

Fil-Am Community Church

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Key Verse: 2 Chronicles 7:14,

14 if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land.

“Preparing for Revival”

Good morning! This morning we’re concluding our series on “The Power of Praying Together”. This morning we’re going to look at what brings revival and what our part is in bringing revival. Revival is when there’s a great and powerful outpouring of the Spirit of God that sinners are converted wholesale and people’s lives are transformed. Everywhere there is just a palpable manifestation of the glory of God because of the miraculous changes that are taking place in people’s lives and in the society as well.

Of course, only God can bring revival. We cannot fake revival. Programs and methods cannot produce revival. But God didn’t leave us in the dark as to how it comes about. Our text from 2 Chronicles 7:14 can serve as a guide. It is not a formula, mind you, but God put it there for a purpose. If we want revival, we need not look any further than this verse.

So, please open your Bibles to 2 Chronicles 7:14 and let us read this passage together.

In 1904 a young ministerial student named Evan Roberts, began to feel that God was sending an urgent message that He was going to pour out a mighty spirit of revival on Wales, which is now a part of Great Britain. Roberts began attending various revival meetings and during one he was deeply moved by the Spirit. As he prayed at the altar he cried out to God, “Bend me o Lord!” This was a complete and total surrender of his will to God’s will.

Roberts soon returned to his home church to preach the message of revival but his pastor was reluctant to allow him to speak. In a compromise, the pastor announced that Roberts would be speaking following the regular prayer meeting and any who wished to stay were welcome. Only 17 people stayed to hear Evan speak and most of them were teenagers and young adults.

Evan Roberts spoke in that church with a simple 4 point message that he was convinced could help God bring revival.

1. Confess all known sin to God
2. Deal with and get rid of any “doubtful” area of your life
3. Be ready to obey the Holy Spirit instantly
4. Confess Christ publicly

When Roberts was finished speaking all 17 young people were at the altar on their knees crying out to God. They prayed until 2am that night and it was the beginning of one of the greatest movements of God in all history. By the end of the week, over 60 people were won to Christ and over the course of the next year and a half revival swept through the nation of Wales. Over 1,000,000 people were led to saving faith in Jesus Christ.

The revival was so great that the national culture changed dramatically. For example,

- A wave of bankruptcies took place - All of the taverns and liquor stores went out of business
- Work at the coal mines was brought to a near standstill - The mules who pulled the wagons were so accustomed to hearing foul language from the workers that after the men were saved the mules no longer recognized their voices or commands
- The entire police force was dismissed for almost 18 months due to a complete lack of crime
- One of the few court cases that was actually brought before a judge was unusual. The defendant came into the court and admitted his guilt, the judge led the man to Christ and the jury closed the case by singing a hymn.

The revival eventually made its way across the Atlantic and swept through parts of New York and New Jersey. There was even a daily column in the

New York Times called “Today’s Converts” that listed those who were being saved.

Now, times seem to have totally changed and we have to admit that our world is nothing like that of 1904. I would have to agree our world is a darker and more sinister place where revival seems almost impossible.

Our churches have fallen on desperate times, but not because of attendance, money or lack of involvement. We are in desperate times because we desperately need a movement of God almighty and no one seems to realize it!

If God could bring revival in 1904 or any other time for that matter, He can do it here in Springfield in 2012. Yes, there are times when during our singing or preaching or fellowship we feel the Spirit of God moving in our midst. But they are few and far between. Is that how it’s supposed to be? Wouldn’t it be nice if God’s divine presence is always felt in this place? Wouldn’t it be nice to hear someone visiting our church for the first time to say, “Surely, the presence of God is here”?

But what keeps us from having a revival? What keeps us from experiencing the power of God? What keeps things from changing for the best? I believe that if we want things to change, there must be a change from within first. A personal, individual revival must take place before a church revival could

ever take place. And the Bible could give us an earful of advice if we'd only listen to what it is saying.

In our text this morning, God gives us four requirements for revival. We'll take them up one by one.

- Humble Ourselves

"If my People, who are called by my name, will humble themselves."

Let me note first that in this passage, God is addressing only those who are his own children, those who have a personal relationship with him. We often forget that the work of revival always begins with God's own people first.

Why? God must first renew His people before the real work of winning the world can take place. The work of revival must begin with God's own people.

Now, how do you know that you are one of his? The Bible says in Romans 8:16, *"The Spirit himself testifies with our spirits that we are God's children."*

You will know in your heart that you are a child of God because the Holy Spirit tells you so. Your spirit senses that. You see, the Holy Spirit started to dwell in you when you accepted the Lord Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior. If you can't pinpoint the time in your life when you placed your trust in Jesus as your Savior, then you don't have the Holy Spirit in you, you haven't been born again, as the Bible says. And if you're not born again, then you won't get revival no matter how much you ask God for it. So, you don't need revival. What you need is salvation. And salvation is what the Lord Jesus Christ offers to each one of us when he died on the cross to pay the

penalty for our sins. He took our sins upon him so that we may be saved from death and from the fires of hell. It's as simple as that. The Bible says, *"Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household."* Acts 16:31

So, to have a revival, God requires his people to be humble. Now, the thing about humility is that, like honesty, it is such a lonely word, to borrow the famous words of Billy Joel. Everyone is so untrue. The moment someone says, "I've got humility," then poof it goes, like a balloon that just burst. It's hard to grab it and make it stay. It's like water that slips out of the hands when you try to hold it. Btw, I'm thinking of writing a book called "How to Be Humble Like Me". Any pre-orders? Of course, that book wouldn't sell.

