

The Major Obstacle to Revival

Psalm 85

By [Tom Cheely](#)

July 28, 2013 – Evening Sermon

I feel so privileged to be a part of the Briarwood staff and to live and serve with you in this way. Tuesday July 16, I was at the Administrative office looking for a particular staff who was good at a particular project I needed help with. Mr. Stallings called me into his office and his question to me was “Are you going to be in town on July 28?” I said “Yes, I’m going to be here.” He said “Pastor Reeder is going to have to be out of town Sunday night July 21st and Sunday night July 28th. I’ll take the 21st and you take the 28th.” How magnanimous of him. He was going to take the five day before and leaving the ten day to me. Bruce Stallings works very closely with Pastor Reeder. He has his schedule and knows everything going on in the life of him as it relates to the church and ministry. He had known for over a month that Pastor Reeder was going to be out of town. Do you really think Bruce came up with that little chemistry experiment in five days that he used in his sermon on July 21st? “I’ll let you have the ten days and I’ll take the five” he said. I never was good at chemistry and even in ten days I couldn’t come up with chemical experiment.

I know we’re all dealing with sin and I was thinking about making a stink bomb and turning it loose. The only thing I ever did well in chemistry in was taking the labels off the bottles so that my color blind chemistry professor never knew what he was grabbing when he looked at the bottles, because he couldn’t tell the colors from another. We had all kinds of interesting things happening in that chemistry class. So I got the ten days.

Back where I lived we never gaged sermons by the length of time the preacher preached. We compared them to the tails of the different animals. There were rabbit tail sermons where you just got a hint that something was there. There were pig tail sermons that just went round and round and round. There were cow tailed sermons that were long and frayed on the end. Occasionally we would get an opossum tail sermon which were straight and to the point. If any of you bring me a sheet of paper after this sermon is over with a list of animals comparing sermons to other animals I will know the depth of your spirituality.

I have been tracking with the pastor very well these last few studies as he has been opening the Scripture for us and teaching us. We have all heard him say

many times “Do you believe we are in need of a Great Spiritual Awakening in this country?” and overwhelmingly the response has been ‘yes.’ It was very encouraging in his last study to hear him take the message of God’s Word beyond the political realm into the church, into the family and to us individually as we looked at the need for an awakening, the need for renewal, revitalization – revival. We all need to come to that place where we understand that it’s not my brother or my sister, the elders or the deacons, the young or the old, but it’s me O Lord, standing in the need of prayer.

The first place Kathy and I served in ministry together was in East Tennessee up above Chattanooga. I had driven from Atlanta to Chattanooga and back and forth every other Sunday for about a year and a half. They then called us to then live there full time with them. I had gotten to know the church, the circumstance and the community verywell during that year and a half. We moved to have one of the Presbyterian evangelistic fellowship evangelists come to the church for a week of concentration of Bible study, prayer and the call to God for revival.

I think it was the first Sunday night service that he was preaching that made many references to the cross. We were in a very small building and immediately hanging behind the pastor you could almost reach up and touch this but right there on the wall behind him was a Celtic cross. It overwhelmed the building because it was so big. As he was making reference to the cross he knew what was hanging on the wall and as he was doing this he stopped and said “What are the cobwebs doing all over the cross? Somebody needs to clean the church and clear the cross.” I believe that’s where we are, the people of God in our nation and in our world today. The church of God needs cleaning. The people of God need renewal. We need revival.

September 16, 1656 Oliver Cromwell stood in England before the Parliament, right after the death of King Charles the First, before the coronation of King Charles the Second. As he stood before the Parliament he said “I had a restless night last night. It was difficult for me to sleep. I kept thinking about what I would say to you this morning and over and over through my mind Psalm 85 kept running. I don’t have time to expound it as it ought to be so I am going to read for you from the Word of God Psalm 85.”

