

In our beloved nation, today is Memorial Day. Through the many years of our nation's history, military forces have risen against us in various ways. Today, and especially today, we remember those who gave the full measure of their devotion. In Arlington, VA, and in many other cemeteries across this beautiful country are the grave markers that remind us that our freedom was and is not without a price. A heaven-sent, life transforming revival that restores the message of Calvary love is our greatest need. Pray for it, my dear friends and family.

WHAT ARE THE CHARACTERISTICS OF A TRUE REVIVAL?

A Devotional prepared by Dr. Robert L. Morris

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2 Chronicles 29:1-36 (Read the entire Chapter)

This Devotional continues in our study of revival, using the revival in Judah under King Hezekiah as the model. Last time we looked at the great need for a true, heaven-sent revival. Today we want to look together at the basic characteristics of a true revival. For this, we turn to 2 Chronicles 29.

We must begin with leadership. The Bible record is: "Hezekiah became king when he was twenty-five years old, and he reigned twenty-nine years in Jerusalem ... and he did what was right in the sight of the LORD, according to all that his father David had done." (2 Chronicles 29:1a, 2; NKJV)

The account of the reign of King Hezekiah is found in 2 Kings 18 – 20, in 2 Chronicles 29-32, and in Isaiah 36-39. The focus in each account differs slightly, but not significantly. Of specific interest for this study are the accounts recorded in 2 Kings and 2 Chronicles. The account in 2 Kings focuses on the civil reforms brought about by King Hezekiah. The focus in 2 Chronicles is on the religious or spiritual aspects of the life of Judah. While the two accounts complete each other, it is the latter that will dominate this study.

"Doing what was right in the sight of the LORD" includes at least the following five important facts.

1. A RE-ESTABLISHING OF THE CENTRALITY OF GOD'S WORD IN THE LIVES OF GOD'S PEOPLE. (vv 3, 16-19)

King Hezekiah came to a tottering throne and an all but destroyed nation. Surrounding them were fearful enemy nations. The Edomites were on the east, the Philistines were on the west and south, and the Syrians and the Assyrians were on the north. Hezekiah could well have been excused if he had thought and even declared his first obligation was to take care of the wretched political situation left by his father. Worldly wisdom would probably have counseled him: "Take care of these enemies, and after their defeat deal with the Temple and restoring the religious life of your people." King Hezekiah was wiser than that. He knew that the terrible condition in Judah was the result of religious corruption. He knew that it is useless to try to heal a nation's tragedies unless its spiritual condition is healed first. The new young king had a brave heart and was one whose testimony is that he "trusted in the LORD God of Israel, so that after him was none like him among all the kings of Judah, nor who were before him." (2 Kings 18:5) He may have had access to and read the words of King David who wrote: "I made haste, and did not delay to keep Your commandments. The cords of the wicked have bound me, but I have not forgotten Your law." (Psalm 119:60, 61) The language of Scripture is powerfully appealing. "In the first year of his (King Hezekiah's) reign, in the first month, he opened the doors of the house of the LORD and repaired them." (v 3; NKJV) King Hezekiah did more! Keep reading!

2. A REQUIREMENT OF PURITY IN THE LEADERSHIP OF THE CHURCH. (vv 4-5, 11-15)

G. Campbell Morgan once wrote: "Sacrifices and offerings are only acceptable when those offering them are themselves consecrated to Jehovah." True revival begins in the hearts made right with God. The revival under King Hezekiah began with a speech made by the King to the priests and the Levites, the designated spiritual leaders in Israel. The Biblical record states it as follows: "Then he (King Hezekiah) brought in the priests and the Levites, and gathered them in the East Square, and said to them: 'Hear me, Levites! Now sanctify yourselves, sanctify the house of the LORD God of your fathers, and carry out the rubbish from the holy place.' ... Now it is in my heart to make a covenant with the LORD God of Israel, that His fierce wrath may turn away from us. My sons, do not be negligent now, for the LORD has chosen you to stand before Him, to serve Him, and that you should minister to Him and burn incense." (vv 4, 5, 10,