What then is humility? What does being humble mean?

It's so easy to rattle off verses related to humility like the one in Philippians 2:3 which exhorts us to 'consider others better than ourselves' or in Romans 12:3 which admonishes us to 'not think of ourselves more highly than we ought' and also in verse 10 which says, 'do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position.'

Our context here, however, indicates something more crucial than maintaining good relationships with others. Previous to verse 14, we see God telling Solomon, 13 *"When I shut up the heaven so that there is no rain, or command locusts to devour the land or send a plague among my people."*

This passage tells us that God sends calamity because of the people's sins. To be forgiven, the people need to humble themselves by way of admitting their sins. I think this is one of the hardest things to do. For someone to admit that he has done wrong, that is a truly selfless act.

Just to give you an example, most of us, when stopped by a policeman for beating the red light or going over the speed limit, we tend to find an excuse or argue with the policeman. You see, admitting we are wrong doesn't come naturally. When we are in a bind, we think first of reasons why we are right then sometimes it takes time or others to convince us that we are wrong. And worse, there are times when our sin or wrongness is staring right at us and yet we stubbornly refuse to acknowledge it. This is so sad because relationships often get strained or even broken because of our hardheadedness.

Psalm 51 was written by King David. He wrote it soon after he was confronted by the prophet Nathan because of his sins of adultery and murder. In this psalm, we see a picture of a broken man, a man who feels so wretched in his heart and downcast in his spirit, a man who acknowledged his own wickedness and saw sin as it is, an abomination to the Lord. You see, what David did was he confessed his sins to God. Confession is to admit to God that our actions were indeed sinful. We agree with him in his evaluation of our wrong actions. The Greek word translated "confess" in the New Testament means "to acknowledge" or "to agree with a charge brought against one."

When you confess, you're telling God, "Lord, I agree that what I did was detestable. You hate sin and I should hate it the way you do."

Until we come to a place where we absolutely, undeniably, and unarguably hate sin, we are not really humbling ourselves before God.

Now, the second thing that God requires for revival is to

2. Pray and Seek his Face

You don't have revival by seeking revival, but by seeking God. God says "if you will pray and seek my face, I will hear and heal your land." One thing every revival has in common: All revivals share a passionate commitment to praying for God to return. REPEAT.

Now let me make it clear when I say for God to return God is not the one who left. The reason revival is needed is because his people have gotten negligent. His people have left. But if God is going to return and be with his people it's going to be because they asked him to.

That's why it's so important for God's people to come together to pray. I think we can have all potlucks, fellowship times, Bible studies we want to have. Satan doesn't care just as long as we don't get together and pray. Revival delays because prayer decays. I've not studied a revival in history that

started as an organized move of the church. Not a single revival where a bunch of directors got together and said, “Okay, let’s start up a committee to start a revival next year.” Revival never starts because of organizing, it starts because of agonizing, because some people get on their knees and humble themselves and seek God and ask him to come.

By now, you’re already familiar with Jim Cymbala, the pastor of Brooklyn Tabernacle, the author of “Fresh Wind, Fresh Fire”. He recounts in that book how he came to pastor that church. It was way back in the 70’s, his father-in-law was then the pastor but he was ill and so asked him to pastor the church. The church was struggling because it was small and poor and Jim was greatly disheartened because the church was not going anywhere. There was discord, distrust and discouragement among the people. Week by week, the church was dwindling in numbers. Then, he became sick and his father-in-law asked him to come down to Florida so he may recover. One day while he was fishing, although his mind was not on fishing, he poured out his heart to God, telling God that he didn’t know how to lead the church. He was tearful as he cried because of the heaviness in his heart and then suddenly, the Lord impressed upon him these words,

“If you and your wife will lead my people to pray and call upon my name you will never lack for something fresh to preach. I will supply all the money that’s needed, both for the church and your family, and you will never have a building large enough to contain the crowds I will call in response.”

Since that time, the church has grown in leaps and bounds. It is now running at more than 10,000 in attendance right at the heart of one of New York's meanest cities.

The Bible doesn't say, "Preach without ceasing." It doesn't say "Sing without ceasing." It says "Pray without ceasing." When the disciples said to Jesus, "Teach us to pray", notice they didn't just say, "Teach us what to pray." I think what they were saying was, "Teach us to have your passion for prayer. We understand from being with you that what drives you and motivates you is your prayer life with God. Teach us to have a passion to pray like you do. And right out of that grew to the two parables on prayer. One was about the guy who wanted bread in the middle of the night. He kept asking till he got what he wanted. I'll sum up that parable in three words: DON'T GIVE UP!

