

Sermons on 2 Chronicles by Robert Morgan

STAYING REVIVED IN A DYING WORLD

2 Chronicles 7:1-22

This fall we're in a series of messages on how Christians should interact with the popular culture. The Bible says that we're to be separate and peculiar people, living in the midst of a crooked and perverted generation. How do we do that? Last week we studied Proverbs 7 and dealt with the topic, "Staying Moral in an Immoral World." Today I'd like to look at 2 Chronicles and deal with the subject, "Staying Revived in a Dying World."

Our basic subject this morning is revival, but this is really a preview for a series of messages I'd like to bring next fall, a year from now. I've been intrigued recently with the subject of revival, both in biblical times and throughout Christian history; and I am convinced that only a great, far-reaching revival will save our nation from moral and political destruction.

I'm in favor of Christians getting involved in politics, and I think the church should take a stand on political issues that have moral ramifications. But the answer to our nation's problems is not a conservative political agenda. It isn't the election of one person or another to public office. It isn't the dominance of one political party or the other. Our root problem is not political but spiritual, and only a spiritual revival can turn the moral tide of our nation.

What do I mean by revival? I'm not talking about a week of meetings in a local church. The term "revival" refers to a special movement of God in which His church is dramatically refocused and revitalized, with ensuing conviction and conversion among sinners.

Bible scholars tell us there are sixteen different revivals described for us in the Bible, and the greatest book in the Bible on the subject of revival is 2 Chronicles. This Old Testament record gives us the biblical formula for revival, and then describes for us five different revivals under five different Old Testament kings.

The formula for revival is found in the words spoken by the Lord on the occasion of the dedication of the long-anticipated Temple. In the first part of chapter 7, Solomon and all of Israel dedicated this imposing edifice, and the last half of the chapter records God's response:

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 I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and heal their land.

The rest of 2 Chronicles illustrates this for us by describing a series of five revivals that swept over the nation of Judah. We don't have time to look at all five revivals this morning, but I'd like to briefly glance at the fifth and final revival, one that occurred under King Josiah in 2 Chronicles 34-35. Because of time, we'll just look at chapter 34, and leave the rest of the story for our more extended study next year. The story begins in 2 Chronicles, chapter 34, and we notice the first characteristic of biblical revivals:

Biblical Revivals Come Just in the Nick of Time

First, revivals often come in the nick of time. Look at verse 1: Josiah was eight years old when he became king.... Why so young? Because his father and grandfather were among the most wicked men in the Bible, and his father was so evil that his own servants conspired to kill him when little Josiah was only eight years old. Look at some verses in the preceding chapter:

Manasseh (Josiah's grandfather) was only twelve years old when he became king, and he reigned fifty-five years in Jerusalem. But he did evil in the sight of the Lord, according to the abominations of the nations whom the Lord had cast out before the children of Israel. For he rebuilt the high places which Hezekiah his father had broken down; he raised up altars for the Baals, and made wooden images; and he worshipped all the host of heaven and served them. He also built altars in the house of the Lord, of which the Lord had said, "In Jerusalem shall My name be forever." And he built altars for all the host of heaven in the two courts of the house of the Lord. Also he caused his sons to pass through the fire in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom; he practiced soothsaying, used witchcraft and sorcery, and consulted mediums and spiritists. He did much evil in the sight of the Lord to provoke Him to anger.

The last part of the chapter says that his son, Josiah's father, continued in the same immoral and lamentable fashion for the two short years of his reign. Among the greatest evils was the practice of child sacrifice in the fires of the Valley of Hinnom.

Our world and our nation are just about in the same shape today. We've been sacrificing our children in the fires of pleasure, with 4000 abortions being performed every day in the United States—a horrendous 40 million abortions taking place in the United States since 1973. Churches in America are ordaining practicing homosexuals as ministers and bishops. In many—perhaps most—of the churches in this city this morning, the Bible is not being preached as the inspired and inerrant Word of God. Forty million Americans

are caught up in internet pornography, and our entertainment industry is dragging our culture into a pit of moral destruction. There is growing interest in the occult, witchcraft, and demonism. If there was ever a time when we need revival, it is now.

But it is at just such a time that God sends revival. I was reading just the other day about another godless time in our national history. It was just after the American Revolution, in the latter days of the 1700s. This was a low-water mark for morality, especially on college campuses. The Rationalist movement, sweeping over classroom and dormitory, had turned most professors and students into infidels.

“During the last decade of the eighteenth century,” wrote J. Edwin Orr, “the typical Harvard student was atheist. Students at Williams College conducted a mock celebration of Holy Communion. When the Dean at Princeton opened the chapel Bible to read, a pack of playing cards fell out, some radical having cut a rectangle out of each page to fit the pack! Christians were so unpopular they met in secret and kept their minutes in code.”

Yale University in Hartford, Connecticut, was no exception. The college church was almost extinct, and Christian students—if there were any—were underground. But God was preparing a man named Timothy Dwight (grandson of Jonathan Edwards) to turn the tide.

As a child, Timothy Dwight had been precocious. He learned the alphabet in one lesson and read the Bible at an early age. Once when he didn’t show up for dinner, his worried parents found him in the orchard teaching the catechism to a group of Native Americans. He was only four.

Timothy entered Yale at age 13, and was so devoted to his studies that he neglected exercise and sleep. He even limited himself to twelve mouthfuls of vegetables at meals, so as not to overeat and dull his mind. He went on to become a pastor and community leader. In 1795, he was elected president of Yale. He longed for revival. He wanted to see an explosion of revival and evangelism occur on these godless campuses. Soon he was debating upperclassman on the subject: “Are the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament the Word of God?” In small numbers, students began considering Christianity, and within a couple of years there were about a dozen believers on campus.

After seven years of preaching, teaching, and praying, Dwight saw a revival break out at Yale in which one-third of the student body was converted. This spiritual resurgence touched other colleges, too: Harvard, Brown, Dartmouth, and many others. This “Second Great Awakening” provided the spiritual leadership America needed for the next generation. It came just in the nick of time.

Revival Often Begins In the Heart of a Single Individual

The second characteristic of biblical revival is this: Revival often begins in the heart of a single individual, and quite often that individual is a young person. Let’s begin reading with verse 1:

Josiah was eight years old when he became king, and he reigned thirty-one years in Jerusalem. And he did what was right in the sight of the Lord, and walked in the ways of his father David; he did not turn aside to the right hand or to the left.

This is absolutely remarkable. This little boy’s father had been one of the most evil men in Judah’s history. His grandfather had been a horribly-wicked king. All the royal court was corrupt. And here he was, eight years old, surrounded by wicked advisors—and yet God gave him an upright heart. Even as a child he sought the Lord.

Let’s read on:

For in the eighth year of his reign, while he was still young, he began to seek the God of his father David; and in the twelfth year he began to purge Judah and Jerusalem of the high places, the wooden images, the carved images, and the molded images...

He would have been sixteen years old. Many of the great revivals in history have been started by teenagers. When God gets hold of a group of teens, He can use them to change the world. Many of the modern revivals have started on college campuses, among students. In one sense, I think that I can say that I’m a product of a small burst of revival that occurred among young people in the early 1970s and became known as the “Jesus Movement.” A lot of the hippies and counter-culture kids began coming to Christ, and one of those was a young man in Florida who was converted while tripping out on a dangerous drug. His life was changed, and he enrolled at Columbia Bible College where he became my roommate and led me to give my life to Christ in full surrender.

There’s another example I’d like to give you. About 100 years ago, there was a college student in Wales named Evan Roberts. He was slightly older, 26 years old, but he was still a student in a British Bible College. He developed a deep burden for revival in his heart, and he gained permission to leave college and return to his home village of Loughor to preach his first sermon. Seventeen people showed up. Evan Roberts had four points to his sermon that day:

- Confess any known sin to God and put away any wrong done to others.

- Put away any doubtful habit.
- Obey the Holy Spirit promptly.
- Confess faith in Christ openly.

