

Learning from history

Preparing for scrutiny, tension and accountability. Finances and miraculous claims, disputes (public ministry systems and procedures, including press management and record keeping).

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June 2022

Dealing with messy revivals

So, towards the end of 2021, the Lord Jesus told me to prepare a series of 12 messages called “catch the revival” which means, revival is here – but we can’t see it, so we need to have eyes of faith, so we can catch it! Today’s message is message 6 in this eye-opening series. Now revival is a GREAT THING because brings with it the Lord’s power – miracles, healing, preaching, salvation and all the blessings of the Lord coming near to his people BUT:

Most people who have heard of a Christian revival consider it to also be messy controversial business. It disrupts “normal”. People say revivals are controversial because during revival some preachers for example teach: “The end is nigh” and as a result for example people no longer want to marry because they are waiting for Jesus to come! In revivals past people waited and waited – and this has given revival a bad name. Then also during revival many people get things like the “jerks” – violent shaking, others fall down – called being “slain in the Spirit,” and then you have “speaking in tongues” “barking”, “dancing in the Spirit”, “crying”, “trembling”, “screaming”, “tearing clothes” “gnashing teeth” and more.

Some people hate this kind of stuff – but what about you? If the Lord told you that you would you’re your life transformed in the coming revival, would you be willing to learn from history to understand some controversies – while not missing the blessing?

The Lord wants me to tell you about some of this history of controversy so I can prepare his people.

About me

Who am I and how did the Lord bring me to this point where I am about to warn you about what may happen to some of you and to some of your churches? How did the Lord entrust me with this message when I was formerly untrustworthy?

So, I experienced personal revival in 2017 and I got baptised shortly after this. My life changed when the Lord Jesus caused me to read my bible regularly for about 2-3 months until his word entered into my heart and I finally accepted that Jesus is Lord! Now this was not an easy thing for me to say because I had spent 20 years as a prodigal son. I was wild! Consumed by money, by career progression and I loved the things of this life – drinking alcohol, being sexually promiscuous and such wicked things but he washed me clean!

After I continued to sit at the feet of my Master Jesus, eventually he commissioned me as a preacher of righteousness and for a number of years now he has given me his words to speak and that is how this year he commissioned me to speak about revival in a season called “catch the revival”.

In this message the Lord Jesus wants us to learn from history so that:

- We as a Church of Christ can prepare for outsiders scrutinising our work including investigation of finances and miraculous claims.
- We can prepare ourselves and our churches for the tension and disputes which come with revival and how to put certain things in place to handle the tensions so we can grow, instead of falling apart.

What we can learn from the bible about revivals and the controversy that comes with them.

To help us start learning about revivals and how controversy can arise, we are going to see a very interesting story in the bible.

The bible says this:

When the men heard this, they were enraged and began shouting, "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!" (Acts 19:28).

This verse places us right in the middle of chaos. We can see:

- Angry men – they are shouting.
- But why were they yelling "Artemis of the Ephesians"?

So first a background of the place and name "Artemis" to give you context:

- *Artemis* in Greek religion was a goddess. The daughter of their chief god Zeus and was in charge of among others nature, child birth, virginity and sudden death. Artemis was so popular and widely worshipped that her great temple, in the city of Ephesus was one of the 7 wonders of the ancient world.ⁱ
- The *Ephesians* were citizens of Ephesus. Ephesus was a city in modern day Turkey in a region called "Asia Minor", part of the Roman Empire at the time. It was also a very famous city, a great city. In around 1 BC, this being around Jesus' time, it had a population of 250,000ⁱⁱ and was then the second largest city in the world after Rome.
- *Ephesus of the Ephesians* was therefore as important as one of the largest cities today, say New Delhi and Shanghai in Asia, say like Toronto and Chicago in North America, say like Lagos and Dar Es Salaam in Africa.

So what we have in this story is the equivalent of people in a great city like Lagos or Toronto shouting and angry. A mob of angry people. Something has disturbed the peace of the city and it has something to do with their Great Goddess Artemis. What could cause this?

The answer is a revival.