I am going to do that for you now also. I do not apologize for reading from the Bible because it is the Word of God. The Bible does not contain the Word of God. It does not become the Word of God. It is the Word of God. When you read or hear the Bible you have the opportunity of understanding the mind and heart of God. You should listen carefully. Psalm 85 says:

[1] LORD, you were favorable to your land; you restored the fortunes of Jacob. [2] You forgave the iniquity of your people; you covered all their sin. Selah [3] You withdrew all your wrath; you turned from your hot anger. [4] Restore us again, O God of our salvation, and put away your

indignation toward us! [5] Will you be angry with us forever? Will you prolong your anger to all generations? [6] Will you not revive us again, that your people may rejoice in you? [7] Show us your steadfast love, O LORD, and grant us your salvation. [8] Let me hear what God the LORD will speak, for he will speak peace to his people, to his saints; but let them not turn back to folly. [9] Surely his salvation is near to those who fear him, that glory may dwell in our land. [10] Steadfast love and faithfulness meet; righteousness and peace kiss each other. [11] Faithfulness springs up from the ground, and righteousness looks down from the sky. [12] Yes, the LORD will give what is good, and our land will yield its increase. [13] Righteousness will go *before him and make his footsteps a way.*

May the Lord use His Word in this study for His strengthening, challenging, encouraging, convicting and reviving us.

I like the outline of this particular Psalm that James Montgomery Boice used. In addition to being a preacher, Dr. Boice was a musician. Before his death I think he had written about ten new hymns that had been put into a hymn book. Typically speaking Cliff Barrows told Billy Graham once “Either you preach well or you sing well but you don’t do both.” Cliff told Billy to stick to preaching. Dr. Boice used this Psalm as a song and outlined the four stanzas which I would have called paragraphs. Each of these portions of the Psalm help us in understanding what God would say to us as His people as we seek renewal and revival.

The first stanza of the hymn (Psalm 85:1–4) encourages us to look back at the past and to remember the mercies of God. Just look at the verbs that are here in this first paragraph – favorable, restored, forgave, covered, withdrew, turned from. What a great God that He would have mercy upon His people even in the midst of their sin and wickedness. As we consider our spiritual conditions, remember who this God is and how He has responded to us in days gone by.

I want to make a couple of political references for you but if you walk away from this study with just a political understanding of this Psalm then you have missed what God was saying to us. This is not a political rally but a worship service. I am not running from anything or for anything so just listen to the mercies of God. In this nation that we call the United States of America it was the first Great Awakening, the movement of God’s Spirit upon those who had settled this land that led us to become a nation. It was the Spirit of God and the work of God that gave us as North Americans, our country. That was in the middle 1700s.

From 1800 to 1840 what we call the Second Great Awakening occurred in the United States. That movement of God’s Spirit in His mercy led us away from the distraction of deism kept us from the pitfall of the French Revolution and led us to be a nation under God. It was the great prayer awakening in the early 1850s that led the strength of this nation and the people through that which would come in

the 1860s, the War between the States but it was that prayer awakening that led the spiritual foundation to keep us strong and together.

The early church has known the blessings of God. They had been faithful to the teaching and instruction of the Apostles but then in the passing of time we entered into those years of 500 to 1500 A.D. that we call the Dark Ages because of the sin that ruled and reigned even in the church among the people of God. It was as though God had turned His back upon His people as He had walked away from His Son as He hung on the cross and the world experienced darkness. Because of the sin of the people of God darkness reined throughout the world but God is a God of mercy.

In the 1500s, the Reformation, the revival, the renewal, the turning of the people of God back to God. As we consider the circumstances in which we find ourselves individually, corporately as the people of God or even nationally as a people, we need always to look back at the past and see God for He is the same yesterday, today and forever. What He was He is. What He is He always will be. He is a loving, gracious, merciful God. This Psalm begins by challenging us and encouraging us to think back and remember who God is.

The second stanza (Psalm 85:5–7) is a prayer for restoration. Whenever the people of God honestly stand before the living God and see Him as He is, as He has revealed Himself to be, not who you prefer Him to be or tried to manipulate Him to be, but who He really is, there will always come a cry of confession, repentance and restoration. It's interesting as you read through the Scripture particularly in the Old Testament, the cycle of life that is portrayed there as the spiritual things as the way we live.

I remember my Old Testament professor at Wheaton college, Dr. Samuel Schultz, would regularly remind us that the people of God live with the blessing of God, but soon turn to sin. However God is merciful but then comes judgment. After judgment comes restoration. After restoration comes blessing that is taken for granted and we live again in sin but the merciful God seeks us but then comes His judgment followed by forgiveness and restoration followed by blessing and there we go again. God loves His people. He wants us to live in close intimate relationship with Him. He wants to forgive our sin and heal our land. He wants to restore us. This stanza urges us to call upon God for restoration.