That day a revival broke out, and within three months 100,000 converts were added to the churches in Wales. It spread around the globe and the years of 1905 and 1906 became revival years in this world. I remember hearing my Uncle Walter tell about the revival that spread through the East Tennessee Mountains in 1905. My grandfather was a circuit preacher in the hills, and everywhere he went in 1905, scores of people were converted. When you drive through the mountains today, there are little churches in every hollow and up every road. Many of them were started in the 1905 revival. 1905 represents the last world-wide revival that this earth has experienced. And almost everyone traces it back to this one man, a Bible college student named Evan Roberts.

The Bible says that the eyes of the Lord range to and fro throughout the earth, seeking someone whose heart is loyal toward Him. He is looking for someone—perhaps a young person—to stand in the gap and build up the hedge against the land. He is looking for an intercessor. And revival usually begins in the heart of one individual whose heart is fully devoted to the Lord his or her God. Will it be you?

Revival Involves Pulling Down Idols

The third characteristic of revival involves the pulling down of idols.

For in the eighth year of his reign, while he was still young, he began to seek the God of his father David; and in the twelfth year he began to purge Judah and Jerusalem of the high places, the wooden images, the carved images, and the molded images. They broke down the altars of the Baals in his presence, and the incense altars which were above them he cut down; and the wooden images, the carved images, and the molded images he broke in pieces, and made dust of them and scattered it on the graves of those who had sacrificed to them;. He also burned the bones of the priests on their altars, and cleansed Judah and Jerusalem. And so he did in the cities of Manasseh, Ephraim, and Simeon, as far as Naphtali and all around, with axes. And when he had broken down the altars and wooden images, had beaten the carved images into powder, and cut down all the incense altars throughout all the land of Israel, he returned to Jerusalem.

This young man, Josiah, waged a one-man war against idolatry in his kingdom. Now, we have idols in our kingdom. Anything that comes before the Lord Jesus Christ in our lives is an idol. Revival begins when we make up our minds that we're going to wage war against the idols that are robbing us of our affection for the Lord. And then, something startling happened in this story in 2 Chronicles.

Revival Releases Renewed Resources

The people began tithing. They starting supporting the work of God financially; and the money was used to repair and renovate the Temple which had become dilapidated and broken down. Look at the way the story unfolds in verses 8ff:

In the eighteenth year of his reign, when he had purged the land and the temple, he sent Shaphan the son of Azaliah, Maaseiah the governor of the city, and Joah the son of Joahaz the recorded, to repair the house of the Lord his God. When they came to Hilkiah the high priest, they delivered the money that was brought into the house of God, which the Levites who kept the doors had gathered from the hand of Manasseh and Ephraim, from all the remnant of Israel, from all Judah and Benjamin, and which they had brought back to Jerusalem. Then they put it in the hand of the foremen who worked in the house of the Lord, to repair and restore the house of the Lord.

Now that the Israelites had put away their idols and torn down their false gods, they had more money for the Lord's work. They had been spending their money on all kinds of things they were putting ahead of God, but now these things had been cast out of their lives, the Lord was first once again, the idols were gone, and the resources needed were available.

American Christians are the wealthiest generation of believers to ever live on the face of the earth. We have more money and more resources than any who have preceded us. God has given us these resources to enable us to finance His evangelistic vision here at the end of world history. And I think that one of the things God is going to judge the American church for is our failure to use the wealth He has given us to support His work at home and abroad.

According to the Barna Research Group, only 6 percent of born-again Christians in America tithe. In the year 2000, it was 12 percent, which is pretty pitiful, but in 2002, it had dropped to 6 percent.

Well, in the story of Josiah, revival came in the nick of time. It began in the heart of one man who led his nation in tearing down the idols and false gods that had turned their hearts from the Lord. As that happened, the resources were unleashed for the building up

of the work of the Lord. And then what happened?

Revival Unleashes the Power of the Word of God

As the temple of God was being renovated and restored, a profound and far-reaching discovery was made. Look at verse 14: Now when they brought out the money that was brought into the house of the Lord, Hilkiah the priest found the Book of the Law of the Lord given to Moses. Then Hilkiah answered and said to Shaphan the scribe, “I have found the Book of the Law in the house of the Lord.” And Hilkiah gave the book of Shaphan. So Shaphan carried the book to the king...

And the rediscovery of the book of the Law sparked an awakening and a revival that changed the course of a nation and the story of history. Look at verses 29ff:

Then the king sent and gathered all the elders of Judah and Jerusalem. The king went up to the house of the Lord, with all the men of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem—the priests and the Levites, and all the people, great and small. And he read in their hearing all the words of the Book of the Covenant which had been found in the house of the Lord. Then the king stood in his place and made a covenant before the Lord, to follow the Lord, and to keep His commandments and His testimonies and His statutes with all his heart and all his soul, to perform the words of the covenant that were written in this book. And he made all who were present in Jerusalem and Benjamin take a stand. So the inhabitants of Jerusalem did according to the covenant of God, the God of their fathers. Thus Josiah removed all the abominations from all the country that belonged to the children of Israel, and made all who were present in Israel diligently serve the Lord their God. All his days they did not depart from following the Lord God of their fathers.

Now, here is something very significant. If we study the chronology carefully, we realize that it was during this revival that Daniel the prophet was saved. He came out of this revival. He was a product of the revival times of Josiah. And so were his compatriots, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego.

Revival is God's way of launching a new generation of workers into His kingdom. It is His way of flinging out with revival-force a new era of dedicated servants. One man said that during a time of revival, the church can accomplish in a few weeks or a few months the work that otherwise would take years and years.

It says that the people of Jerusalem and of Benjamin took a stand that day, and it was a stand they maintained all the rest of their days. I wonder if someone here wants to take a stand for Jesus Christ today. I wonder if someone here wants to tear down some idols and cast out some false gods. I wonder if someone here wants to be that man or woman who brings revival, if God so wills, to a new generation.

Well, I think it's time we began praying for revival. We need personal revival. We need church revival. We need national revival. And we need a worldwide revival of biblical proportions. I wonder if there's someone here who would let it begin with you. Perhaps someone here needs to come to the Lord for salvation. Perhaps you need to come, confessing sin in your life. Perhaps you need to come, dedicating yourself to be a carrier and conveyer of revival. Perhaps you need to come and join a church that's praying for revival.

2 CHRONICLES 7:14

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.

About the time I was born, 57 years ago, General Dwight D. Eisenhower was thinking about running for the presidency of the United States. An oil baron in Fort Worth named Sid Richardson wanted him to run, and Sid talked to Billy Graham about it. Billy was a young man who had just become a popular national figure in America. So Billy Graham wrote a letter to Dwight Eisenhower. In his letter, Billy quoted a politician who had said to him that if Washington is not cleaned out in the next two or three years, we are going to enter a period of chaos that could bring about our downfall. Billy quoted that statement to Eisenhower and then added, “Sometimes I wonder who is going to win the battle first—the barbarians beating at our gates from without, or the termites of immorality from within.”

Well, when Eisenhower read the letter he was taken back and said, “Who is this young man?” But Eisenhower did run for the White House, and when he won the election he called Billy Graham and asked to meet him at the Commodore Hotel in New York City. It was five days before the inauguration, and Eisenhower told Billy that he was concerned about the spiritual condition of America and he asked Billy to give him a Scripture verse he could claim as his own as he prepared to take the oath of office.

Billy suggested this verse—2 Chronicles 7:14—and when Eisenhower took the oath of office, his hand rested on a Bible that was opened to this passage.

Now, if the president of the United States and if the United States of America needed that verse when I was a baby in my mother's

arms, we need it a hundred times more today.