11) What is not cited here is that whereas this reform began in the first month of the first year of his reign, King Hezekiah wisely gathered together at least most of the priests and Levites, and spoke to them as well as to the people of Judah. They had been complicit or at least content in serving King Ahaz in his idolatrous reign. Some who read the Scripture at this point may be tempted to suggest that the sanctifying ordered by King Hezekiah was probably for ceremonial uncleanness. It is the position of the one writing this study that the requirement that they cleanse themselves before they cleansed the Temple has more than ceremonial meaning. Impure hands are not fit for the work of revival! King Hezekiah, who "... did what was right in the sight of the LORD, according to all that his father David had done," surely understood the ancient writing of King David who said: "Who may ascend into the hill of the LORD? Or who may stand in His holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who has not lifted up his soul to an idol, nor sworn deceitfully." (Psalm 24:3, 4)

Fourteen Levites "arose" (vv 12-14) and began their work. "They gathered their brethren, sanctified themselves, and went according to the commandment of the king, at the words of the LORD, to cleanse the house of the LORD." (v 15) They understood their assignment and completed it. By this they were ready to cleanse the Temple of God. Mrs. C.H. Morris was a gifted musician, poet, and hymn writer. She wrote the lyrics and the music score for many of the church's great songs. One of them, and one of my all-time favorites, is particularly meaningful when considering the subject of revival and the need for clean hands and pure hearts.

I Long to Be Holy

I long to be holy, all spotless within,
Free from the defilement of every known sin;
The past with its follies, all under the blood,
Soul, body and spirit, all yielded to God.
I long to be holy, carnality slain,
My heart a fit temple, where Jesus shall reign;
When pure is the fountain, the stream will be pure;
Thy blood for my cleansing, the remedy sure.
I long to be holy; Lord, Thou has the pow'r
To sanctify wholly Thy children this hour;
Faith claims the best promise, Thy word cannot fail,
And for us this moment, the blood doth avail.

Chorus: (after each verse)

Take me and make me holy in heart;
Take me and make me pure as Thou art.

3. A REPENTANCE FOR ALL SINS, KNOWN AND UNKNOWN, AND FORSAKING OF THE SAME. (vv 6-9, 20-24)

This is characteristic Number 3 in our study of what a true revival is like. In his statement to the priests and Levites, King Hezekiah went through the painful litany of recognizing the sins of Judah under the leadership of his father King Ahaz. After he declared that "our fathers have trespassed and done evil in the eyes of the LORD our God," he listed them as:

- * ... they have forsaken Him;
- * ... turned their faces away from the dwelling place of the LORD;
- * ... turned their backs on Him;
- * ... shut the doors of the vestibule;
- * ... put out the lamps;
- * ... burned incense or offered burnt offerings in the holy place to the God of Israel.

A person cannot be the instrument of God in leading in correction in an evil setting unless that person is strongly aware of the strength and horrific nature of the existing evils.

Hezekiah's statement to the priests and Levites was not only "kingly," but uttered "kindly." We note the Biblical statement: "My sons, do not be negligent now, for the LORD has chosen you to stand before Him,

to serve Him, and that you should minister to Him, and burn incense.” (v 11) It is the tenderness of “my sons” that captures a bit of the character of this young but wise king of Judah.

The priests were appointed to offer sacrifices of atonement successively, “for the kingdom, for the sanctuary, and for Judah.” (v 21) “... for the kingdom” means for the sins of the king and his predecessors. “... for the sanctuary” means for the sins of the priests themselves and for the desecration of the Temple of the LORD. “... for Judah” means for the people who, by their own voluntary consent, were involved in the national apostasy under King Ahaz. It is significant that King Hezekiah “commanded that the burnt offering and the sin offering be made for all Israel.” (v 24) The sad fate of the northern kingdom of Israel was a valuable lesson for King Hezekiah. Yet, he knew that the 10 tribes constituting the northern kingdom of Israel were a part of the whole nation of God’s chosen people. Tenderly and meaningfully he included them in his command: “for all Israel.”

Let us resolve that we will never forget the magnificent truth stated in Hebrews 13:12: “Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered outside the gate.” And that is how the sins of our lives can be forgiven, and the sin nature in our lives can be removed, and the throne room of our hearts occupied by the King of kings and Lord of lords. The difference between God’s holiness and our holiness is that His is intrinsic, while we are made holy by His blood, through total surrender to Him, and obedience to His will, based on His sacrifice on Calvary. We live surrounded by temptation to sin, but by the Holy Spirit’s power we can live in the triumph of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. We move now to look at the fourth characteristic of a true revival.

