean a commitment that goes against tradition and current custom, if need be; that goes against the way we were raised, if need be; and goes back to complete obedience to what God’s Word teaches about how we are to live. Undergirding Hezekiah’s reforms is an understanding of what the Law of Moses prescribed and a commitment to follow that completely. He knew what was clean and unclean (29:5). He knew what the proper incense offerings and burnt offerings were that had been neglected (29:7). He had gained this understanding from God’s Word (29:15). Spiritual renewal is always centered on a renewal of the authority of God’s Word.

Again, we can only understand how radical this was for Hezekiah if we remember his background and the spiritual climate he grew up in. His father was an abusive, self-centered man who had burned some of Hezekiah’s brothers to death by offering them to the pagan god, Molech! Ahaz had set up idol worship throughout the whole country. Hezekiah easily could have been a rebellious, angry young man, mad at God, mad at his abusive father, just going with the evil current of his day. What I’m getting at is, he didn’t drift into the direction he took. He had to make a commitment to go against the evil ways of his father (29:6) and to follow God’s Word even when it ran counter to the evil customs being practiced.

A radical commitment to God’s Word means that even though you had angry, abusive, self-centered parents, you confront your own anger, abusiveness, and self-centeredness so that it doesn’t continue in your family. Even though your parents worshipped gods of their own making, whether money or pleasure, you worship the living God in accordance with His Word of truth. Commitment puts God’s Word into life by obeying it when it confronts the way we live. Spiritual renewal always comes through renewed commitment to God and His Word.

Renewed commitment to God and His Word always reveals areas of our lives that have been displeasing to God. Thus the second element in spiritual renewal is cleansing.

2. Spiritual renewal comes through cleansing in accordance with God's Word (29:12-24).

Note that reform or renewal always starts with the person and moves outward to the church (29:5, "consecrate yourselves and consecrate the house of the Lord"). Many of these priests had fallen into unfaithfulness and idolatry, so they had to deal with their own sin before they could begin the process of cleansing the temple. God can't use you to impact others for Christ until you cleanse yourself from defilement. These priests had a lot of crud to deal with--it took them 16 days to haul out all the idols and other junk from the temple (29:17)! But, thank God, if we're willing to clean up our lives, even if it takes a while to shovel it all out, He will restore us and use us again for His purpose!

In Hezekiah's revival, as soon as the temple was cleansed, they gathered in worship and offered three kinds of sacrifices: Sin offerings (29:21); burnt offerings (23:27); and thank offerings (29:31). These three offerings typify the kind of cleansing and consecration we need as worshipers of God.

The *sin offering* pictured *substitution*. God's holiness and justice demand that the penalty for our sin is death. Without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness (Heb. 9:22). The slaughter of these animals and the sprinkling of their blood on the altar pictured the perfect sacrifice for our sins that would be accomplished by the Lord Jesus Christ on the cross. For the person to be cleansed, he had to lay his hands on the head of the animal as the priest slit its throat, thus identifying himself with that shedding of blood on his behalf. His sins were "transferred" to the animal which died in his place. Even so, there is no cleansing from sin unless you have by faith identified yourself with Jesus Christ in His death on your behalf.

The *burnt offering* pictured *consecration*. It was offered up totally to the Lord (the worshiper did not eat any of it) and represents the surrender and holiness demanded of those who have received God's forgiveness. Our response to His mercy in becoming our sin

offering should be to give ourselves completely to Him: "I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship" (Rom. 12:1).

The *thank offering* pictured *devotion*. These were voluntary offerings expressing love and gratitude for God's many blessings. The author to the Hebrews refers to this when he writes, "Through (Christ) then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name. And do not neglect doing good and sharing; for with such sacrifices God is pleased" (Heb. 13:15-16). Christians are to be "overflowing with gratitude" (Col. 2:7).

The burnt offerings and thank offerings move into the third area of renewal, celebration, or corporate worship. But the point is, we can't experience spiritual renewal, whether individually or corporately, unless we appropriate God's cleansing through the blood of Christ, confessing our sins and cleaning the offensive, idolatrous crud out of our lives, even as they cleansed themselves and God's temple. Spiritual renewal starts with commitment; continues with cleansing; and culminates in celebration:

3. Spiritual renewal expresses itself in celebration with God's people (29:25-36).

Celebration results from knowing that your sins are forgiven. "When the burnt offering began, the song to the Lord also began with the trumpets" (29:27). They had quite a celebration, with cymbals, harps, lyres, trumpets and singing (29:25-28).

I chose the word "celebration" because it starts with the same letter as commitment and cleansing. Seriously, though, the word expresses the fact that these people weren't just mumbling through a religious service, looking at their watches and wondering if they'd get home in time to tune in the football game. Their hearts were in it! Note 29:30, "they *sang praises with joy*." Do you sing that way? If not, maybe you need revival! When you realize that God has moved in your heart to reveal Christ as the perfect sacrifice for all your sins, how can you mumble through a song with no joy? An outsider coming into our midst should be able to tell by our wor-

ship that we are overflowing with joy because of what God has done in cleansing us from sin.

They were joyous, but they were also reverent. We read (29:30) that "they bowed down and worshiped." They had a sense of awe in the presence of God. By bowing down they showed their submission to Him.

One of the current adjectives in vogue among teenagers is "awesome." A group of girls sees the captain of the football team and coo, "He's awesome!" Perhaps it's a harmless expression, but I've got news for you. A handsome young man isn't awesome. GOD IS AWESOME! We need to remember that when we worship Him together.

Hezekiah invited the consecrated people (29:31), "*Come near* and bring sacrifices and thank offerings to the house of the Lord." This expression is used in the book of Hebrews when we are invited to draw near through the blood of Christ as we assemble together (10:19-25). We don't gather here on Sundays to run through an entertaining program. We gather to meet with the Lord Himself, to come near to Him. So our worship celebration should be both joyful and reverent, in His presence.

Sometimes people come to church and leave mumbling, "I didn't get anything out of it." That's not the point. The point is, "Did the Lord get anything out of you?" Did you come to draw near and offer to the Lord a joyous, reverent thank offering because of His grace shown to you through the blood of Christ?

Conclusion

I love verse 36: "Then Hezekiah and all the people rejoiced over what God had prepared for the people, because the thing came about suddenly." God *prepared* it (He is the sovereign cause of revival), but it happened *suddenly*! There was a joyous spontaneity to the whole thing. The birth of our Savior had been prepared from ages past, and yet "*suddenly* there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God" In Acts we read that "*suddenly* there came from heaven a noise like a violent rushing wind" and yet "this is what was spoken of through the prophet Joel" hundreds of years before! Prepared by God, but it happened suddenly. And God's people rejoiced and God--not Hezekiah--got the glory.

I'll end where I began: Spiritual renewal or revival in our nation begins with revival in our hearts. John Wesley said, "Give me 100 men who fear nothing but sin and desire nothing but God, and I will shake the world." If you and I want revival, we must *commit* ourselves completely to the Lord; we must *cleanse* ourselves of all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God (2 Cor. 7:1); and we must join together in corporate *celebration* of God's abundant grace that extends to all who will draw near to Him through blood of Christ. And if God's Spirit moves in a mighty way in our midst, we will rejoice over what He has prepared, because the thing came about suddenly.

Discussion Questions

1. What should we do if we're committed to Christ, cleansed from all known sin, and yet feel spiritually cold?
2. Discuss the implications of the statement, "Commitment to God is the most pressing need in a time of pressing need."
3. Must true confession of sin include contrition over our sin?
4. Discuss: Apathy in worship is sin.

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