The third stanza (Psalm 85:8–9) encourages us to wait on God. Waiting is an interesting word in the Scripture. We don't fully understand the Biblical use of the word wait. Generally when we think of waiting it's "I'm in the car, now where is everybody else." In the Bible waiting also carries with it a sense of working. So it is a working wait. It's not just sitting whenever but it's while we are waiting for God we go about the responsibilities and things we know and understand from God.

Nehemiah was a good example. They were rebuilding the wall of the city around Jerusalem and there was opposition and struggle. Nehemiah went straight to God in prayer. It's interesting that the Bible didn't tell us what he prayed it just said he prayed. If you'll allow me just a little freedom I'll tell you what he prayed. Nehemiah was a cup bearer over in Persia. God had instructed him to go build the wall and tried to get out of it but you don't ever try to get out of what God has instructed you to do. So he went to go rebuild the wall and ran into trouble so he prayed to God. Nehemiah prayed "Alright God I didn't want to come over and build this wall in the first place. I told you I wasn't a wall builder but You said come so I did. Now we have trouble so what are You going to do about it? Amen."

I believe we have a right to pray like that. When Nehemiah finished praying the Scripture says that Nehemiah turned to those who were with him and said "We are going to post a guard on the wall." He basically was saying that we have asked God to do something and handle this and while we're waiting for Him to do what He wants to do, this is what we're going to do. We're going to use what we have learned from God up to this point and we're going to live by what we've learned. So he posted a guard on the wall because of the enemy, waiting for God to do what God was going to do.

This Psalm tells us that we have called and asked God for restoration but until God has done what God is going to do, we are going to do what He has instructed us to do. We are going to live by that which we have learned from God. I Thessalonians reads that we are people who are now waiting for the return Christ. You know full well that God doesn't intend for us to just sit here in the church, maybe have a picnic or two or just enjoy being together until Jesus comes again, but we are to wait for His return. We are to have that working waiting until He comes. We don't give up hope that He is going to come. We don't throw in the towel because it's been according to our measurement over 2,000 years now and He hasn't come back. Perhaps He didn't know what He was talking about or He has forgotten. No, we don't wait that way. We wait because it's going to happen and we're excited about it but we do what God has instructed us to do as His people until the waiting is over. We wait upon the Lord.

We North Americans aren't real good at waiting. We are very impatient. We will somehow figure out how to make this second coming happen whether God wants it to or not. Whether this is God's time or not we'll figure it out. We don't just wait. We don't work well while we're waiting either but the Psalmist here is telling us that God has restored and we are now waiting for Him in all of His fullness and all of His glory. We don't wait for the salvation for the people of God in the Old Testament we're looking for and anticipating taking place but we have experienced that. Now it's what God is going to do, how God is going to show Himself, how God is going to bring glory to Himself, how God is going to work out His eternal plan for His glory and His good and our well-being. We let God do what God is going to do. We wait.

The fourth stanza (Psalm 85:10–13) tells us we wait, trusting in the promise of God, not empty hollow waiting. Jesus says “I will build My church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it” (Matthew 16:18). The church can look kind of rough and rotty at times but Christ is building His church. It will be done. It’s the promise of God. Take Him at His Word. Trust in His promise. If I were to tell you that I was going to build the church you would have every reason to fear and wonder what was going to happen and what it would look like but there is no need to fear because the promise is not from me. It is from Jesus Christ. He will build His church. It’s His Word. He has promised it. Take Him at His Word.

In every church that I have served as a pastor or on the pastoral staff, one of the things I have prayed for and longed for is the reputation of the congregation in the community where the body of Christ resides. Years ago I had been in one particular community for several months and I would meet with some of the people in the local community at a café. We were talking and one man said to me “Preacher, I’m glad to see you’re still here. I would have thought they would have run you off by now. You have been here longer than the last guy.” Someone else said “Yeah those Presbyterians don’t seem to be able to get along. I have been living in this town for 37 years and those Presbyterians have been fighting the whole time I’ve been here.” I thought “That is not quite the reputation I want and it hurts to have.” God did some incredible things in the lives of those people.