When I think of growing up in the 1950s, I think of it as a time of relative innocence. In the year I was born, the best-selling book was Norman Vincent Peales' *The Power of Positive Thinking*. In the year I was born, two new shows premiered on television—the *Today Show* and the *Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet*. Kellogg's invented a new kind of cereal the year I was born, Sugar Frosted Flakes—and they were Greaaaaaat. So was church. America was, by and large, a church-attending nation. We went Sunday morning, Sunday night, and Wednesday night; and twice a year we had a revival meeting that lasted one or two weeks, and usually numbers of people were saved. In my public school, we opened each day with devotions, including Bible study and prayer. And yet, Dwight Eisenhower was worried about the spiritual condition of our nation and as he took the oath of office his hand rested on a Bible that was opened to 2 Chronicles 7:14. Well, the 1950s are long gone and things have never been as bad as they are today. And yet, the formula for revival is still the same:

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.

Background and Context

Let me say just a word of background about the books of 1 and 2 Chronicles. These are two Old Testament books that make for interesting reading. They tell the history of the nation of Judah in very personal and hopeful terms. We don't know who wrote these books—he never added his name to the manuscript—but he was evidently a Levite or a priest who worked in the restored Jewish temple in Jerusalem during the Persian era. In giving us a history of the nation of Judah, he was honest and forthright—he points out the nation's continual downward-spiraling morality. But he is also hopeful, and he points out how again and again God sent a revival. And even after the nation had perished because of its sins and been destroyed, God still sent a revival and reestablished the nation and rebuilt the temple and restored worship.

In my opinion, 2 Chronicles is the Bible's premiere book on the subject of Revival. And this verse is the key to the whole book. In this one verse, the Lord gives us His biblical formula for personal and church-wide and national revival.

The book of 2 Chronicles opens with King Solomon ascending the throne upon the death of his father, King David. Look at chapter 1, verse 1: Solomon son of David established himself firmly over his kingdom, for the Lord his God was with him and made him exceedingly great.

His first great task was to build the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem, which we now call the First Temple. Look at chapter 2, verse 1: Solomon gave orders to build a temple for the Name of the Lord and a royal place for himself.

In chapter 3, work on this temple was begun. Look at chapter 3, verse 1: Then Solomon began to build the temple of the Lord in Jerusalem on Mount Moriah, where the Lord had appeared to his father David. It was on the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite, the place provided by David.

Chapter 4 describes the construction process, and by the time we get to chapter 5, the temple is completed. Look at chapter 5, verse 1: When all the work Solomon had done for the temple of the Lord was finished, he brought in the things his father David had dedicated—the silver and gold and all the furnishings—and he placed them in the treasuries of God's temple.

The chapter goes on to describe the moment when the famous Ark of the Covenant was moved into the Holy of Holies in this new Temple, and the building was dedicated to the Lord during the Feast of Tabernacles, which would have been in the month of October. Great multitudes came from across Israel and around the Mediterranean world, and for seven days there was unending festivity and worship because of the dedication of this fabulous building.

The climax of it all comes in chapter 6, when Solomon offers the prayer of dedication for the temple. This is one of the longest prayers in the Bible, and Solomon's prayer takes up the entire chapter. We don't have time to look at this chapter in detail, but there are a couple of verses that are very important.

Look at verse 24: When Your people Israel have been defeated by an enemy because they have sinned against You and when they turn back and confess Your name, praying and making supplication before You in this temple, then hear from heaven and forgive the sin of Your people Israel and bring them back to the land You gave to them and their fathers...

Look at verse 26: When the heavens are shut up and there is no rain...

Why would the heavens be shut up and the rain be withheld?

When the heavens are shut up and there is no rain because Your people have sinned against You, and when they pray toward this place and confess Your name and turn from their sin because You have afflicted them, then hear from heaven and forgive the sin of Your servants, Your people Israel. Teach them the right way to live, and send rain on the land you gave Your people for an

inheritance.

Look at verse 28: When famine or plague comes to the land....

In other words, Solomon is telling us that sometimes a nation or an individual may suffer defeat or drought or devastation because of their sins. If you and I live in consistent disobedience to God, if we neglect our spiritual disciplines, if we ignore His Word, if we sin against Him, it does not lead to blessings in our lives. And whenever we find ourselves facing the consequences and the results of our disobedience, we need to humbly return to God with all our hearts and seek His forgiveness and His healing. Solomon stated this principle repeatedly in his prayer. Sin leads to undesirable consequences, but those undesirable consequences can have the effect of turning us back to the Lord. I wonder if this is a cycle that's happening in your life right now?

Well, look at what happened next, in chapter 7, verse 1: When Solomon finished praying, fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices, and the glory of the Lord filled the temple. The priests could not enter the temple of the Lord because the glory of the Lord filled it. When all the Israelites saw the fire coming down and the glory of the Lord above the temple, they knelt on the pavement with their faces to the ground, and they worshipped and gave thanks to the Lord, saying, "He is good; His love endures forever."

And the king and all the people offered sacrifices before the Lord. And King Solomon offered a sacrifice of 22,000 head of cattle and 120,000 sheep and goats. So the king and all the people dedicated the temple of God. The priests took their positions, as did the Levites with the Lord's musical instruments, which King David had made for praising the Lord and which were used when he gave thanks, saying, "His love endures forever." Opposite the Levites, the priests blew their trumpets, and all the Israelites were standing.

So they dedicated the temple and the festivities and celebrations lasted two weeks. Look at verse 8:

So Solomon observed the festival at that time for seven days, and all Israel with him—a vast assembly, people from Lebo Hamath to the Wadi of Egypt. On the eighth day they had an assembly, for they had celebrated the dedication of the altar for seven days and the festival for seven days more. On the 23rd day of the seventh month he sent the people to their homes, joyful and glad in heart for the good things the Lord had done for David and Solomon and for all this people.

Now, after the temple had been dedicated, all the sacrifices offered, all the prayers prayed, and all the people had gone home, the Lord came and appeared to Solomon in private. Look at verse 11:

When Solomon had finished the temple of the Lord and the royal palace, and had succeeded in carrying out all he had in mind to do in the temple of the Lord and in his own palace, the Lord appeared to him at night and said: "I have heard your prayer and have chosen this place for myself as a temple for sacrifices. When I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or command locusts to devour the land, or send a plague among my people..."

Where have we heard those words before? The Lord was listening carefully to Solomon's prayer, and now He was repeating it to him and re-emphasizing it.

"When I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or command locusts to devour the land, or send a plague among my people, 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. Now my eyes will be open and my ears attentive to the prayers offered in this place. I have chosen and consecrated this temple so that My Name may be there forever. My eyes and my heart will always be there."

So there you have the dramatic setting and the wonderful context for this verse. When a nation turns away from God and rejects Him, it never leads to national blessing but to national problems. When a church turns away from the Lord, it never leads to blessings but to curses. When a family or an individual turns away from the Lord and neglects Him, it never leads to blessings, but to problems—to personal drought and defeat and devastation. And the only answer is revival. National revival, and church revival, and personal revival. And that's what this verse is about. It's the greatest verse on the subject of revival in the Bible, for 2 Chronicles 7:14 gives us God's formula for revival.

God's Formula for Revival

Notice how the verse begins. It isn't addressed to the newspapers or film producers or social critics. It's not addressed to the president or congress or supreme court. It's address to believers—to those who already claim God as their God and Christ as their Savior

If my people who are called by My name....

In New Testament terms, this is referring to Christians—those called by the name of Christ. And we are given a four step process:

1. If My people who are called by My Name shall humble themselves....

We have to divest ourselves of this veneer of pride that coats our personalities. We have to pull out of our hearts the core of pride that's driven into the center of our personalities. Pride is a beaver's dam that holds back the currents of revival. If we're not experiencing revival in our hearts right now, it's very likely that pride is the culprit.

2. And pray...

Most of the great revivals I've read about in history—revivals that have transformed nations and societies and cultures, revivals that have changed and shaped history—have come about in response to the prayers of one person or a small group of people who decided they were going to pray down revival from on high.

3. And seek My face...

That means we get serious about our Christian lives, about our relationship with Jesus Christ. We get serious about our spiritual habits. We get serious about God's Word and about reading and studying and claiming and obeying it, and about developing our personal relationship with God through commitment, prayer, Bible study, and fellowship with Him.

