

SMALL WORDS OF REVIVAL – WHEN-IF-THEN

Notes from David Hillson's talks, 8 & 15 February 1998

There are lots of big words in the Bible – justification, sanctification, propitiation etc. But often “small is powerful”, and the little words make a huge difference. For example, just imagine life without “with” – the promise of God's abiding presence.

We spent two weeks during February exploring one of the classic revival passages in the Bible – 2 Chronicles chapter 7 verses 13-15 – focusing on the small words that make all the difference : WHEN, IF and THEN. These three little words cover three important aspects of revival : conditions needing revival, conditions for revival, and conditions of revival.

WHEN – CONDITIONS NEEDING REVIVAL

2 Chronicles 7:13 tells us that God allows conditions to develop which require nothing less than radical revival. These are symbolised by three things :

- no rain – speaking of a lack of the Holy Spirit's reviving, no anointing or refreshing, leading to dryness
- locust invasion – a picture of satanic attack, destroying crops and leading to famine
- plague – weakness and death in the body

As we look around us today, we should ask whether we detect these three things. It is interesting that God says “When I ...” – he is apparently allowing these conditions to develop. Why? Because he wants us to see our desperate need of revival, to recognise that we are not supposed to live a dry life without the Holy Spirit, with the enemy able to rampage through us without hindrance, and with weakness in the body of the church. He wants better for us, and is prepared to let us suffer in order to wake us up to our need!

IF – CONDITIONS FOR REVIVAL

What is our response to these conditions? 2Chronicles 7:14 starts with the word “If ...”. This is a very important word in the Bible. God seeks relationship and will not force himself on people, so he waits for our response. Many places in the Bible say “IF you will ... THEN I will ...”, for example the conditional covenants in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28. We need to realise that we are *responsible* (able to respond?), and that what we do matters – what happens “IF NOT”??

God is looking for a response, which 2 Chronicles 7:14 summarises in the IF part of the verse :

- “*If my people who are called by my name ...*”. It is God's own people who he expects to respond. “Called by name” speaks of a family relationship, bearing his character, associated with his reputation. It also means a people who know who they are – a people of destiny and identity. We will never see revival until we know who we are.
- “*...will humble themselves...*”. Humility is a vital Christian characteristic – 1 Peter 5:5-6 says that God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble. But what is humility? It is simply *seeing yourself as God sees you*, nothing more nor less. This doesn't mean sackcloth and ashes, but realism. God will not revive people who are proud of their own capabilities, but instead looks for those who recognise their weaknesses and rely on him for grace.
- “*...and pray...*”. It is not enough to hope for revival, or even to wait for it. We need to ask for it. James 4:2 says simply “You don't have because you don't ask!” The word used here has particular meaning – it is about *habitual intercession*, being *persistent* and *consistent*. Does this describe our prayer for revival? Revival history shows that it is preceded by faithful prayer, sometimes for years, often by just a few people. Will we?
- “*... and seek my face ...*”. The Hebrew word translated “seek” means to be desperate, searching for something, striving, not resting until it is found. We must realise that we'll never see revival unless

God is involved. Are we desperate enough? Jeremiah 29:11-14 tells us that we'll find him when we seek him with our whole heart. We're told to seek "his face" – asking God to look at us – do we really want this? What will he see?

- "... *turn from their wicked ways ...*". Repentance is a recurring theme of revival – not because God wants to keep reminding us of how bad we are, but because he wants to keep an open door for us to stay close to him. We must be passionate for holiness, with no apathy, no compromise and no turning back, if we are to see revival. God is not likely to bring revival to a half-hearted unholy church.

These are the conditions which God is looking for as a response to the clear need for revival. We must ask ourselves whether we are prepared to fulfil the conditions. How will we respond?

THEN – CONDITIONS OF REVIVAL

Fortunately for us, 2 Chronicles 7:14 continues on after the IF part, with a THEN section. God has promised that if we meet the conditions for revival, he will act. How?

- "*Then will I hear from heaven...*". We desperately need God to hear our prayers, and revival is characterised by answered prayer. Of course God always listens when we pray, but he sometimes chooses not to hear us. Isaiah 59:1-2 explains that our sin separates us from God so that he cannot hear us or act on our behalf. King David wrote a psalm which says "If I cherish my sin in my heart, you will not hear me". But IF we meet the conditions of humility, prayer, seeking God and repentance, THEN he guarantees to hear us. And 1 John 5:14-15 tells us that a heard prayer is an answered prayer!
- "...*forgive their sin...*". God will make his people clean and restore us to wholeness, IF we meet the conditions. He is very keen to sort out his church! This is not an optional extra, and God is committed to your holiness – possibly more than you are!
- "...*and heal their land.*" The effects of revival go much wider than the church, and will make a difference in our community. The wholeness that God promises includes putting right the conditions that need revival – bringing the rain of the Holy Spirit's anointing, banishing the locusts of enemy attack, and restoring health and strength in the body of the church.

These THEN's describe what happens when revival arrives – God is actively involved, in partnership with his people, answering prayer, sorting out the church, and making the community whole again.

SO WHAT??

There seems little doubt that we can see the WHEN conditions needing revival around us. We need the THEN of God's involvement to bring revival. But IF is the bridge between WHEN and THEN! We must ask ourselves whether the THEN is worth the IF. If we want revival, then we must prepare for it and meet the conditions.

The passage in 2 Chronicles chapter 7 has one more important thing to say. Verse 15 tells us that having laid down the WHEN conditions needing revival, and showing us the IF conditions for us to meet in order to bring the THEN conditions of revival among us, there is also a NOW!!

God says "NOW I am watching and listening to see what happens in this place." He expects a response to his word, and is paying careful attention to us. What will God see and hear from us? Revival will not go away as a subject. It is not a passing fad. There are two alternatives for us as a church and as individuals – revival or death. God clearly wants to revive us, and is looking to see whether we meet the conditions. Do we really want to see revival?

(David Hillson)