

**Sermon preached by Dr. Neil Smith at Faith Evangelical Presbyterian Church,
Kingstowne, Virginia, on Sunday, February 9, 2014**

A LONGING FOR REVIVAL

Isaiah 55:6-9

I was planning to preach on Jesus' Parable of the Good Samaritan this morning, as we continue to think together about what God wants from us as His people, using Micah 6:8 as the launching point for our study and reflection on these things. Micah 6:8, you will recall, says:

He has showed you, O man, what is good.
And what does the Lord require of you
but to do justice, to love mercy,
and to walk humbly with your God?

The Lord willing, we will come back to this next Sunday. But the Lord has laid something else on my heart to share with you this morning. First, I need to tell you that Pastor David is away on a preaching mission this morning. Lou Woods, one of our fellow EPC teaching elders in the area, has been battling a nasty infection of some kind for the last two weeks or so, and called a few days ago to ask Pastor David to pinch-hit for him today at Riderwood Village Church, the congregation Lou serves in a retirement community in Silver Spring. So, Pastor David is there this morning and not here.

I want to tell you also that our presbytery, the Presbytery of the East of the EPC, met Friday and yesterday at Ashland EPC in Voorhees, NJ, not far from Philadelphia. We were blessed to have Rev. Bill Dudley, the current Moderator of the EPC General Assembly, with us at presbytery. He is pastor of Signal Mountain Presbyterian Church in Chattanooga, TN, and a terrific ambassador for the EPC and, even more, for the Lord Jesus Christ. We also had the privilege of hearing from missionary to Albania, Claudia Tahan. Claudia and her husband Fred are members of the Ashland Church who heard and answered the Lord's call to serve Him as missionaries in Albania, where they are incarnating the gospel and sharing the love of Jesus.

In the course of the presbytery meeting, we examined, received into the presbytery, and approved calls for 10 already ordained pastors to serve in different ministries from Connecticut to northern Virginia, including the two pastors of a church strategically situated across from Central Park in New York City, and another EPC pastor whose call is to serve as President and CEO of Intercessors for America, a ministry that seeks to mobilize people, as you might surmise, to pray for America.

In addition to these 10 already ordained pastors, we also examined and approved for ordination a young seminary graduate who had been under the care of our presbytery, and now has a call to serve as an assistant pastor in one of the churches of our presbytery in Pennsylvania. And that is not all. We also examined and received two seminarians as candidates under care of the presbytery in their preparation for ordained ministry.

It is difficult to convey in words how spiritually uplifting and refreshing, how encouraging and edifying, how God-honoring and Christ-exalting it is to hear the stories and testimonies of those whom the Lord has called (or is calling) to join us in the work of His kingdom in the Presbytery of the East and in the EPC as we seek to faithfully serve God's purposes in this generation. And for generations to come. All to the glory of His name.

You can ask any of the others from Faith who attended the presbytery meeting about their impressions of what took place. We were well represented there, with Ruling Elders Stan Crow, Lanah Hamrick, Henry Hoyle, David Kern, and Alan and Debbie Smith all in attendance, along with Teaching Elder Helen Franssell, in addition to Pastor David and me.

What I feel impressed to say to you this morning is that, whether it is apparent to us or not, God is on the move. He is! The world is in terrible shape, but God has not given up on it. He has not given up on us. Though the church may seem impotent in the face of the powerful cultural tides that beat against it, God has not given up on His church. Nor will He ever. He is, in fact, building His church and enlarging the territory of His kingdom by establishing His rule in the heart of every person – every man or woman, every boy or girl – who embraces the gospel and trusts in Him for salvation. God is not yet finished with this world. He is not yet finished with us, His people. And we have not yet finished the work God has given us to do in His name. The Lord our God still has a mission – a *Great Commission* – for us to fulfill.

I confess to you that when I look at the condition the world is in, and the seeming inability of the church to beat back the advancing forces of darkness, I can get pretty discouraged. When I think about the challenges facing the church in our culture right here in America, I am sometimes tempted to despair. Except I know that despair is not the answer. I know that giving up is not an option. It is not worthy of the God we love and trust and serve. I know that God is still sovereign. I know that God is still in charge. I know that God's plans and purposes will prevail. I know that Jesus is Lord. And, whether we see it or not, whether we know it or not, He is at work in the world today.

I recently read the testimony of a formerly-atheist TV network political commentator who says she is more surprised than anyone that she has become a follower of Christ. I read about a couple who left the Mormon church after 30 years because, at the urging of one of their sons, they read the gospels, fell in love with Jesus, and are now following Him. I also read recently about a devout, young American Muslim who opened his heart to the Lord Jesus, even though it meant being disowned by his family. God *is* at work in the world today.

I wish I could see His hand at work more clearly. I long to see it more clearly – to see more and more evidences, and hear more first-person testimonies of how God is moving in His mercy and grace, in the power of His love, in the truth and power of the gospel, in the truth and power of His Word, and in the grace and power of the Holy Spirit to change lives. I long for true, lasting revival – heaven-sent, Holy Spirit-generated, life-altering, sin-renouncing, God-glorifying revival – to break out and sweep through the church in America and around the world.

I long for that kind of revival here at Faith. In us. In our fellowship. In our lives and relationships. I long for a revival of true religion among this family of believers I love, in response to what God, in His matchless mercy, grace, and love, has done for us in His Son Jesus Christ our Lord. I long for a revival of genuine faith, hope, and love for Him in our hearts. I long for the flame of our love of God to burn as brightly as it once did. I long for a revival of grace and godliness in our homes and marriages and families – in all of our relationships and responsibilities, in fact. I long for a revival that will impact our priorities as individuals and families, and as a church family under the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

I long for a revival in the church everywhere that will result in a passionate resolve to do justice, to love mercy, to care for our neighbors in need, to work for peace and reconciliation in our world, and to walk humbly with God. I long for a revival to take place in us and all God's people that will cause the unbelieving world to sit up and take notice.