4. And turn from their wicked ways...

If you're doing something that you know is wrong or careless or immoral or disobedient to God—anything that doesn't please the Lord—you have to turn from that. Give it up, whatever the cost. Repent and clean up your life.

Those are the four requirements for revival, and that's the first part of the verse. The last part of the verse gives three promises of things God will do.

1. Then will I hear from heaven....

Our prayers and pleas will travel all the way, unhindered, to heaven and God will listen to your prayers and mine as carefully as He listened to Solomon's prayer in chapter 6.

2. And will forgive their sin...

God specializes in forgiveness. When we earnestly repent and seek His face and turn from our sin, there is not a sin in this world that He will not instantly and permanently forgive through the power of the shed blood of Jesus Christ.

3. And will heal their land.

The spiritual decisions and changes we make can have national ramifications. It can impact our entire country and bring about healing on many, many levels. And this is what we call revival. In the book of 2 Chronicles, it happened over and over again. This book of 2 Chronicles gives us the stories of one revival after another in ancient Judah. But we can see the same patterns throughout the 2000-year-history of the church since biblical times.

Conclusion

Let me close today by giving you one simple application of this principle. From time to time I mention the name of a man who had a very unusual ministry in England in the 1800s—George Müller. He was born in 1805, and he lived until 1898, so his lifespan corresponded almost perfectly with the 19th century. He was born in Germany, and as a young man he got himself into a lot of trouble. In fact, he was just wild, doing whatever he felt like doing. By age 16, he was in prison. When he got out of prison, he started where he had left off, and he lived a thoroughly immoral life. But in his early 20s, he begun getting tired of it. One day a friend invited him to go with him to a Bible study group, and instantly Müller knew that he wanted to go, too. He did go that evening, and it was the turning point in his life.

Well, to make a long story short, Müller went on to become a man of incredible faith and prayer who started evangelistic works and missionary enterprises and orphanages, and who ran them all by faith and prayer. He would pray and specific, virtually miraculous answers would come down from heaven. He published an account of this in a book called *Answers to Prayer*.

Copies of this book made it over to Ireland, and in January, 1857, a young man named James McQuilkin read that book. McQuilkin was deeply moved by Müller's record and he went out and found a prayer partner, and, in time they recruited a handful of prayer partners, four of them as far as I can ascertain from his historical records. Every Friday night, these four men gathered in a schoolhouse and prayed for souls and for revivals. McQuilkin and his very small group prayed for about a year, and on January 1, 1858, the Lord gave them their first remarkable answer to prayer—the conversion of a farm worker. Encouraged by this, the group continued meeting in earnest prayer as more people came to faith in Christ. Another year passed, and in February of 1859, a spirit of revival broke out in a nearby church as McQuilkin preached. So many people came and crammed themselves into the church that

fears arose that the balconies and galleries would collapse. The revival overflowed into the streets. It spread to other churches and towns.

These new believers carried the spiritual fire to other places, and a revival blazed through Ireland. It's estimated that as many as a thousand people a day gave themselves to Christ. Business throughout the country almost came to a complete standstill for a brief period of time as people couldn't do anything else until they got themselves right with God. People were unable to sleep at night, for they were under such conviction that they wept and prayed through the night in their homes. Churches were packed at all hours.

And this revival had a healing effect on Ireland. Divisions and conflicts evaporated. The jails were emptied. The churches were filled. The people became concerned for the poor. The nation became almost like a new land.

The revival spread to England, Wales, and Scotland. Many yielded to Christian service, and a new era of a ministry was launched in Great Britain. It's called the Irish Revival of 1859, and it began with a singular answer to prayer on this day in 1858 through the power of the Holy Spirit. And, in fact, 1859 became a year of revival around the world. We have similar reports of the same sort of thing happening in South Africa and especially here in America because of the Fulton Street Revival. (This account is adapted from George Müller's book, *Answers to Prayer from George Müller's Narratives*, compiled by A.E. C. Brooks (Chicago: The Moody Press, n.d.), 37-39. As a further note, this small prayer group in Ireland just happened to begin at the very same time—the very same week—as a prayer meeting that began on Fulton Street in New York City that led to a similar revival in the United States, known as the Fulton Street Revival—but that's another story.).

And this is a pattern that we have seen over and over in biblical history, in world history, in American history, and in church history.

And if we ever need the Lord to send another revival, it's now. Why don't you let it begin with you?

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.

SICKNESS INTO WHOLENESS

2 Chronicles 29:1-36

I've been reading an interesting biography of former President Ronald Reagan. Whatever people thought of his policies, they could not help but admire his sunny, optimistic perspective on life. With him it was always morning-in-America and win-one-for-the-gipper. It was this resilience and cheerfulness that helped him through the assassination attempt and that sparked such powerful forces in the world that the Berlin Wall came tumbling down. Where did his optimistic spirit come from? According to Peggy Noonan, in her biography, *When Character Was King*, it came from his mother and from his mother's Bible.

Mrs. Nell Christian Reagan "was a Christian from the evangelical school and pretty much her whole life was bringing the good news to people who hadn't heard it or maybe hadn't listened hard enough." She had absorbed that old classic book, *The Christian's Secret of a Happy Life*, by Hannah Whitall Smith, the theme of which is that God will let little befall you that will not be to the ultimate benefit of your soul.[1]

Whatever happens to God's children will be used for good in their lives. That was her unshakable philosophy.

Noonan gives an example: After Ronald Reagan graduated from a Christian college in Northern Illinois, he started looking for a job; but this was during the Great Depression and jobs were hard to find. He hitchhiked to Chicago, but had no luck. Coming back home, he heard that Montgomery Ward was opening a big store in his hometown of Dixon, Illinois. They were looking for someone to run the sports department, and Reagan, twenty-two, thought he was the perfect candidate. He was a well-known swimmer and lifeguard, and had been a football star in college. They were willing to pay \$12.50 a week, and that's what he needed to help his family. He applied for the job; another local sports star got the job, and Reagan was crushed. He told his mother of his disappointment.

She had a talk with him about it and told him that all things were part of God's plan, even the most disheartening setbacks. If something went wrong, we shouldn't grow discouraged or feel down in the dumps. We should trust God with it and keep going. Later on, she told him, something good would happen and you'd find yourself thinking, "If I hadn't had that problem back then, then this better thing wouldn't have happened to me."

Reagan believed it, wrote Peggy Noonan. He believed every word of it. After all, it came from his mother and from his mother's Bible. And sure enough. About that time, a local radio station hired him for seventy-five dollars a week to broadcast sports, and soon his name was known throughout the Midwest. It was the first step on a path that was to lead him into broadcasting, movies, politics, and eventually would take him all the way to the White House.

What if Reagan had been hired at Montgomery-Ward? What if his desires had been granted? The world would never have heard his name. But because of a heartbreaking disappointment—a lost job opportunity during the Great Depression—he went on to change

American history.

Well, there's another statesman who learned a similar lesson. His name was Hezekiah, King of Judah, and I'd like to show you one sentence he wrote which fits perfectly the theme of our current series of sermons. It is found in Isaiah 38:17:

Surely it was for my benefit that I suffered such anguish.

Here's the way it's put in other translations:

Ø Indeed it was for my own peace that I had great bitterness—NKJV

Ø It was for my own good that I had such troubles—NCV

Ø See, this great bitterness was for my own peace—Berkley

Ø Surely it was for my welfare that I had great bitterness—NRSV

Ø It was for my own good that I had such a hard time—CEV

Ø Yes—I see it all—it was good for me to undergo this bitterness—TLV

Who was Hezekiah? What was he talking about? What bitterness and anguish did he suffer? What can we take away from his life to help our own hearts in times of bitterness and anguish?

Hezekiah is one of the greatest kings of antiquity. His story is so important it is given to us three times in the Bible. Once in 2 Kings, once in 2 Chronicles, and once in the middle of the book of the prophet Isaiah.

