

“A Prayer for Revival”  
Psalm 126  
(Preached at Trinity, July 21, 2013)

I'm supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord's Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

**Disclaimer:** These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I'll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. We are continuing with the series of **Psalms 120-134**, each designated by the title, “A Song of Degrees,” or “A Song of Ascent.” They picture the ascent of pilgrims going up to Jerusalem for the feasts. They begin in a distant land and move closer and closer to Jerusalem.
2. We've seen in these psalms the reality of the hardship God's people face as they travel through this world—But God is our never-ending source of comfort and deliverance.
3. As we come to **Psalm 126** we find the psalmist looking back to better times.  
**Psalm 126:1 KJV** - "When the LORD turned again the captivity of Zion, we were like them that dream."
4. It was a wonderful time. It was like a dream. He directs our attention to a time of great revival in Israel. The context is presumably their great deliverance from Babylon.
  - A. In 586 Nebuchadnezzar attacked Judah. He carried off most of its inhabitants, burned Jerusalem, destroyed the Temple, and the wall that extended around Jerusalem was torn down with its great stones piled one on top of the other.
  - B. Years and then decades passed and Jerusalem became but a memory, almost a legend. The elderly would tell stories of the splendor of Jerusalem but there were children born in Babylon who were now adults who had never seen Jerusalem. The great city became overgrown and for years was nothing but a pile of weeds and rubble.
  - C. Most thought that the possibility of ever returning and restoring the city was the beyond the realm of possibility. It was only the consideration of dreamers. Finally, God moved upon King Cyrus to restore the Temple at Jerusalem.  
**Ezra 1:2 KJV** - "Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, The LORD God of heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth; and he hath charged me to build him an house at Jerusalem, which *is* in Judah."
  - D. Only about 50 thousand returned. But it was a time of unimaginable joy. When the foundation of the Temple was laid there was a great shout of praise.  
**Ezra 3:10-13 KJV** - "And when the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the LORD, they set the priests in their apparel with trumpets, and the Levites the sons of Asaph with cymbals, to praise the LORD, after the ordinance of David king of Israel. <sup>11</sup> And they sang together by course in praising and giving thanks unto the LORD; because *he is* good, for his mercy *endureth* for ever toward Israel. And all the people shouted with a great shout, when they praised the LORD, because the foundation of the house of the LORD was laid. <sup>12</sup> But many of the priests and Levites and chief of the fathers, *who were* ancient men, that had seen the first house, when the foundation of this house was laid before their eyes, wept with a loud voice; and many shouted aloud for joy: <sup>13</sup> So that the people could not discern the noise of the shout of joy from the noise of the weeping of the people: for the people shouted with a loud shout, and the noise was heard afar off."

- E. Twenty years after Ezra arrived the Temple was completed.
4. This is the context of **Psalm 126**  
**Psalm 126:1-3 KJV** - "When the LORD turned again the captivity of Zion, we were like them that dream. <sup>2</sup> Then was our mouth filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing: then said they among the heathen, The LORD hath done great things for them. <sup>3</sup> The LORD hath done great things for us; *whereof* we are glad."  
 a. It was like a dream! Joy filled the air. It was a glorious revival.  
 b. Even the Gentiles looking on knew something extraordinary was taking place.  
**Psalm 126:2 KJV** - "then said they among the heathen, The LORD hath done great things for them."
5. But the years passed and the glory faded. The joy was replaced with the mundane and for decades the work in Jerusalem ceased. The walls remained rubble. The original revival had ended and there was a longing for the return of their original zeal.  
**Psalm 126:4 KJV** - "Turn again our captivity, O LORD, as the streams in the south."  
 A. The word "captivity" in **verse 4** doesn't really express the fullness of the passage.  
 1. The word for "captivity" ("Turn again our captivity, O LORD") carries the idea of restored fortunes. It is the same word used to describe Job's restoration.  
**Job 42:10 NAS** - "And the LORD restored the fortunes of Job when he prayed for his friends, and the LORD increased all that Job had twofold."  
 And the word "restored" in **Job 42** is the same word translated "turn" in **Verse 4**  
 2. The NIV & CSV translate the word "captivity" with the word, "fortunes"  
**Psalm 126:4 NIV** - "Restore our fortunes, LORD, like streams in the Negev."  
 B. **Verse 4** is a prayer for God's wondrous refreshing.  
 The word translated "south" is נֶגֶב - It is referring to Negev, a dry arid region in the south. It was a place where streams were welcomed relief.  
 "Oh God, send us refreshing as the streams of Negev."  
 C. It is a prayer that their weeping would be turned to joy; that their barrenness would be replaced by a wonderful harvest.
6. Tonight, I want us to consider this prayer for revival. It is a word often misused and misunderstood. It is often confused with an awakening  
 A. An awakening is a Divine visitation in which there is a great increase in the salvation of souls. We need a great awakening in our day. It may be the only hope for our nation.  
 We have seen numerous awakenings throughout history.  
 1. I believe the days following Pentecost was a great awakening. In a short time over 10,000 were saved in Jerusalem.  
**Acts 2:41 KJV** - "Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added *unto them* about three thousand souls."  
**Acts 4:4 KJV** - "Howbeit many of them which heard the word believed; and the number of the men was about five thousand."