Now let me give you the before and after story of this revival so you can see the story unfolding and as I narrate the story, I will be showing what the Lord wants us to learn from this for our generation. I will give it in summary/bit but you can read the full story in Acts 19. The main character is an Apostle of Jesus called Paul. Here are extracts:

Part 1: The beginning of revival.

V1-5 (excerpts): *While Apollos was at Corinth, Paul passed through the interior and came to Ephesus. There he found some disciples and asked them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you became believers?" "No," they answered, "we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit."*

They were baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied. There were about twelve men in all.

Lesson: So, the revival begun when the Holy Spirit came upon 12 men after Paul laid his hands on them. Revival is usually started by the Holy Spirit. Without the Spirit, revival can't take place. The activity of the Spirit is therefore very prominent in revival and it will often look like Pentecost.

Revivals bring with them a lot of physical manifestations – "jerks," shouting, being "slain in the Spirit," speaking in tongues, barking, dancing in the Spirit, "crying", "trembling", "screaming", "tearing clothes" "gnashing teeth" and more.

Some of these phenomena, we believe, are prompted by God. When the divine Holy Spirit comes to inhabit our weak bodies which are like “jars of clay” (2 Corinthians 4: 7) our bodies often can’t often handle the power.

As an example, Methodist circuit riders (1800s) like John A. Grande led significant revivals who saw such manifestations. Grande once recalled: *“I would sing a song, or pray or exhort a few minutes, then the fire would break out among the people and the slain of the Lord everywhere were many.”* Crowds followed him from one preaching point to another, “singing and shouting along the way.” At one meeting, so many people fell, they “lay in such heaps that it was feared they would suffocate.” Likewise, the Jamaican revival of 1960, the Korean revival of 1905 and others had such manifestations.

Back to our story, then what happened next?

Part 2: The revival starts spreading with miracles

V 8-11: *Then Paul went to the synagogue and preached boldly for the next three months, arguing persuasively about the Kingdom of God. But some became stubborn, rejecting his message and publicly speaking against the Way. So Paul left the synagogue and took the believers with him. Then he held daily discussions at the lecture hall of Tyrannus. This went on for the next two years, so that people throughout the province of Asia—both Jews and Greeks—heard the word of the Lord.*

God gave Paul the power to perform unusual miracles. When handkerchiefs or aprons that had merely touched his skin were placed on sick people, they were healed of their diseases, and evil spirits were expelled.

Now we see a shift.

- Paul preaches for 3 months, in a synagogue, the equivalent of a modern church – he is rejected/abused by the religious leaders, so instead starts holding daily discussions in a lecture hall – the equivalent of a school hall or perhaps a public theatre – with the result that virtually the entire great city of Ephesus and its surrounding areas hear the gospel.
- Miracles then start happening and these are crazy miracles – people are being delivered even by handkerchiefs from Paul!

An important point to note here, in many revivals, the established religious leaders and bodies often reject what is happening. This is a typical pattern. If you are in a church that is being revived, expect that your leaders will be hated/rejected by other churches or denominations. The root cause of this is often jealousy because Jesus was condemned to die because of jealousy and so were his apostles. Jealousy in churches is therefore common and this often results in resistance to the message of the Lord!

It’s not the only time it’s happened in the history of revival. For example:

George Whitfield (1740-1770) in the First Great awakening was attacked by other ministers in a letter for example:

- They denied that every day “saints” could recognize “true ministers.”
- They denied that one need only be a Christian to preach the gospel.

Many religious leaders forget that God’s Spirit cannot be corralled/contained – just like was in Acts by the leaders of the day, even today often religious leaders hinder revival and cause disunity and fights.

Charles Finney (1792- 1875) in the Second Great Awakening was accused of his “new measures” or techniques being manipulative. He is called the father of modern revival for introducing ideas like the “altar call” – a public invitation and the “anxious seat” – pews where those who were uncomfortable with the message or crying or etc would move near the front and not disturb others.

Revival will cause jealousy in the church and could tear it apart. We need to be able to counter this.