4. A RETURN TO TRUE WORSHIP OF GOD. (vv 25-30)

The priests and Levites had completed their assignments. They had begun by cleansing the house of the LORD. The priests brought out all the debris and the Levites threw it into the Brook Kidron. (v 16) The Levites, the priests, the house of the LORD God, and all the articles within that house were sanctified, (that is, cleansed). King Hezekiah presided over the preparation for worship. It is significant that King Hezekiah “commanded that the burnt offering and the sin offering be made for all Israel.” (v 24) The sad fate of the northern kingdom of Israel was a valuable lesson for King Hezekiah. Yet, he knew that the 10 tribes constituting the northern kingdom of Israel were a part of the whole nation of God’s chosen people. Tenderly and with clearly defined meaning, he included them in his command: “for all Israel.”

The priests and Levites were now sanctified (cleansed), and the Temple with all its furnishing was cleansed and restored. It was time for King Hezekiah to bring back the service of worship, and thereby honor the LORD God of Israel. (See vv 25, 26) This was a high and holy moment in the great revival of the people of Judah. Everything was in order. The participants were properly in place as assigned. Let the service begin! The first order in the service was announced by King Hezekiah, who “commanded them to offer the burnt offering on the altar.” (v 27) So much more could be stated regarding the many offerings listed in the Old Testament. But what did the burnt offering, as noted in verse 27 represent? It was the prophetic insight pointing to the one day, in God’s plan when “this Man, (Jesus Christ) after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God ... for by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified.” (Hebrews 10:12, 14; NKJV) And that is the only basis for true worship. Focusing on Jesus is the heart of true worship. And now, number 5.

5. A RESTORATION OF A PASSION FOR GOD. (vv 31-36)

To know the Lord is to love Him. To love Him is to fellowship with Him. To fellowship with Him is to praise and exalt Him. To praise and exalt Him is to obey His Word. To obey His Word is to serve Him faithfully. To serve Him faithfully is to love others and share His message of redeeming grace with them. The spiritually minded King Hezekiah spoke to the people who were consecrated to the LORD. He instructed them to “come near, and bring sacrifices and thank offerings into the house of the LORD.” The people responded positively by bringing sacrifices and thank offerings. Some brought burnt offerings. The offerings were in abundance. (vv 32 - 35) “Then Hezekiah and all the people rejoiced that God had prepared the people, since the events took place so suddenly.” (v 36)

Sacrifice for sin in both the Old Testament, through the sacrificial system of the blood of bulls and goats, and the New Testament, through the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross, is the springboard for the sacrifice of praise. The people of Judah had a grand celebration of praise. “So the service of the house

of the LORD was set in order. Then Hezekiah and all the people rejoiced that God had prepared the people, since the events took place so suddenly.” (vv 35c, 36)

In the New Testament we read: “Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name. But do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.” (Hebrews 13:15, 16) Truly, revival had come to Judah, AND with it a thrilling and consuming passion for their relationship with the LORD God of Israel. In the hearts of God’s precious people there should be a burning passion to see this kind of a revival break forth in all our churches, returning our nation to the true worship of God that will result in millions of people turning their lives to Jesus Christ, “The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.” (John 1:29) Let’s close this Devotional with that magnificent “revival” hymn penned by J. Edwin Orr, and sung to the music of a Maori Melody.

CLEANSE ME

1. Search me, O God, and know my heart today.

Try me, O Savior; know my thoughts, I pray.

See if there be some wicked way in me;

Cleanse me from ev’ry sin, and set me free.

2. I praise Thee, Lord, for cleansing me from sin.

Fulfill Thy Word, and make me pure within.

Fill me with fire, where once I burned with shame.

Grant my desire to magnify Thy name.

3. Lord, take my life and make it wholly Thine;

Fill my poor heart with Thy great love divine.

Take all my will, my passion, self, and pride.

I now surrender; Lord, in me abide.

4. O Holy Ghost, revival comes from Thee.

Send a revival – start the work in me.

Thy Word declares Thou wilt supply our need.

For blessing now, O Lord, I humbly plead.