2. In our own land we have seen numerous times of God moving with great power including the First and Second Great Awakenings.  
1740-1742 – The Great Awakening – 50,000 were saved in New England and about 300,000 across all thirteen colonies
  3. These great awakenings are often called revivals, although technically, one has to be alive before they can be revived. We are longing to see God bring life upon dead bones.
- B. Revival is different from an awakening of the masses to salvation. Revival is a renewal of the church in holiness, purity, and truth
1. Church members are renewed into a conviction of sin
  2. Church members are renewed in their relationship with Christ resulting in fervency of prayer
  3. New power comes to the Preaching and truth becomes central
  4. Revival often results in a purging of the church of those steeped in tradition and ritual but do not know Christ  
The Reformation was a time of revival upon the church
- C. There are also times of personal revival – times of refreshing and renewal of our passion for Christ; an increase in the fervency in our prayer life; a renewed hunger for the Word of God; a great stirring of our heart during worship.
- I. First, I want us to briefly consider our need for revival in Christ’s church today  
I preached a sermon two years ago from Psalm 63, also on the subject of revival.
- A. Although we have great cause for encouragement the church in America today is still in great need of revival today
1. The church today is doctrinally weak and spiritually dull.
  2. It is often difficult to distinguish most church members from those outside the church. Immorality within the church seems to mirror immorality without. The divorce rate is the same.
  3. It’s no wonder the church today has little impact upon the world. To a large degree, the poor spiritual wasteland in our nation is a reflection of the weakness of the church
- B. Few churches today are experiencing the power of God
1. Preaching is void of power - Few are being converted
  2. Worship is void of the expectation of meeting God – Do we come expecting to meet God?
  3. When revival begins in the church the presence of God comes down. Men are humbled. Sin is exposed in all its vileness. Preaching is attended with power. Worship is filled with awe and reverence. Each person feels the sermon is directed to him.
- C. We must cry out to God for a great revival in preaching.
1. Every period of great revival in the church has been characterized by powerful preaching.
    - a. The Apostles were characterized by powerful preaching
    - b. The Reformation was charged with powerful preaching from preachers like Martin Luther, John Calvin, John Knox.

- c. The Puritan revival in England was characterized by the powerful preaching of men like John Bunyan, John Owen, and Richard Baxter.
  - d. The Great Awakening in America was promoted by the preaching of Jonathan Edwards, John Wesley, and George Whitefield.
  - e. The church today must return to a high focus upon preaching
3. Today in many churches the emphasis is upon singing. The pulpit is minimized. The praise band is emphasized.
- Lloyd-Jones preached in the 1960's – "At a time like this, at an appalling time like this, with crime and violence, and sin, and perversions, God's name desecrated and the sanctities being spat upon, the whole state of the world surely says that this is not a time for singing, this is a time for preaching. We are wafting ourselves into some happy atmosphere. This is no time for singing; it is a time for thinking, for preaching, for conviction. It is a time for proclaiming the message of God and his wrath upon evil. The time for singing will come later. Let the windows of heaven be opened, let us see men and women by the thousands brought into the Kingdom of God, and then it will be time to sin" (Revival, page 63).
- D. There is a great famine in the church that runs deep
- 1. There is a famine of hearing the Word of God. Amos warned Israel of such a time.  
**Amos 8:11-12 KJV** - "Behold, the days come, saith the Lord GOD, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD: <sup>12</sup> And they shall wander from sea to sea, and from the north even to the east, they shall run to and fro to seek the word of the LORD, and shall not find *it*."  
    - a. Many professing Christians just simply have no desire for God's Word.
    - b. Few invest serious time in God's Word. Few professing Christians can declare that they have read the Bible through in the last five years.
  - 2. There is a famine of brokenness and humility
    - a. There is little trembling before God, "Have mercy on me a sinner." There isn't a hatred of sin – a trembling over what we see in our culture. There isn't a great sense of the need for separateness, holiness, purity.  
 There isn't the spirit of David,  
**Psalms 139:23-24** – "Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: <sup>24</sup> And see if *there be any* wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."
    - b. There isn't a desire to die to self. Rather we are in full control. I am my own ruler!
    - c. There is little desire from hearts that humbly declare, "God, here I am, I am yours, use me, send me."
  - 3. There is a famine of spiritual thirst
    - a. People are not hungry for God
    - b. They are not interested in investing themselves in growing nearer to Him.