I’m an old man so this fits my culture very well for this was back in the days when there was a Wednesday night prayer meeting at the church. Some of you have no idea what that is but our people would meet together and pray. They called it a prayer meeting so I assumed they wanted to pray. I didn’t prepare a Bible study because it was a prayer meeting. Sometimes we were there five minutes, sometimes twenty and sometimes an hour and a half depending on how praying they were but when I left the community on Wednesday the telephone in the church office rang constantly, as people as far away as thirty miles would call to leave prayer requests because the people of God were going to gather to pray.

I grew up in Hopewell, Virginia. It was a very rough city before I got there. My presence didn’t help a whole lot but it was a pretty rugged place. Many of you think there is corruption in the various governments in the city places where you live but I’m here to tell you there was in my city. There was a local bar in the city and the morning before the city council would meet that night the city council men would be at the bar. They would stay there for about five hours. The meeting that night would go according to how much who paid whom and how they would vote when they got together for the meeting. You may think that went on in your town but I’m testifying to you that it went on in my town. Ten members who were elders at the Presbyterian Church decided that they would get together and pray about the city government. So when the council men would go to the bar, the elders would go to the church. They would pray all day through the meeting that night. This went on for several months.

At one particular meeting after that the council was getting ready to vote on a zoning issue that would have made a lot of money for a couple of people in town. They had been paid and everybody knew how to vote. So when they came to that part of the agenda the mayor said "All in favor of the zoning process, raise your hand if you vote 'yes' and literally the men struggled to get their arms up off the table and couldn't. The mayor then said "All who vote 'no' raise your hand" and they couldn't get their hands down. The mayor said "I don't think you understood what I asked so we're going to vote again." The same thing happened. So they declared the vote to be null and void. They would put it off until the next meeting.

The next week the same thing happened again. So the mayor appointed a special committee to investigate what was going on in the city. When the committee reported back to the city council they said "Nothing has changed in our city. Everything is going on just like it always did except there are ten Presbyterians that meet every time we're meeting and they pray about our meetings." Do you know what happened? The city council decided that they would alternate days each week when the council would meet. I guess they figured Presbyterians would meet one day a week but not every day of the week and they would be able to slip a meeting past the prayer, but isn't it interesting that they caught the significance of the prayer.

I wonder if there is anyone in Birmingham or Vestavia or Hoover or Ensley or any of the surrounding communities who give a flip that we are going to meet and pray tonight or tomorrow morning or Wednesday at noon. What do you think the reaction will be a couple of weeks from now when the word gets around that those Briarwood people are praying for change and renewal and revival? Will anybody care? Will anyone in Montgomery fear the prayer of Briarwood Presbyterian people? Will it trouble anyone in Washington that we call on God to remember His mercy, to restore us and that we are going to wait on Him because of His promises?

I think this may help us. I got this today and it says "Greeting from sunny and dusty Kampala. It has been a hard week, one of those weeks where you know there is an enemy and he is out to steal, kill and destroy. That is just how it's felt. When I was living at home sometimes you would hear people say 'missionaries are on the front lines because they are out there fighting the battle.' We are the support troops so be a part and pray and give. Well," Caroline Phillips goes on to say, "I don't really think that's true. I think that no matter where God has placed us we are fighting the battle each day against the world, the flesh, the devil. My battle may look different than yours but Jesus Christ is in the business of building His Kingdom everywhere on this planet. The good news is we all have the same God who is more powerful than the enemy and the same weapons to fight with. You know how it is, sometimes the fiery darts are just a little bit more in your face than at other times. Last week was one of those weeks for me. Please pray that I

would walk close with Jesus, would find shelter under His wings but also that I would put on the full armor of God and would stand firm. Maybe that's it. If you think of me this week would you ask the Lord, 'Please help Caroline to believe You and stand firm, Amen.' Thanks fellow soldiers in the fight!" Let's pray.

Prayer:

Our heavenly Father, how thankful we are that You are a kind, gracious, loving God but we are also reminded that You will not hold Your anger forever. In Your goodness to us mercy precedes judgment but in Your righteous holiness judgment will come. O God, we need You. I need You. Cleanse my heart. Restore to me the joy of my salvation. Renew a right spirit within me. Thank You Lord for Your mercy, Your grace, Your love, Your forgiveness, Your strength, Your encouragement, courage and challenge. May we Your people in the grace and strength of the Gospel live as Your people for the glory of our great Savior Jesus Christ, we pray in His Name, Amen.

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