I long for a revival that will refresh, renew, and reenergize the church of Jesus Christ to carry out the mission – the *Great Commission* – God has given us. I long for a revival sent from God that will overflow the banks of the church and lead to a new Great Awakening in our time, a true spiritual awakening in which thousands upon thousands – even millions – of unbelievers and nominal believers come to a genuine, personal, trusting faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord of their lives, and make a heart-commitment to live from now on as followers of Christ. That is the longing of my heart.

I want to be a part of what God is doing. I want *us* here at Faith to be a part of what God is doing. I want us to be a part of what the Lord of the church is doing, and what He desires to do in this world to make His name known, to seek and to save the lost, to heal the broken, to set the prisoners free, to open the eyes of the blind, and to change lives forever through the power of the gospel.

A true, heaven-sent, Holy Spirit-powered revival cannot be generated or manufactured by human means. True revival cannot be programmed. It cannot be scheduled on the church calendar like a mission trip to Brooklyn or a chili cook-off. There is no “satisfaction-guaranteed-or-your-money-back” formula to follow. This is not to say there is nothing that you and I can do in order to prepare the spiritual soil of our hearts or of our church for the seeds of revival to be sown in us. We can aid or hinder the movement of God's Spirit in revival by what we do or fail to do, but nothing we do can bring about a true and lasting revival if the Holy Spirit does not make it happen. When revival comes, it is the sovereign and gracious work of our sovereign and gracious God.

What can we do, if we long for God to send revival to the church, to our land, to the world in our time? First, you and I must cultivate and maintain a heart attitude of humility and repentance before God. Search your heart. Confess your sins to the Lord and repent of them. Ask the Lord to show you any sin in your life that you may not even be aware of. Make David's prayer at the end of Psalm 139 your prayer:

Search me, O God, and know my heart;
 test me and know my thoughts.
 See if there is any offensive (wicked, sinful) way in me,
 and lead me in the way of life everlasting.
 (Psalm 139:23-24)

Revival begins with a spirit of humility and repentance before God.

Second, we can commit ourselves to pray for revival. Charles Finney, one of the most influential revival preachers during the 2nd Great Awakening in the first half of the 19th century, maintained that “prayer is an essential link in the chain of causes that lead to a revival.” The apostle Paul urges us to “devote (ourselves) to prayer” (Colossians 4:2). James tells us that the faithful, fervent prayers of God’s people are powerful and effective (James 5:16). Like the man in Jesus’ story who asks a friend for help at midnight (Luke 11:5-10), or the widow in His parable who pleads her cause before an uncaring and unjust judge (Luke 18:1-8), we are to pray for revival boldly and persistently. And we know that the One to whom we plead in prayer is not unwilling or uncaring or unjust. He is the God who loved this world so much that He gave His Son to die for it. For *us*. The One to whom we pray is the God of all grace, who has showered us with His saving grace, His sanctifying grace, His sustaining grace, His protecting and preserving grace. It is all by grace. All by *His* grace.

There is never a time when it is not time to pray. And there is never a time when it is not time to pray for revival, asking – and trusting – God in His sovereign wisdom, grace, and power to send it in His time and for His glory. There is never a time when it is not time to seek the Lord.

Listen to what the Bible says in Isaiah 55:

Seek the Lord while He may be found;
 call on Him while He is near.
 Let the wicked forsake their ways
 and the unrighteous their thoughts.
 Let them turn to the Lord,
 and He will have mercy on them,
 and to our God,
 for He will freely pardon.
 “For my thoughts are not your thoughts,
 neither are your ways my ways,” says the Lord.
 “As the heavens are higher than the earth,
 so are my ways higher than your ways
 and my thoughts than your thoughts.”
 (Isaiah 55:6-9)

Brothers and sisters in Christ, let us seek the Lord while He may be found. Let us seek His face in prayer. Trusting in Christ, let us come boldly to the throne of grace, asking the Lord in His mercy and grace to send the Holy Spirit with a new wave of revival.

Let me ask you to do something. Will you commit to praying every day for revival? Will you make a commitment to set aside one minute every day – 60 seconds – to pray for revival to come in our day? It's okay to pray more than 60 seconds a day for revival (!) – but all I'm asking right now is for you to commit to praying for revival for just one minute every day. If it helps, set the alarm on your phone to go off at the same time every day, and stop whatever you are doing in order to pray for revival in the church, revival in our lives, revival in our land, and revival throughout the world.

Perhaps God, in His mercy, will use our prayers and the prayers of many others to bring revival in our time.

The other thing God may choose to use to bring about revival is our witness to the Lord Jesus and the power of the gospel in our words and actions. God can use you. God can use each of us right where we are and wherever He takes us as ambassadors of Christ (2 Corinthians 5:20). God can use you in your neighborhood. God can use you – God can use *us* – right here in this neighborhood. In Kingstowne. One of the things I ask you to pray is that the Lord will show us how to be salt and light here in Kingstowne, how to impact our neighbors with the message of the gospel and the love of the Lord Jesus. Will you make this your prayer, too?

Do you have a longing for true revival? I do. May the Lord send revival in our day. For the glory of His name. May the Lord graciously revive us by the power of His Spirit and use us as instruments of revival.

Lord, let it be so in us. Amen.