

## How To Recognize A Revival When You See It

*Jonah 3*

**H**e wouldn't recognize a kiss if it was on his face." "You wouldn't recognize a real thought if it was tattooed on your arm." "He wouldn't know a gift horse if it kicked him in the teeth." "She wouldn't know a muddy giraffe if it was stranded on an iceberg." Many years ago a singing group by the name of *Steely Dan* had a popular song called "*Reelin' in the Years*." The first stanza went like this:

*Your everlasting summer / You can see it fading fast  
So you grab a piece of something / That you think is gonna last  
**You wouldn't know a diamond / If you held it in your hand**  
The things you think are precious / I can't understand*

Would you recognize a **revival** if you held one in your hand? I went to the *Webster's Dictionary*, where I found this definition for the word "revive": "*to become active or flourishing again*." It comes from a Latin word which means "to live again." But that doesn't really answer our question, does it?

What does "revival" mean? One of the definitions given for that word is "an often highly emotional evangelistic meeting or series of meetings." In my opinion, it is indeed sad, but true, that this is the common and popular usage of the word.

What is "revival," true, godly revival? It is much, much more than a series of meetings, though that is the meaning we've given to the word. It does not come only when a person is in the church building, or when the person is listening to a certain preacher, nor is it limited to a particular time of the year. We can pray and seek and yearn for revival, but only God can send that revival.

Revival is the outpouring of the Holy Spirit of God to the extent that men and women respond to God, so that their lives are changed as their hearts are awakened afresh to the Living Christ! Revival is confession of sins, and forgiveness of sins, and repentance, and renewed prayer lives. Revival is commitment and dedication. Revival is bringing back to life what was once alive, but because of the decaying affects of sin, is now dead.

And anything short of this is not revival. Whatever else you may call it, it is definitely not revival.

The Scriptures teach us about revival. In the book of Jonah we find a story of how an entire city experienced a genuine encounter with God. We find at least six characteristics of true, godly revival. Read with me from Jonah, the third chapter:

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## **1 True revival is initiated by God.**

It was God who sent Jonah to Nineveh. It was God who came to Adam in the Garden to seek reconciliation. It was God who went to Cain to restore a broken relationship, after Cain had murdered his brother Abel. It was God who initiated the Covenant with Abraham and his descendants. It was God who sent Nathan the prophet to King David after he had committed murder and adultery, to declare to David his sin. In the New Testament, it was God who appeared to Saul, on his way to Damascus to arrest Christians.

Throughout all of history, mankind has been running away from God. Our sinful deeds and sin-nature have broken the Covenant with God. Our sin has weakened our spiritual state, and destroyed it. But God, even more faithful than we could possibly imagine, has been seeking reconciliation with His people. It is not our nature to search after righteousness. Isaiah 53:6 says, *“All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.”*

Revival has not been experienced until we have been reconciled to God—that is what God wants. God has initiated your reconciliation with Him by sending His only Son, Jesus Christ, to die on the cross, to be the sacrifice for your sins. And ever since that momentous Good Friday, the Holy Spirit has been convicting men and women of sin. God takes the initiative in revival.

The experience of that revival may come only when men and women and boys and girls turn their hearts to the Lord, and repent of their sins. God has initiated the revival through Jesus Christ, but we will find God when we search for Him, when we come to Him with a heart of faith, when we see ourselves utterly helpless before Him, and accept by faith what Jesus has done for us.

## **2 Revival comes in spite of the preacher**

Jonah attempted to run away from God, but when he did, he discovered something he did not know: God is not limited to a certain place. Jonah headed for the coast, to a city called Joppa, where he could secure passage

on a ship headed for Tarshish, probably located in what is today southern Spain. He was sailing as far as he possibly could to escape the mandate of God.

But something happened, something Jonah least expected. God caused a great storm to rise up, and pound and beat the ship on which Jonah was a passenger, so that the men on board were frightened for their lives. But where was Jonah? Down in the inner hold of the ship, fast asleep. The men woke him up, after crying to their gods for safety, but to no avail. They begged Jonah to pray to his God to save them. When Jonah told them that his God was the one who made the sea and the dry land, the men knew immediately that it was because of Jonah that their lives were in danger.

You know the story. When Jonah was thrown overboard into the raging sea, the waters quieted, and the Bible tells us in Jonah 1:16 that *“At this the men greatly feared the Lord, and they offered a sacrifice to the Lord and made vows to him.”* Jonah had been used of God to bring reconciliation to these men, in spite of himself!

When Jonah finally arrived in Nineveh, his message was a message of doom! He offered no hope at all to the people in that great city. God’s greatest obstacle to revival in Nineveh was Jonah. It wasn’t the sin in the lives of the people, nor was it the evil deeds they did. It was the uncommitted heart of the preacher. But God overcame that obstacle and used Jonah in spite of himself, to bring revival to the city.

If revival breaks out in this church this week, if we are convicted of our sin and with hearts broken before God we confess our sins and repent, it will be in spite of the preacher! It is initiated by God, and comes in spite of the preacher.

### **3 Revival comes when the focus is right.**

Yes, Jonah finally went to Nineveh, though somewhat reluctantly. Even after he arrived he had his own interests at heart. Probably the last thing Jonah wanted to see was repentance on the part of the people. He offered no hope in his message—just forty days and WHAM!

But the people in the city shifted their focus from themselves to God. Verse five of chapter three says that *“The Ninevites believed God....”* The Scripture doesn’t say that they believed **Jonah**. It is very likely that the large majority of the people could not even understand Jonah’s language, but the few who could understand it believed God, and spread the message throughout the city. Personality never

entered into it, and Jonah was sorely disappointed. He may have thought: “But what about my reputation as a prophet now, Lord?”

