

Spiritual Revival: Turn

We become very concerned about the spiritual state of our country and of the Church in America. We should take a page out of history. 715 BC was a fascinating year. In the winter of that year God's people were worshipping false gods, including the god Molech to which Israelites were offering their infants as child sacrifices, they were engaged in "unrestrained evil", and they were being oppressed by their enemies. The northern kingdom of Israel had fallen to Assyria just seven years earlier — with no visible signs of repentance. By the spring of 715 BC the people of God had reopened the temple doors, were joyfully and triumphantly worshipping God, they had destroyed the altars of the false gods, and they were living in godly community.

What happened?

One word: revival! Os Guinness once said, "The story of Christian reformation, revival, and renaissance underscores that the darkest hour is often just before the dawn, so we should always be people of hope and prayer, not gloom and defeatism. God's Holy Spirit can turn the situation around in five minutes."

This remarkable revival was preceded by the actions of the young king, Hezekiah, who from the beginning of his reign instituted godly worship. 2 Chronicles 29:3 says "In the first year of his reign, in the first month, he opened the doors of the house of the Lord..." Hezekiah gave his own life and then used influence upon the lives of others to lead God's people back to true spiritual life. In the text before us we can see how Hezekiah called upon the people of God to turn to the Lord.

2 Chronicles 30:1-9

1 Hezekiah sent to all Israel and Judah, and wrote letters also to Ephraim and Manasseh, that they should come to the house of the Lord at Jerusalem to keep the Passover to the Lord, the God of Israel. **2** For the king and his princes and all the assembly in Jerusalem had taken counsel to keep the Passover in the second month—**3** for they could not keep it at that time because the priests had not consecrated themselves in sufficient number, nor had the people assembled in Jerusalem—**4** and the plan seemed right to the king and all the assembly. **5** So they decreed to make a proclamation throughout all Israel, from Beersheba to Dan, that the people should come and keep the Passover to the Lord, the God of Israel, at Jerusalem, for they had not kept it as often as prescribed. **6** So couriers went throughout all Israel and Judah with letters from the king and his princes, as the king had commanded, saying, "O people of Israel, return to the Lord, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, that he may turn again to the remnant of you who have escaped from the hand of the kings of Assyria. **7** Do not be like your fathers and your brothers, who were faithless to the Lord God of their fathers, so that he made them a desolation, as you see. **8** Do not now be stiff-necked as your fathers were, but yield yourselves to the Lord and come to his sanctuary, which he has consecrated forever, and serve the Lord your God, that his fierce anger may turn away from you. **9** For if you return to the Lord, your brothers and your children will find compassion with their captors and return to this land. For the Lord your God is gracious and merciful and will not turn away his face from you, if you return to him."

I. God invites us to return to Him (v. 6a)

In 2 Chronicles we have the Hebrew words for "turning" 13 times, six of which are in verses 6-9 of our text. Obviously this is a major emphasis of the chronicler in describing the reign of Hezekiah. He turned, and he called upon the people of God to turn. "Turning" is what we now call "repentance." One can see throughout the Old Testament that the people of God are called upon to turn *from* evil and turn *to* the Lord. When we turn to the Lord, we turn with worshipping hearts. Hezekiah restored godly worship in Judah, and he called upon "all Israel" (see verse 5), which

includes the remnants of the northern kingdom that had been invaded and put into exile by Assyria. God is gracious. Even when we have turned our backs on Him and have been disciplined by Him, He still calls up for us to come to Him in worship. Notice in verses 10-11 that not everyone was happy and repentant upon hearing of the invitation. Many “left then to scorn and to mock them.” But notice also that “some men...humbled themselves and came to Jerusalem.” So it is today. Many will mock us for inviting them to turn to the Lord and to His house of worship, but some will come, for which we are grateful.

Notice also that when Hezekiah re-established worship he focused on Passover. This is highly significant, for Passover was the moment in history when the death angel passed over the Israelite homes because they had the blood of the Passover lamb on their doorposts. So today the wrath of God passes over sinners who receive the blood of Jesus Christ shed on Calvary’s cross for us. Hezekiah renewed worship by focusing the people of God upon the very heart of the Gospel. Spiritual renewal always depends upon a reception of the core work of Jesus Christ on our behalf in the Gospel. Unfortunately today, many have abandoned the Gospel and thus will not be renewed spiritually. Richard Niebuhr once famously wrote concerning liberal theology: they teach that “a God without wrath brought men without sin into a kingdom without judgment through the ministrations of a Christ without a cross.” How tragic it is when preachers try to help people without Christ and the cross.

II. When we turn to the Lord, He will turn to us.

Notice what He does when He turns to us.

a. What He does *in* us

1. He works devotion in our hearts (vv. 30:14:31:1)
2. He works in us joy and gladness (vv. 30:21-27)
3. He works in us generosity (vv. 31:5-11)

b. What He does *for* us

1. He defeats all of His and our enemies (vv.32:20-23)

In case any of us would think that our salvation is a combination of what God does for us and what we do for Him, we must notice that even what we do is a gift from God. Even when we repent, it is because the Lord gives us the gift of repentance (see Westminster Shorter Catechism #87; Acts 11:18).

Discussion Questions

1. Why did Hezekiah begin his reforms with the worship in Judah?
2. What is the significance of his beginning these reforms with the reinstatement of the Passover feast?
3. How did Hezekiah handle the unpopularity of his declaration to come worship in Jerusalem? (30:10,11)

4. What were the results of the revival under Hezekiah? (Chaps 30-32)

5. How can we seek the internal blessings of spiritual revival: greater devotion to the Lord, joy and gladness, generosity?

Going Deeper

1. How can you make a more decisive turn toward the Lord in your life right now?

2. What marks of a personally revived life would you more intentionally seek in your life?