Part 3: Imitators come on the scene

V13 – 20: *A group of Jews was traveling from town to town casting out evil spirits. They tried to use the name of the Lord Jesus in their incantation, saying, "I command you in the name of Jesus, whom Paul preaches, to come out!" Seven sons of Sceva, a leading priest, were doing this. But one time when they tried it, the evil spirit replied, "I know Jesus, and I know Paul, but who are you?" Then the man with the evil spirit leaped on them, overpowered them, and attacked them with such violence that they fled from the house, naked and battered.*

The story of what happened spread quickly all through Ephesus, to Jews and Greeks alike. A solemn fear descended on the city, and the name of the Lord Jesus was greatly honored. Many who became believers confessed their sinful practices. A number of them who had been practicing sorcery brought their incantation books and burned them at a public bonfire. The value of the books was several million dollars. So the message about the Lord spread widely and had a powerful effect.

The revival was now getting hot:

1. The common magicians or exorcists are starting to recognize that Jesus' name is not like what they had been used to before.
2. Also the revival is starting to impact the economics of the city. People who used to buy magic books no longer needed magic for the power of Jesus was clearly greater than the gods of the magicians. Tension you can see is about to build for now Paul is causing millions of dollars to be lost.

In revival non-Christians will know that Jesus is far above all other so called "gods". Many will come to Christ when they see the power of his name, oh Lord Jesus, no wonder our world which thinks all religions are equal needs you. We want them all to know that you alone are the WAY!

Part 4: A riot breaks out

V23 – 33 (excerpts). *About that time, serious trouble developed in Ephesus concerning the Way. It began with Demetrius, a silversmith who had a large business manufacturing silver shrine of the Greek goddess Artemis. He kept many craftsmen busy. He called them together, along with others employed in similar trades, and addressed them as follows:*

"Gentlemen, you know that our wealth comes from this business. But as you have seen and heard, this man Paul has persuaded many people that handmade gods aren't really gods at all. And he's done this not only here in Ephesus but throughout the entire province! Of course, I'm not just talking about the loss of public respect for our business. I'm also concerned that the temple of the great goddess Artemis will lose its influence and that Artemis—this magnificent goddess worshiped throughout the province of Asia and all around the world—will be robbed of her great prestige!"

At this their anger boiled, and they began shouting, "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!"

Soon the whole city was filled with confusion. Everyone rushed to the amphitheatre.

Inside, the people were all shouting, some one thing and some another. Everything was in confusion. In fact, most of them didn't even know why they were there.

The Jews in the crowd pushed Alexander forward and told him to explain the situation. He motioned for silence and tried to speak. But when the crowd realized he was a Jew, they started shouting again and kept it up for about two hours: "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians! Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!"

Now we have come to the core of the story.

The revival has caused loss of business and the city's reputation and history is at stake. It is decision time. Something must change. The city can no longer be Luke warm. See how revival forces a decision? It's a matter of life and death. Which will it be? God or money?

Application of this story for us today?

Choices

- "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians" is a statement of defiance or rebellion. These people were saying, "We shall worship Artemis NOT this God who is being preached – we don't care about the miracles we have heard about him!"
 - Those in power want to maintain the status quo. They don't want change – even good change! They prefer the praise of men, rather than the fear of God!
- "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians" is also a statement of choice. These people are saying: "We prefer money to the salvation of people's souls. We don't care if we deceive people with magic books and no gods, as long as we remain rich."
 - It's a statement of priority – "We really don't care so much about whether people receive truth or not."

Such people who reject God are the people who then will want to kill revivals – because of their love for power. Power brings money - and money is at the root of evil for money is a god.

During revivals, you must therefore be ready to counter this, people fighting you. If you are a leader, you must be ready to discern this and pray about it non-stop. If you are a follower. Be ready to defend your leaders from the lies, be ready to cover them in prayer, don't frustrate them – when it is already a difficult situation.

As you can see, revival forces you to make a choice - God or man. God or money. Salvation or damnation.

Because it forces you to have a choice - it brings out emotions.

Revival is like a knife that cuts to people's hearts.