The main thing Jesus taught about prayer was this: Don't Give Up! Keep praying. We need to be like Jacob. Remember? He saw an angel of the Lord at the brook Jabbok. And he wrestled with him all night. And do you remember the angel in the morning said, "Let me go." And what did Jacob say in Gen. 32:26, "I will not let you go unless you bless me." Church, I challenge you to pray that way. I challenge for you to pray for God to come powerfully to Springfield to touch the lives of the people in this community and say, "God, I'm not going to give up until it comes." Bombard heaven until the answer comes.

Pray and seek his face. The third requirement is to

3. Repent or turn from our evil ways

A wife goes to a doctor to describe to him the condition of his husband who was too sick to get up from bed. The doctor says, “Not good. Your husband has but one week to live. You can extend time by cooking for him, rubbing his feet and back, taking him to baseball games, fishing, etc. Be as affectionate as when you were first married. This could extend his life.” The wife goes home and the husband asks, “Honey, what did the doctor say?” And she replies, “He said you’ve got one week to live.”

You see many people do not get healed, not because their condition is incurable, but they’re not healed because they do not want to follow the doctor’s orders. And I want to suggest to you that many nations are not healed for the same reason. God in his word has said clearly, “I am the Great Physician and I can heal the land.” The question really is, “Do we want to follow the doctor’s orders?”

The issue is not whether or not God can heal a land. The issue is whether the people will swallow the prescription, and the last pill is the hardest of all. The first piece of medicine wasn’t easy: humbling ourselves is not something we do readily. The second was no easier to swallow: Pray and earnestly seek the face of God. But the third pill is the hardest of all to get down: We must turn from our wicked ways, and God says “Then, after you turn, then will I hear.”

We arrogantly assume we can turn our backs on God and it will not affect our communication with him. And what we forget is that when we choose sin God turns his back on us. God will not look at sin. That's why on the cross his own son, as the sky went dark, screamed, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?" What Jesus feared most about the cross was not the pain of the nails or the taunts and insults of the crowd. What made him tremble was the thought that when sin was on him, God would turn his back. God will not look at sin, even when it is on his own son. And until this land, and until you and I come to grips with that basic truth, we won't have revival. Because we won't have revival until God comes and God is going to turn back when we turn around.

God says in **Malachi 3:7**, "**Return to me and I will return to you, says the Lord Almighty.**" You cannot reverse that order. What is the word for turning around? REPENTANCE. Repentance means a 180 degree turn in our lifestyle or thinking. Anything that offends God must go. Any garbage or excess baggages that we carry must go. Anything that stands as a barrier between us and God must go!

And so, we must be willing to put the way we live on the line, whatever it costs us to obey God's will! We think of "wickedness" as violence and impurity and flagrant greed and denial of God. But GOD SAYS WHEN HIS PEOPLE STOP PUTTING OTHER THINGS FIRST AHEAD OF HIM-- WHEN THEY ARE WILLING TO PUT COMFORT AND SECURITY AND LEGITIMATE PLEASURES WAY DOWN THE LIST OF THEIR LIFE

PRIORITIES, and absolutely put God FIRST-- THEN GOD'S PEOPLE WILL BE LEAVING THEIR WICKED WAYS!

There was a cartoon several years ago in the Saturday Review of Literature in which little George Washington is standing with an ax in his hand. Before him lying on the ground is the famous cherry tree. He has already made his smug admission that he did it--after all, he "cannot tell a lie." But his father is standing there exasperated saying, "All right, so you admit it! You always admit it! The question is, when are you going to stop doing it." Repentance is stopping whatever wrong you have been doing!

The blood of Jesus reveals the fact that the problem isn't on the outside, it's on the inside. And we need to be cleansed, we need to repent, we need to turn away from church that just goes through the motions with a heart detached from God.

I Timothy 2:8. Paul says, "I want men everywhere to lift up holy hands in prayer." That verse doesn't say what many have wanted it to say. Holding up hands for the sake of doing so is not the point of the verse. The key word is "HOLY". I want men to lift up holy hands." In otherwords, hands that are clean before God, not clutching on to anything. He's looking for holy people to start praying for a nation.

The Bible say in Isaiah 55:6-7, "Seek the Lord while he may be found; call on him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the evil man his

thoughts. Let him turn to the Lord, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God for he will freely pardon.” God will tune in when we turn around.

There’s a lining around your heart that’s very, very thin that’s called the pericardium. Sometimes that lining will expand up to $\frac{3}{4}$ ” thick. When that happens your heart is constricted. It simply cannot beat and function like God designed it. The doctor has to do something radical: open up your chest and take his knife, and slit that pericardium so that the heart can be released to expand and beat like God wants it to. Now sin in your life is like a wall around your heart. And you’re not going to be able to love God, and feel for God, have a passion for God, have a fire for God until that heart is released to beat for God like he intended. Until your spiritual heart undergoes a radical surgery to remove that sin. And that’s why the Bible says in Acts 3:19, *“Repent then and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, so that times of refreshing may come from the Lord.”*

My guess is this morning that there’s many of us who need to be refreshed from the Lord. And the refreshing comes after the repentance. It’s time to do business with God. Let’s Pray.