Revival will come to this church when the people of this church look past the preacher, or the Sunday School teachers, or the deacons, or the other people in the pew, and see Jesus. It is when we are focused on God that we experience revival. When you look at your neighbor and focus on their faults and shortcomings, and everything they do that you don't happen to agree with, then you're not focused on God. When you complain because of the way someone prays or the preacher preaches, you're not focused on God. When other people become bigger and more important to you than God, then you're not focused on God. When your own priorities and desires are bigger to you than God is, then there is no way under the sun that you can be focused on God.

Hebrews 12:1-2 says this better than I ever could, so let me read it for you:  
*“Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God”* (RSV and KJV).

Revival will come when we look past personality and see Jesus.

## **4 True revival is no respecter of persons.**

From the account given us in God's Word, we see that the revival in Nineveh began with the people of the city, and extended throughout that ancient metropolis until they all were convicted of sin and sought to repent. When the word was brought to the king of Nineveh, he rose from his throne, took off his rich and royal robes, put on sackcloth and sat in ashes to demonstrate his grief over his own sin and that of his city. When revival reached this man's heart, he went from a throne to ashes, from a kingly robe to sackcloth.

Every economic level of persons, every social level, every political and religious group, from the greatest of them to the least of them, was touched by this God-sent revival. They had no hope of salvation; it was not promised to them. But the very fact that God had even warned them perhaps told them of His grace and mercy and love, and they sought to secure that from God by truly repenting.

Spiritual awakenings have a genuine way of leveling people. Corporate CEOs are one with common laborers. The best athletes in school are on the same level as the

most uncoordinated kids in the class. The song birds among us stand before God along with the croaking toads. Those with stellar reputations are on the same level as those whose pasts are shady and scandalous. Don't think that you can experience revival and hang onto your pride which has told you all your life that you are better than someone else.

## **5 Revival results in repentance**

Sure the people were afraid. We've already seen how they believed God. They were convinced of the fact that their sins had warranted the destruction of their great city, and that sure death would accompany that judgment. That would be enough to cause fear in the hearts of nearly anyone, but fear was not enough. Sincere and genuine repentance was essential if that city was to be saved. The sackcloth and the fast were not the repentance itself, but were outward signs of an inner repentance. The decree of the king for every man to turn from his evil way and to cease the deeds of violence tells us that beyond a doubt their repentance was real.

Revival is absolutely impossible without that genuine, sincere, heartfelt repentance in the hearts of God's people. There must be a change of attitude about sin, especially our own sin. There must be a change of attitude about God, as He has revealed Himself. And there must be a change of attitude about ourselves, so that we see ourselves as God sees us. Acts 3:19 reads, *"Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord."*

## **6 Revival almost always brings opposition.**

In the case before us, it was Jonah who was opposed to the revival in Nineveh. The very one who should have been rejoicing with the people had instead alienated himself from them, and invalidated his usefulness. Chapter four, verse one, tells us that Jonah was angry, probably because God was not! The Scripture reads, *"But Jonah was greatly displeased and became angry."* The word for "angry" there literally means "to be hot." Jonah was literally burned up over this!

Jonah hasn't been the only person to oppose revival when it happens. Consider the opposition John the Baptist faced when people began to awaken to the reality of their sins and their need for repentance and forgiveness. It was an opposition that eventually led to his own death. Jesus was crucified. Saul, later the Apostle Paul, violently opposed the early Christians, until he himself was spiritually reborn. Then he himself encountered opposition and persecution from every hand. Paul

wrote to Timothy, “*everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.*”

A preacher by the name of George Whitefield was being used mightily of God to bring people to Christ in England. News of that awakening reached America, and George Whitefield was soon encouraged to visit here. When he arrived in Boston in the year 1740, it was not long before what is now called “The Great Awakening” began to occur here in our country. When he first arrived, a minister of another faith met him in the street and remarked to him, “I’m sorry to see you here.” To which Whitefield replied, “So is the devil.”

Many years ago, when I was a teenager, there was a great spiritual awakening among the youth of our church. Young people who did not know Christ at all came to know Him for the first time, including myself. The awakening continued for quite some months, and spread to our high school. Some who came to know Christ were some of the most popular people on the campus, and so naturally when they joined our group they were popular there, too. Whether I was jealous, or actually doubted their sincerity, the truth is that for a time, until I repented of my sin, I was opposed to their being with us.

True revival brings opposition. It may come from your parents, your children, your husband or wife. It may come from the members in the Sunday School class of which you are a member, or from your fellow deacons, or maybe even from the person sitting next to you on the pew. But true, godly revival brings opposition. Don’t wait to seek God’s face the best way you know how until *everyone* says it is okay to do so. True revival will never, never, never be opposed by God.

Is the Holy Spirit speaking to your heart, convicting you of sin in your life which needs confessing, pointing the way to repentance, showing you Christ? God has already taken the initiative through Jesus Christ His Son, and has chosen to reveal this to you in spite of the preacher! Christ brings people together and places them all on the same level. Revival comes when your heart and soul are focused on Jesus Christ and Him alone. The result of revival is repentance. And the cost of revival is opposition, sometimes from the very people we love the most.

Would you recognize a kiss if it was on your face? Would you recognize a real thought if it was tattooed on your arm? How about a gift horse if it kicked you in the teeth? Would you know a muddy giraffe if it was stranded on an iceberg? What about a diamond if you held it in your hand? Yes, to everyone of those things. But will you recognize a *revival* when you see it?