It's like a fire - that burns away the dross and reveals the true thing.

It is for this reason that revival draws out two extremes:

1. Those prepared by God are set on fire and come to know him more, want to know him more and get consumed by him - they start reading the bible more and praying more.
2. Those opposed to God are drawn out more because the word Cuts them too - but to reveal how much they oppose him.

Revival removes luke warm people and sets people apart as hot or cold.

In the passage - we see the cold hearts of people who had been revealed by Paul's revival.

His revival had revealed that:

1. The witch craft and magic books they were selling were not needed, the people having encountered Jesus
2. The gods and idols they were buying were simply enriching the merchants – not really changing the lives of people.

This separation of the sheep from the goats caused the goats to bleat: "*Great is Artemis of the Ephesians.*"

These goats were dying to gore the servant of lamb of God to death.

The things the Ephesians did were not limited to history in the bible - these things have happened in the history of the church and will continue to happen every time a revival breaks out.

As the Lord has told me to catch the revival, it means what I am preaching will happen. When you and I catch the revival, the enemies of the Lord will come out and because of that, he wants me to prepare you and I for what is coming so that we are not unaware of the schemes of the enemy (2 Corinthians 2: 11). This is why the Master wants us to learn from history - that we might not be ignorant.

Revival also changes cities.

Let's imagine this revival was taking place in a modern city, say Toronto. Who or what would be impacted by a revival?

1. **Places of entertainment and related items** - people might prefer church instead of going say to a Toronto raptors basketball game or Toronto blue Jays baseball game, so revenue suffers because many of these venues can handle 20k – 50k people in one night. If people no longer buy beer for example, those locations will suffer economically. Do you see how these would eventually have to choose? God or money?
2. **Transport and tourist spots.** In 1994 when revival visited Toronto, catch the fire church (then called Toronto Vineyard Church) was one of the Top tourist attractionsⁱⁱⁱ!. So those in places say, Yonge Street the heart of Toronto including its sex shop and cannabis lounges will no longer have business. You see how these could eventually have to choose? God or pleasure?
3. **Even hospitals and pharmacies** are impacted because people are healed by God during revivals. See how doctors, nurses, pharmacists and related supplies would have to choose? God or hope to people?

All this turning upside down can cause extreme reactions in people.

Some will choose to honour God, even in business. For example when the great revivalist Charles Finney in the 1800s visited a cloth spinning mill, the factory workers became so anxious they could no longer work. One woman was even shaking so violently. The supervisor however saw people could no longer concentrate and instead said:

“Stop the mill and let the people attend to religion for it is more important that our souls should be saved than this factory run”

This is the right response – from those who honour God.

So in reality because revival impacts everything and forces people to make choices, the ones who revile God - the ones who start persecuting others – these are the ones who will be screaming:

Great is Yonge Street of Toronto
Great is Madison Square Garden of New York
Great is the Cotton tree of Sierra Leone
Great is the Louvre of Paris.

Pride in leaders owing to spiritual gifts is a big issue.

In 1964, missionary Johannes Ratuwalu announced that God had given him a healing ministry. With the support of his reformed Church synod, he began conducting healing campaigns in Kupang and Soe. People were indeed healed, but there was little or no emphasis on evangelism during his meetings. According to local reports, Ratuwalu himself “succumbed to the excesses of pride” as his popularity grew, bringing the movement to a quick end.

A revival is supposed to result not only in external things like miracles and healing but it should change the heart and bring life style changes – so someone also experiences internal revival but these things have happened in history for example:

There was speaking in tongues at the Azusa Street revival, but many of those revived remain racist and this affected the Azusa Street revival.

In another case, Christians in name were known to practice witchcraft, amulets, charms, visiting shamans – leading to the East Timor Revival of 1965.

Those who are given special gifts of the Spirit during revival need to especially watch themselves so that they don't fall into the sin of pride including thinking they are not subject to the temptations common to others – such as over women and money. This is what causes many “men of God” to eventually succumb to sexual temptation and financial controversy.

The Lord Jesus said he is gentle and humble in heart (Matthew 11: 29) and yet he had all power and performed all sorts of miracles. We need to copy him ESPECIALLY during revivals.