He was twenty-five years when he became king, and from the very beginning he sought to bring spiritual revival to the nation of Judah. In the very first month of the first year of his reign, he launched repairs on the temple of the Lord in Jerusalem, which had become neglected and run-down. Look at 2 Chronicles 29:

In the first month of the first year of his reign, he opened the doors of the temple of the Lord and repaired them. He brought in the priests and the Levites, assembled them in the square on the east side and said: "Listen to me, Levites! Consecrate yourselves now and consecrate the temple of the Lord, the God of your fathers. Remove all defilement from the sanctuary. Our fathers were unfaithful; they did evil in the eyes of the Lord our God and forsook him. They turned their faces away from the Lord's dwelling place and turned their backs on him. They also shut the doors of the portico and put out the lamps. They did not burn incense or present any burnt offerings at the sanctuary to the God of Israel. Therefore, the anger of the Lord has fallen on Judah and Jerusalem; he has made them an object of dread and horror and scorn, as you can see with your own eyes. This is why our fathers have fallen by the sword and why our sons and daughters and our wives are in captivity. Now I intend to make a covenant with the Lord, the God of Israel, so that his fierce anger will turn away from us. My sons, do not be negligent now, for the Lord has chosen you to stand before him and serve him, to minister before him and burn incense (2 Chronicles 29:3-11, NIV).

I don't have time to read the whole story of how the worship of the Lord was reactivated, but just look at the last verse of the chapter, 2 Chronicles 29:35b-36, NIV: So the service of the temple of the Lord was reestablished. Hezekiah and all the people rejoiced at what God had brought about for his people, because it was done so quickly.

Hezekiah went on to re-institute the Feast of the Passover, and there was great spiritual momentum in ancient Judah. There was a revival. There was a quickening of the religious life of the nation, and the people of Israel turned back toward the goodness and the grace of God. We long for such a revival in our own country today. I've read about the great revivals in the past, and these great revivals have molded and shaped American history. Not far from here, just to the northeast is Lexington, Kentucky. Outside Lexington is the little community of Cain Ridge. One day near the year of 1800, a preacher came to Cain Ridge to pastor a set of three frontier Presbyterian churches. His fiery preaching started a revival in that local area, and as the churches planned their annual Communion service they decided to invite other local Presbyterian and Methodist churches to participate. The revival spread, and in their enthusiasm the people decided to plan a larger Communion service for the whole area the following summer. To their utter amazement, hundreds of people came, then thousands of people. For seven days, thousands of people descended on Cain Ridge, and one preacher after another began taking to the stage to preach the Gospel. No one knows how many people attended the Cain Ridge Camp Meeting, but estimates range from ten thousand to twenty-five thousand. Hundreds if not thousands were converted, and it started a revival that spread throughout the nation and changed the culture of America.

Wouldn't it be wonderful to have a revival like that in our own day; and that's just what was happening in the days of Hezekiah. The nation had been in spiritual decline for a long time, and Hezekiah's own father, King Ahaz, had been among the worst. The nation of Judah had sunk into the cesspool of idolatry and immorality. Now under the preaching of the prophet Isaiah and the leadership of King Hezekiah, a vast spiritual revival was underway.

And then, right in the middle of everything, when he was at the prime of his powers, at the peak of his manhood, and the pinnacle of his usefulness, Hezekiah was struck from nowhere by twin disasters. One was a military disaster and the other was a medical disaster.

I want to show you something that I had never seen before in his story. Both disasters struck Hezekiah when he was thirty-nine years old. In other words, these two blows came in the same year. The first involved the invading armies of King Sennacherib of Assyria. Look at the way Isaiah 36 begins:

In the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah's reign, Sennacherib king of Assyria attacked all the fortified cities of Judah and captured them.

If Hezekiah became king when he was twenty-five and he had been on the throne fourteen years, he would be how old? Thirty-nine.

Now move ahead two chapters and notice how Isaiah 38 begins: In those days... In what days—in those very days of invasion and national trauma.

In those days Hezekiah became ill and was at the point of death. The prophet Isaiah son of Amoz went to him and said, "This is what the Lord says: Put your house in order, because you are going to die; you will not recover."

Last year, I had a fairly routine medical procedure as a preventative against cancer. As I drove to the doctor's office, I thought to myself, "What if today I learn that I have an advanced malignancy with only a few months to live? What if I learn that I have a terminal illness?"

Well, I didn't; but it was a sobering thought, and I felt a certain level of fear about it. I remember my friend, Jonathan Thigpen, who was my age, telling me about the time he sat down in the doctor's office and was told that he had a terrible, terminal illness known as Lou Gehrig's disease, from which he eventually died. These were the feelings that Hezekiah had.

Now, just for the sake of establishing a chronology, let me jump ahead of the story and disclose that in the end, God did provide Hezekiah with healing and with an additional fifteen years of life. We know from other passages that Hezekiah was twenty-five years old when he became king, and he reigned for twenty-nine years. Twenty-five plus twenty-nine equals fifty-four. Hezekiah died when he was fifty-four years old. Now if he was fifty-four when he died, and if his life had been extended by fifteen years in answer to prayer, how old was he when this sickness struck him? Fifty-four minus fifteen is thirty-nine.

In his thirty-ninth year, Hezekiah was hit by this one-two punch. At the very same time, he faced the greatest challenge in his professional life and the greatest challenge in his personal life. As king, he was facing a mortal enemy invading his land, and as a man, he was facing his own mortality.

I think there is something very important for us to notice here. Sometimes problems come in twos and threes. Just as we're reeling from one tragedy or difficult, we face another. We even have an entire set of terms to describe it. We talk about...

Ø The one-two punch

Ø The double whammy

Ø The double-edged sword

Ø Double trouble

Ø Double, double toil and trouble

Ø Fighting on two fronts

Ø Waiting for the other shoe to drop.

Ø Going down for the third time

Ø Or, as a recent movie put it—a series of unfortunate events

As I prepared this message, I couldn't help thinking about the story of Phyllis Rutledge. Some years ago, I read her story. Her husband, Howard Rutledge, was a pilot in Vietnam, and on November 28, 1965, as she returned home from church she saw the Navy Chaplain approaching her house. Her legs buckled under her and someone helped her to a seat. Her husband's plane had been shot down over Vietnam, and Howard was missing in action. Not long afterward, her mother suffered a stroke and died. The next year as Phyllis vacationed at the beach with her children, trying to maintain some normalcy and sanity, her fifteen-year-old son, John, was diving into the water and struck his head on a rock under the water. A stranger saved him from drowning and an

ambulance rushed him to the hospital, but there was little the surgeons could do. John was paralyzed from the neck down.

Or I think of the e-mail message I got this week regarding my friend, missionary Janice Banks. Last month her husband was killed in a car wreck, and this week her mother passed away.

Why is this? Why do problems come in doubles and triples? There are two answers to that question.

First, when we have problems in multiples, they are very likely to represent strategic attacks by the devil. Whenever we suddenly encounter a string of problems or distresses, we can very often rightly sense the lurking hand of the devil. Satan has something to do with it. That's one of the lessons from the early chapters of the book of Job, when Satan arranged for successive waves of tragedy to hit Job, one after another, in an intense effort to destroy his faith. These are Satan's cluster bombs.

It was like the German Luftwaffe bombing London during World War II, wave after wave after wave. Whenever I find a series of unfortunate events occurring in my life, one after the other, almost in timed precision, I consider the possibility that this is a sustained, strategic Satanic attack.

Second, when we find ourselves under assault, these things not only represent the attacks of the devil, but they also represent the lessons of the Lord.

When we become Christians, we become disciples of the Lord Jesus; and the word "disciple" means "learner." Jesus wants to teach us His richest and deepest lessons, but we are unstable pupils. One moment we're hot and the next we're cold. One moment we're full of faith and the next moment we're overcome with anxiety. One moment we're obedient and the next moment we've fallen into sin. I recently found a fascinating poem about this. It was written by John Newton, the London pastor who is best known for having written the great hymn, "Amazing Grace, How Sweet the Sound."

He wrote many poems and hymns, but one of the most interesting and autobiographical and honest was entitled "Conflicting Feelings." It said:

Strange and mysterious is my life.