- c. Most people in the church today spend little time in prayer  
Many Christians have never fasted  
They have little interest in God's Word
- 4. A famine of love and passion for Christ
  - a. We have received of the greatest gift – John 3:16  
Jesus is that “Heavenly gift” spoken of in Heb. 6:4
  - b. Most are not thirsting for Christ
  - c. May we return to our first love. May we once again be filled with the joy of being in love with the King of the universe  
**1 Peter 1:8** – “Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see *him* not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory:”

II. Let me speak for a moment on the matter of personal revival

- A. The psalmist recalls a previous work of God
  - 1. He remembered God's great deliverance
  - 2. He remembers the raptures of joy that filled their heart
  - 3. It was so wonderful it was like a dream
- B. Is there a time in your Christian journey when you had a much greater passion for Christ than you do now?
  - 1. I'm not encouraging sensationalism or kindling some experience of excitement. Too often Christians place an over emphasis on feelings. They are always looking for an increase in their feelings. I'm not talking about feelings. Our feelings are not a true test of our spiritual condition. The human heart is so deceptive.
  - 2. I'm talking about your appetites; your thirsts.
    - a. Was there a time when you had a much greater thirst for holiness?  
**Matthew 5:6 KJV** - "Blessed *are* they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled."  
This isn't talking about a feeling. It is talking about an intense interest in living a holy life.
    - b. Was there a time when the Word of God held a much greater place in your life? Again, this isn't just a feeling. It is an intense desire to know God more through His Word, a desire to be taught by God in order to be conformed to His righteousness.  
**Psalms 119:9-11 KJV** - "Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed *thereto* according to thy word. <sup>10</sup> With my whole heart have I sought thee: O let me not wander from thy commandments. <sup>11</sup> Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee."  
**Psalms 119:105 KJV** - "Thy word *is* a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path."  
**Psalms 119:103 KJV** - "How sweet are thy words unto my taste! *yea, sweeter* than honey to my mouth!"  
**Psalms 119:97 KJV** - "O how love I thy law! it *is* my meditation all the day."

- c. Was there a time when Christ had a greater centrality in your life? Was there a time when serving Him was your greatest delight, but you've been distracted by many other things?

### Conclusion:

1. What will it take to stir the fires of revival?  
We must be those who cry out, "Oh God, come upon us with power."  
Are you interested in praying for the refreshing of God upon your soul?  
**Psalm 63:1-2** – "my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is; <sup>2</sup> To see thy power and thy glory"  
**Isaiah 64:1** – "Oh that thou wouldest rend the heavens, that thou wouldest come down, that the mountains might flow down at thy presence"
2. And we must praise God for His mighty work we are seeing.  
For the last 20 years there has been a revival of love for sound doctrine, particularly among the young generation.
  - a. Scores of conferences are attended by thousands of Christians hungry for sound doctrine.  
Ligonier Conference, Desiring God Conference, Together for the Gospel Conference, Shepherds Conference, Expositor's Conference, Banner of Truth Conference, Founder's Conference.
  - b. Sermon databases like Sermon Audio report hundreds of thousands of sermon downloads.
  - c. It would seem doctrine is once again finding the favor of many of God's people.
3. Doctrine alone, however, is not an end in itself. Pray that this love of sound teaching will result in transformed lives that will flood into our culture speaking God's mighty Word.
4. And remember, the Christian life is a journey. It is a marathon, not a sprint. It isn't a flash of fire that then quickly fades. The Christian life is full of victories and defeats. It is full of times of great joy and times of great grief.
5. Sometimes Christians look back with a desire for the simpler days when they were first saved. It was all new. It seemed easier. But with maturity comes greater responsibility. No adult can return to the carefree days of childhood.  
And Christianity is not about nostalgia. It is about pressing on in the Christian warfare.
6. May God bless us with ever increasing maturity. May He increase our passion for Christ, His Word, and holiness.  
And may God bless us with special times of renewal that serve to refresh and increase our passion for Him like a mighty fire of revival.
7. And may we pray for such times. What does the psalmist do as he remembers the past time of refreshing?
  - A. He prays that God might once again fill their hearts with bountiful joy.
  - B. He also recognizes the need for patient work. He paints the picture of a farmer sowing seed who will enjoy a rich harvest in due time.