During revivals – it is critical that Christians regularly give themselves over to prayer and fasting in order to protect themselves and their leaders from pride.

In addition, accountability structures are critical.

When in revival, look at your church and whether it has in place the accountability structures – this means:

1. Have a body of elders to check on the pastor and put in place an ethical code/guidelines. For example, should your pastor/leader counsel women on his own? This code can protect the leaders from temptation.
2. having regular review of the books of accounts to see how money is being spent and similar checks and balances.
3. There also has to be a team to carefully investigate miraculous claims to prevent people faking miracles, so as to wrongly accuse the ministry of spreading lies. They should then use their regular communication channels (such as newspaper, social media) to expose the fake, but also give credibility to the genuine miracles (e.g. by publishing doctor reports as proof of genuine healing).
4. Finally, the leader himself has to be willing to submit to these systems and watch over himself.

If these systems are not in place take this message and warn your leader, be your brother's keeper for we are one body, if one part suffers the rest suffers. If they won't listen, take a brother or two, if they still won't listen - tell the elders, if nothing then you are free to leave the church and wash your hands of them (Matthew 18: 15).

Going deeper: Learning from history to solve the challenges and controversies in revivals

Communication is key, knowledge is even more important.

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What about us today?

We live in the age of TV and movie superheroes. Loki is a god and so is Thor. Here is *Iron Man* with his side kick supercomputer Jarvis defeating aliens and men alike. There is Professor Xavier in *X men* using his mind to manipulate world events and of course *Black Panther* is emerging from the high technology state of Wakanda.

It would seem that because in our world we imagine ourselves to perhaps be not too unlike our heroes – all powerful, invincible, self-reliant that we have forgotten that God is powerful and in the bible, it was always that when men and heavenly creatures encountered God’s glory – they trembled....they worshiped... they were like dead men. For example:

The Israelites and mountains tremble

...So it came about on the third day, when it was morning, that there were thunder and lightning flashes and a thick cloud upon the mountain and a very loud trumpet sound, **so that all the people who were in the camp trembled.** And Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain. Now Mount Sinai was all in smoke because the LORD descended upon it in fire; and its smoke ascended like the smoke of a furnace, **and the whole mountain quaked violently....**^{iv}

Powerful heavenly creatures can’t even look at God’s glory.

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord, high and exalted, seated on a throne; and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him were seraphim, each with six wings: **With two wings they covered their faces,** with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. And they were calling to one another: “*Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory.*” **At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke.**

“Woe to me!” I cried. “I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty.”^v

Daniel is like a dead man....

On the twenty-fourth day of the first month, as I was standing on the bank of the great river, the Tigris, I looked up and there before me was a man dressed in linen, with a belt of fine gold from Uphaz around his waist. His

body was like topaz, his face like lightning, his eyes like flaming torches, his arms and legs like the gleam of burnished bronze, and his voice like the sound of a multitude.

I, Daniel, was the only one who saw the vision; those who were with me did not see it, but such terror overwhelmed them that they fled and hid themselves. So I was left alone, gazing at this great vision; **I had no strength left, my face turned deathly pale and I was helpless.** Then I heard him speaking, and as I listened to him, I fell into a deep sleep, my face to the ground. A hand touched me and **set me trembling on my hands and knees.**^{vi}

It is actually not uncommon for there to be physical manifestations. So, then the shakes, the shouts, the shrieks, the manifestations - all these are to be expected when sinful flesh - treasures of clay are made to contain a holy God. God correctly told Moses, "If you see my face, you will die" (Exodus 33:20).

His glory is too awesome for us in our sinful state to contain him, how about when the Spirit then comes close - he is terrifying! A lot of us hear about God of love and Jesus. We sing "baby Jesus, baby Jesus I love you" but there is a side of God which is VERY VERY terrifying and so we need to prepare you by informing you about this.