What opposites I feel within!

A stable peace, a constant strife;

The rule of grace, the power of sin:

Too often I am captive led,

Yet daily triumph in my Head,

I prize the privilege of prayer,

But oh! what backwardness to pray!

Though on the Lord I cast my care,

I feel its burden every day;

I seek His will in all I do,

Yet find my own is working too,

I call the promises my own,

And prize them more than mines of gold;

Yet though their sweetness I have known,

They leave me unimpressed and cold

One hour upon the truth I feed,

The next I know not what I read,

While on my Savior I rely,

I know my foes shall lose their aim,

And therefore dare their power defy,
Assured of conquest through His Name,
But soon my confidence is slain,
And all my fears return again,
Thus different powers within me strive,
And grace and sin by turns prevail;
I grieve, rejoice, decline, revive,
And victory hangs in doubtful scale:
But Jesus has His promise passed,
That grace shall overcome at last,

Well, the Lord intends to stabilize and strengthen and develop us—and that is one of the reasons He allows trials and troubles to come. They are His tools in conforming us into the image of Christ.

Going back to the example of Job, the multiple trials and tragedies that Job endured were sent by the devil but allowed by the Lord. Satan wanted to use these things to tear down Job's faith, but the Lord used them to build up Job's faith and to make him twice the man that he was before.

The same is true with Hezekiah. Later, after the crises had passed, Hezekiah looked back on that awful thirty-ninth year of his life and he said: "It was for my peace. It was for my benefit. These things happened for my good. It seemed awful at the time, but it has all worked for good. It was for my benefit that I was afflicted." God uses these things to teach us the deepest lessons of His love and power.

Now, in what way did Hezekiah benefit from a foreign invasion and from a terminal disease? What lesson did God intend to teach?

The great overriding lesson is this: In quietness and confidence is our strength. Let's go back to the Assyrian invasion and look at two very interesting questions, hurled out as challenges by the Assyrian Field Commander to Hezekiah. Look at Isaiah 36:

In the fourteen year of King Hezekiah's reign, Sennacherib king of Assyria attacked all the fortified cities of Judah and captured them. Then the king of Assyria sent his field commander with a large army from Lachish to King Hezekiah at Jerusalem. When the commander stopped at the aqueduct of the Upper Pool, on the road to the Washerman's Field, Eliakim son of Hilkiah the palace administrator, Shebna the secretary, and Joah son of Asaph the recorder went out to him. The field commander said to them, 'Tell Hezekiah, this is what the great king, the king of Assyria, says..."

Now, notice this. With his very first words, the field commander of Sennacherib unwittingly cut to the very heart of the spiritual purposes of God in allowing this problem and peril to come upon His people. These words were uttered by the pagan, satanic emissary of a foreign godless power, yet they go right to the core of our spiritual lives.

This is what the great king, the king of Assyria, says: On what are you basing this confidence of yours? You say you have strategy and military strength—but you speak only empty words. On whom are you depending, that you rebel against me?

On what are you basing your confidence? On whom are you depending?

Now, Hezekiah did not face this crisis alone. He had a very powerful friend named Isaiah, and what did Isaiah advise? I'll give you one sentence:

In quietness and confidence shall be your strength.

(Isaiah 30:15, NKJV)

And what did Hezekiah tell his people, the trembling nation of Judah. We have the answer in 2 Chronicles 32:6-8:

He (Hezekiah) appointed military officers over the people and assembled them before him in the square at the city gate and encouraged them with these words: "Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or discouraged because of the King of Assyria and the vast army with him, for there is a greater power with us than with him. With him is only the arm of flesh, but with us is the Lord our God to help us and to fight our battles." And the people gained confidence from what Hezekiah the king of Judah said.

I wonder if Hezekiah didn't go back and read the words of his great, great, great, great grandfather, King David, who had written this in Psalm 27:

The Lord is my light and my salvation—whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life—of whom shall I be afraid? When evil men advance against me to devour my flesh, when my enemies and my foes attack me, they will stumble and fall. Though an army besiege me, my heart will not fear; though war break out against me, even then I will be confident... I am still confident in this: I will see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. Wait on the Lord; be strong and take heart and wait on the Lord.

Jeremiah 17:7 wrote, "Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, whose confidence is in Him. He will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream. It does not fear when heat comes; its leaves are always green. It has no worries in a year of drought and never fails to bear fruit."

Hebrews 10:35 says: "Do not throw away your confidence."

Hebrews 13:6 says that we can say with confidence: The Lord is my helper!

1 John 5:14 says: "This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to His will, he hears us."

Deuteronomy 31:6 says: "Be determined and confident. Do not be afraid of them. Your God, the Lord himself, will be with you. He will not fail you or abandon you" (Good News Translation).

The Psalmist said, "My heart is confident in you, O God; no wonder I can sing your praises (Psalm 57:7, New Living Translation).

Confidence is simply another word for faith in the presence, the power, and the promises of God. Over the past several years, I've begun to slowly realize that God values faith and confidence above all else in our hearts. The Bible says, "Without faith it is impossible to please God." That is, without quietness and confidence in our hearts during times of trouble, it is impossible to please God. In fact, the Lord allows trials and troubles to come into our lives just in order to exercise and build up this essential quality of confidence and quietness in our souls.

Faith is the quietness and confidence that God is in control of all the circumstances of my life. Faith is the inner quietness and confidence that characterizes the child of God during trouble and tribulation. Faith is the absence of excessive anger or anxiety in the face of adversity. Faith is resting in Jesus Christ and in His Word, like the old song that says:

Jesus, I am resting, resting,

In the joy of what Thou art;

I am finding out the greatness

Of Thy loving heart.

King Hezekiah was living a charmed life, a life of revival and blessing, until his thirty-ninth year when the roof caved in. His land was invaded by the enemy, and his body was invaded by disease. Both came at the same time in a simultaneous attack. Sometimes that happens to us. But multiple problems and perils often represent an attack by Satan, and God can use these things to deepen our faith, establish our confidence, and to so bless us that in coming days we will say:

Surely it was for my benefit that I suffered such anguish.

For we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.

[1] Peggy Noonan, *When Character Was King: A Story of Ronald Reagan* (New York: Viking, 2001), p. 20

OUR DAILY JOY

2 Chronicles 30:21

There's an old Swedish hymn that says, "Day by day and with each passing moment, strength I find to meet my trials here, / Trusting in my Father's wise bestowment, I've no cause for worry or for fear." Well, we've begun this New Year with a series of messages on the day-by-day aspects of our Christian experience, and today we're coming to our daily joy. I'd like to show you another Old Testament story that brings out the importance of experiencing, day by day, a personal revival of joy in our hearts. Our key text is 2 Chronicles 30:21 (NKJV):

So the children of Israel who were present at Jerusalem kept the Feast of Unleavened Bread seven days with great gladness; and the Levites and the priests praised the Lord day by day, singing to the Lord, accompanied by loud instruments.

Charles Schultz, the creator of the comic strip Peanuts, once quipped, "Life is easier if you dread only one day at a time."

Sportscaster Harry Kalas once introduced ballplayer Garry Maddox of the Philadelphia Phillies by saying, "Garry has turned his life around. He used to be depressed and miserable. Now he's miserable and depressed." (Quoted by John Maxwell in *Today Matters* (New York: Warner Faith, 2004), p. 159.)

I don't believe the Lord wants us to be dread one day at a time. He doesn't want us to be miserable and depressed in life, nor depressed and miserable. But the devil does, and Satan knows how to send hardships from every direction. There are some days when, frankly and honestly, I lose the sense of joy I should have as a Christian. I had such a day a couple of weeks ago. There are some days when I just want to pack my bags and take a long trip. But when my heart is reflecting the promises of God by simple faith believing, then I'm able to abide in the joy God wants me to have.

This introduces to us the concept of personal, daily revival. We all long for a national or a global revival that will restore the vitality of the Holy Spirit to the church around the world. Something stirs within us when we read of the great revivals of yesteryear. I was reading just the other day about what happened in 1835 when a missionary named Titus Coan landed in the Hawaiian Islands. There was a mighty stirring of God, and multitudes came to hear him—such great crowds that he scarcely had time to eat. Once he preached three times before he had a chance to eat breakfast. Within two years under such preaching, a great revival broke out, and nearly the whole population came to him and settled down for two full years—15,000 people; and there was not an hour, day or night, when an audience of 2,000 to 6,000 would not rally at the ringing of a bell. Thousands of people found the joy of Jesus. Quarrels were resolved, alcoholics were delivered, adulterers were converted, thieves returned stolen property, and on one Sunday alone there were over 1700 baptisms. When Titus Coan left the Hawaiian Islands, he had personally baptized nearly 12,000 people. (Oswald J. Smith, *The Revival We Need* (Edinburgh: Marshall, Morgan, & Scott, 1933), p. 2.)

We long for a pray for a massive revival like that to sweep across our nation and our world, but what I'd like to suggest today is that as individual Christians we don't need to wait for that. We need personal daily revival in our lives right now. We need the joy of Jesus day by day in our lives.

Here in 2 Chronicles is a story that can help us with that. I believe that 2 Chronicles is God's manual on the subject of revival. It's the theme of the book. We can't study the entire book in a half-hour, but I would like to show you one story that we should know about.

In 2 Chronicles 28, Prince Hezekiah was elevated to the throne upon the death of his father, Ahaz, who had been an exceedingly evil man. Look at the description of Ahaz in 2 Chronicles 28:22ff.:

Now in the time of his distress King Ahaz became increasingly unfaithful to the Lord. This is that King Ahaz. For he sacrificed to the gods of Damascus which had defeated him, saying, "Because the gods of the kings of Syria help them, I will sacrifice to them that they may help me." But they were the ruin of him and of all Israel.

This is such a picture of self-destructive and addictive sin. He was addicted to the very things that were destroying him. He worshipped the very things that were causing his ruin. That's what an addiction is, and that's a picture of sin. Look at verse 24:

So Ahaz gathered the articles of the house of God, cut in pieces the articles of the house of God, shut up the doors of the house of the Lord, and made for himself altars in every corner of Jerusalem. And in every single city of Judah, he made high places to burn incense to other gods, and provoked to anger the Lord God of his fathers.

Under King Ahaz, the temple was looted, the precious articles of worship were destroyed, the church was shut down and boarded up, and the entire nation descended into a cesspool of idolatry. Sounds like today, doesn't it? But God sent one man to turn the tide, a young prince named Hezekiah whose story is told in the next couple of chapters. As I read and studied these chapters, it became clear to me that personal revival—the kind of revival that brings us daily joy—requires four prerequisites.

Make Up Your Mind To Change Things In Your Life

First, we have to make up our minds to change things in our lives. Look at chapter 29:

Hezekiah became king when he was twenty-five years old, and he reigned twenty-nine years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Abijah the daughter of Zechariah. And he did what was right in the sight of the Lord, according to all that his father David had done.

In the first year of his reign, in the first month, he opened the doors of the house of the Lord and repaired them.

Notice that! In the first month of his first year. In other words, as soon as he rose to the throne, he took action and began to institute religious reform. He didn't wait. Let me ask you a question—what do you need to change in your life? If an expert on spiritual growth or on personal management spent a day or two with you, what would he tell you to do? What needs to change? What habits? What behavior patterns? What attitudes? If you could change one thing about yourself, what would it be? If you could improve in one area,

what area would you target?

If you need religious reform in your life, don't wait for another day. If you need personal revival to occur in your heart, don't wait because the moment might never come again. You have to make up your mind that, with God's help, you're going to change things in your life.

Carry Out the Rubbish

And then it's a matter of cleaning out the rubbish. The second requirement is that we carry out the rubbish. Look at verse 3ff: 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 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...."

And look down at verse 16: Then the priests went into the inner part of the house of the Lord to cleanse it and brought out all the debris that they found in the temple of the Lord to the court of the house of the Lord.

Before they could restore the worship services in the temple, they had to carry out the rubbish and debris. The temple was filthy and it was full of inappropriate and vile objects. It took over two weeks to clean out all the garbage. Look at verse 17: Now they began to sanctify on the first day of the first month, and on the eighth day of the month they came to the vestibule of the Lord. So they sanctified the house of the Lord in eight days, and on the sixteenth day of the first month they finished.

In our case and in our application, the holy place is our heart. And if you want a personal daily revival, the first thing you have to do is to haul the rubbish from your heart. We call that confession and repentance and turning away from sin. In his book, *The Revival We Need*, Dr. Oswald J. Smith makes an interesting observation. He wrote;

"How may we secure such an Outpouring of the Spirit? You answer, by prayer. True, but there is something before prayer. We will have to deal first of all with the question of sin; for unless our lives are right in the sight of God, unless sin has been put away, we may pray until doomsday, and the Revival will never come. 'Your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid His face from you so that He will not hear' (Isaiah 59:2)." (Oswald J. Smith, *The Revival We Need* (Edinburgh: Marshall, Morgan, & Scott, 1933), p. 6.)

We need to clear the rubbish out of the temple of our hearts.

Years ago, when I was in college, I met a man who intrigued me a great deal. He was an unusual Irish evangelist named Dr. J. Edwin Orr, and he was up in years when I met him. During the last year or two, he has been on my mind and I've searched out his books and read many of them. In one of his first books, he describes a time when he arrived in Auckland, New Zealand, and was taken to a particular town where there was to be an annual Ngaruawahia (pronounced Na-ru-a-wa-hi-a) Bible Convention, a yearly Bible conference that was modeled after England's famous Keswick Convention. Tents were spread out everywhere, and hundreds of people registered.

After the service on the first night, a young man approached Dr. Orr and said, "Mr. Orr, about a dozen fellows want you to come along to Tent Number Twenty-nine. They are concerned about revival."

He went and talked with them about the hindrances to revival, and then he asked them plainly, "Now, you fellows, do you really believe that God is going to send us revival?"

They said yes.

"Yes, but do you believe that He will start the revival here in this tent tonight?"

After a silence, one young man said quietly, "If we pay the price."

"All right," said Orr. "Let's get to prayer and see if God keeps His word. We'll pray for a revival here." Some of them began to kneel. But suddenly one of the young men cried out, "I say, don't! Before we pray to God for revival, I want to get something off my mind." Then turning to another fellow in the tent, he said, "Jack, I want to confess openly that I have been criticizing you behind your back. Will you forgive me? I think I ought to get right with you first."

There was a painful silence for a moment, and then Jack said, "That's all right. It's my fault, too. I have been doing the same thing before your back. May God forgive us both."

As the young men started praying, they began confessing sins in prayer, sins that had hindered them, sins of the flesh and secret sins, sins of attitude and behavior. Every one of the twelve men got thoroughly right with God and the spirit of revival began to fall on them. They sang and prayed and rejoiced. And finally, at 10:15, Dr. Orr told them he was going back to his hotel to get some sleep,

but he advised them to go to some of the other tents and share what had happened.

Dr. Orr walked back to his hotel, but he couldn't sleep. So he got up and returned to the campgrounds and was amazed to see prayer meetings going on in a dozen tents. Grown men were weeping like children over their sinful hearts and crying out for mercy. Dr. Orr, who was very tired, returned once again to his hotel, but found that he was locked out. He tried every way he could to get into the building, but when everything failed, he went back to the campgrounds. It was nearing midnight, and he found that the revival was still spreading. Misunderstandings were being resolved. Enemies were being reconciled. Tears of repentance were falling on the ground, and the whole camp was breaking out in song, and the one song that rang through the campgrounds was the old song, "I've got the joy, joy, joy, joy down in my heart."

Dr. Orr said, "The fervor rather carried us away, I am afraid. The scenes that night were the nearest thing to spiritual intoxication that I have ever seen."