Fine, we will still not be able to stand WHEN he comes to our midst but at least we will not be so critical when we see people falling and being slain in the Spirit. it will help us to indeed have a holy fear and get out of the way of the Master when he has come to revive his people and then leaders will instead use this information to expect phenomena but then to also pray for God to give them discernment to know when Satan is masquerading as an angel of light (2 Corinthians 11: 14) and causing "fake shakes" or "miracles" just like the sons of Sceva we read about.

May we/our leaders test the Spirits without hindering the work of God. Knowledge of history is helpful here.

In addition, during a revival and when these things happen, newsletters and other media to explain the issues and controversies are critical. This transparency and accountability (bringing issues to the light) causes controversies to quickly be dealt with. If these are not explained with biblical examples then there is a risk that extraordinary experiences become the goal and then causes the revivals taking on cultic or occult traits instead of holiness – and also cause people to ridicule us, instead of treating the name of the Lord as holy.

Training schools to teach faithful preaching, correct errors in doctrine and theology.

Any revival needs to have an arm for sending out teachers to help new converts to get the correct training and to likewise train teachers. Paul's ministry in Ephesus was most successful when he set up a training school of Tyrannus as we saw.

Preaching shouldn't only emphasize miracles and prophesying but should also emphasise repentance and faith. Poor doctrine - preaching that the end is nigh yet Jesus said we don't know the day of his return (Matthew 24: 36) is very dangerous and is combated through training schools.

Correct these are the last days for the apostles announced these when the Spirit came (Acts 2: 16-21) but the exact day, we don't know, we only see signs.

Learn from those like Billy Graham who avoided major controversies.

Billy Graham, born in 1918 and died in 2018 was a spiritual advisor to US presidents and has been called one of the "most influential Christian leaders of the 20th century. Over his life he preached to live audiences of 210 million people in 185 countries and in fact just one of his televised broadcasts in 1996 may have reached as many as 2.5 billion people worldwide.^{vii}

How did this man, who was also 61 times named one of the "most admired men and women" do it?

How did he keep his ministry relatively scandal free where many of today's "men of God" are in the news for the wrong reasons – buying the latest car when the majority of their congregation is poor, leading false resurrections, giving out fake cures, fake holy water and all other things that bring shame to the Great name of Christ?

Him and his team earlier on analysed what always failed successful ministers and as a result, he and his team came up with the “Modesto Manifesto” (Cliff Barrows jotted down notes in their meeting). Here are the four key components of their strategies employed to help them avoid scandal and that I believe strongly are excellent tools for fighting temptation:^{viii}

- **Honesty:** "It was resolved that all communications to media and to the church would not be inflated or exaggerated. The size of crowds and the number of inquirers would not be embellished for the sake of making Billy Graham Evangelistic Association (BGEA) look better."
- **Integrity:** "It was resolved that financial matters would be submitted to a board of directors for review and facilitation of expenditures. Every local crusade would maintain a policy of 'open books' and publish a record of where and how monies were spent."
- **Purity:** "It was resolved that members of the team would pay close attention to avoiding temptation— never being alone with another woman, remaining accountable to one another, etc. A practice of keeping wives informed of their activities on the road and helping them feel a part of any and all crusades they undertook would be encouraged."
- **Humility:** "It was resolved that members of the team were never to speak badly of another Christian minister, regardless of his denominational affiliation or differing theological views and practices. The mission of evangelism includes strengthening the body of Christ as well as building it!"

The core lesson from Billy Graham, this great servant of God and his team was this: AVOID tempting situations as a first line of defence.

References

ⁱ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Artemis>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.journeysinternational.com/destination/europe/turkey/ephesus/#:~:text=Ephesus%20had%20a%20population%20of,a%20mob%20led%20by%20St.>

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/1995/september1/5ta022.html>

^{iv} Exodus 19:16-19 (NIV)

^v Isaiah 6: 1- 5 (NIV)

^{vi} Daniel 10: 4- 10. Note to the Reader. This description by Daniel seems to fit a similar one of Jesus in revelation 1: 10- 18.

^{vii} https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Billy_Graham

^{viii} <https://www.charismanews.com/opinion/69841-how-billy-graham-avoided-scandal-his-entire-life>