At one o'clock, Dr. Orr gathered everyone together, pronounced a benediction, and persuaded them to go to bed, or so he thought. Somehow the praise service started up all over again. People were awakened by the singing as far as a half-mile away, and it was the beginning of a great revival among those people. But it had come with through the doors of confession. (J. Edwin Orr, *All Your Need* (London: Marshall, Morgan, & Scott, Ltd., n.d.), chapter 2.)

My point is that before you can really experience daily joy, you have to haul the debris out of your life. It might be pride or a critical spirit or bitterness or sexual sins or unbelief. But confessing it is just as real a transaction as these Levites opening the doors of Solomon's temple, going from room to room with their wheelbarrows and shovels and brooms and mops and cleaning the debris out of the temple.

Reestablish the Passover

The next order of business was to reestablish the temple worship and then to restore the observance of the Passover, and this is very interesting to me. I'd like to show it to you. Look at the next chapter, 2 Chronicles 30: And Hezekiah sent to all Israel and Judah, and also wrote letters to Ephraim and Manasseh, that they should come to the house of the Lord at Jerusalem, to keep the Passover to the Lord God of Israel.

The Passover was the oldest and greatest of Israel's holy days, for it commemorated the night when the Jews were delivered from Egypt. They had been slaves for many years, but Moses came and confronted Pharaoh and said, "Let my people go." When Pharaoh refused, the Lord sent a series of plagues upon the nation of Egypt, and the last of the great plagues was the death of the firstborn. But the Lord told the Israelites that night to gather in their homes and for each family to slay a sacrificial lamb. Its blood was to be painted on the doorposts of the house. The Lord said, "When I see the blood I will pass over you."

That night the death angel passed through the land of the Pharaohs and the firstborn of all flesh died, but the Israelites were spared because of the blood of the Lamb, and that night they were delivered from Egypt.

Now, God commanded the Jews to observe this as a holy night on an annual basis throughout all their history. Throughout all their generations, they were to commemorate that night and observe it as a holy night. But the observance of Passover had fallen to the wayside and the nation had forgotten its most important holiday.

Now Hezekiah wanted to reestablish the observance of Passover, but he had a problem. The date for the Passover came too early in the process of reform and renovation, and they weren't ready to observe it. And by the time everything was ready, the date had come and gone. Now the temple and the priests and the Levites were ready, but the Passover was still ten or eleven months away. Hezekiah didn't want to wait. So being a creative leader, he said, "For this year and this year only, let's have Passover early. Let's have it now."

It's like the President of the United States saying, "This year, we weren't quite ready for Christmas on December 25th, so let's observe it on February 28th." And that's what they did.

2 Chronicles 30 says: And Hezekiah sent to all Israel and Judah, and also wrote letters to Ephraim and Manasseh, that they should come to the house of the Lord at Jerusalem, to keep the Passover to the Lord God of Israel. For the king and his leaders and all the assembly in Jerusalem had agreed to keep the Passover in the second month. For they could not keep it at the regular time, because a sufficient number of priests had not consecrated themselves nor had the people gathered together at Jerusalem. And the matter pleased the king and all the assembly. So they resolved to make a proclamation throughout all Israel, from Beersheba to Dan, that they should come to keep the Passover to the Lord God of Israel at Jerusalem, since they had not done it for a long time in the prescribed manner....

And the rest of the chapter describes how the runners spread the message throughout Israel and how the people came to observe Passover.

Now Passover, of course, was an adumbration and a foreshadowing of Calvary, the slaying of the Passover Lamb, the sacrifice of the one and only Son of God. It represents the cross, and that's the next step in daily personal revival. We have to decide to change things in our lives, we have to clear out the debris, and then we have to kneel at the cross and rediscover the depths of our Lord and Savior.

Dr. Eric Frykenberg, veteran missionary to India, was a great storyteller, and he could vividly describe scenes and events from his fifty-plus years in Asia. One day someone asked him, "Dr. Frykenberg, what is the most difficult problem you ever faced?"

Without hesitation, he answered, "It was when my heart would grow cold before God. When that happened, I knew I was too busy. I also knew it was time to get away. So I would take my Bible and go off to the hills alone. I'd open my Bible to Matthew 27, the story of the Crucifixion, and I would wrap my arms around the cross."

"And then," Frykenberg said, "I'd be ready to go back to work." (Leslie B. Flynn, *Come Alive With Illustrations* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1987), p. 173.)

On that day when Jesus died on the cross, it was so very different from all His other days. Gone were the quiet walks along Galilee's trails. Gone were the commending words of God the Father who said, "This is My beloved Son." Gone were the flashes of miracles and the commanding tones of His powerful sermons. Gone were the boat trips across the lake and the hikes into Caesarea Philippi. It was a day of pain, of torture, of nails, of blood, of anguish, and of death, and Jesus, despising the shame, endured death, even death on the cross. And on that day, our healing was purchased and paid for. Our sins were forgiven. Our eternal destiny was claimed. Our atonement was accomplished. Our lives were transformed. And we need to revisit the cross on a regular basis, finding there the fountainheads of joy and victory.

Choose Joy

And then finally, after you've made up your mind to change things, and carried out the rubbish, and restored the Passover to your life, you're free to choose the joy of the Lord. Look at verse 21: So the children of Israel who were present at Jerusalem kept the Feast of Unleavened Bread seven days with great gladness; and the Levites and the priests praised the Lord day by day, singing to the Lord, accompanied by loud instruments....

And verse 26: So there was great joy in Jerusalem, for since the time of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel, there had been nothing like this in Jerusalem. Then the priests, the Levites, arose and blessed the people, and their voice was heard; and their prayer came up to His holy dwelling place, to heaven.

I use the phrase choose joy on purpose—because our attitudes are a choice we make.

Recently I received a letter from a man named Roy Swanberg who lives in Princeton, Illinois, and I've since spoken with him and asked him if I could share with you a little story he related to me. In 1962, Mr. Swanberg was stationed with American forces in the countryside of England. On this particular occasion, he had worked hard for several days on a difficult assignment, and he was exhausted. It was almost time for him to go off duty, and just at that moment his sergeant approached him and lit into him and chewed him out over some small matter not even of his own doing.

Roy was steamed. He was furious -- "spitt'n mad," as he put it. And as soon as his shift was over he stormed down the road. He decided he just wanted to get out of there and hike off his anger. The sun went down, Roy had forgotten what side of the road they drive on in England; and a large truck went by without seeing him and just about hit him, causing him to fall into the weeds.

That just made matters worse, and Roy decided he didn't care if he was hit or not. He was far from home, exhausted, lonely, and feeling sorry for himself. He said that if some temptation had offered itself to him at that moment, he'd probably have done it, whatever it was. He kept walking through a town or two, and he walked all night long in a big circle, and was just heading back to base when the sun came up. His thoughts turned of home. At 5:30 in the morning in England, they would still be asleep back in Minnesota. They were very proud of their only son, serving in the military. He thought of his sisters and friends and neighborhood and school back in Minneapolis, and of his church. And to his surprise, he started thinking about his childhood Sunday School classes and his childhood teachers.

And he thought of the Sunday School songs he had learned as a child—"The B-I-B-L-E: Yes, That's the Book for Me." He began to hum the tunes to Jesus Loves Me, and Thank You, Lord, For Saving My Soul. He began singing aloud the words of Heavenly Sunshine and Blessed Assurance and Trust and Obey.

Near the end of his long nocturnal walk, Roy remembered the song, I Have the Joy, Joy, Joy, Joy Down in my Heart. It was truly a personal revival. He arrived back at camp, cleaned up, got dressed for a new day, and though he hadn't slept all night, he went back to work, greeted his sergeant with a smile, and dove back into his work with the joy of Jesus in his heart.

The Bible says that the joy of the Lord is our strength. When you lose your joy, you lose your strength and enthusiasm for life, and you need a personal spiritual revival. Anyone in that category today? Make up your mind to do something about it, clear out the debris of sin, rediscover the Passover Lamb, and chose to be joyful in Him, and you, too, can say:

I've got the joy, joy, joy, joy down in my heart...
Down in my heart to stay