

Sunday, August 20, 2023

First Lesson: 2 Chronicles 17:3

Second Lesson: Acts 11:19-21

Sermon Series: Revivals that Move Mountains Week 7

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- We are continuing with week 7 of our 8-week sermon series called “Revivals that Move Mountains.” This is a sermon series that is designed to get our minds, hearts and bodies refueled, renewed, re-energized and refocused on the work of the ministry that is always before us;
- Therefore in unpacking the role in which revivals have played in the scriptures, I would like to use *author Geoff Waugh’s book Revival Fire*, that I mentioned last week; in which we now have a slide for just in case you would like to take some notes, that reveals *9 commonalities that these revivals shared*;

1. They occurred in times of moral darkness and national depression.
2. Each began in the heart of a consecrated servant of God who became the energizing power behind it [*only 1 spark*].
3. Each revival rested on the Word of God, and most were the result of proclaiming God's Word with power.
4. All resulted in a return to the worship of God.
5. Each witnessed the destruction of idols where they existed.
6. In each revival, there was a recorded separation from sin.
7. In every revival the people returned to obeying God's laws.
8. There was a restoration of great joy and gladness.
9. Each revival was followed by a period of national prosperity.

- Therefore, today's goal will be to look at the revivals that are occurring in both of our lessons today; see how these commonalities might reveal itself to us, **with the hope that** they make speak to our situation today.
- Therefore in looking at our first lesson, we will note number 2 from our list coming into fruition, for the one who is consecrated to become that spark for a revival would be King Jehosophat?
- So the first question that one might ask is, "Who was King Jehosophat?"
- So a quick Google search would tell us that King Jehoshaphat was the fourth king of Judah under the divided monarchy, the son of Asa.
- King Jehosophat was first introduced in 1 Kings 15:24, but after that, we are told nothing more than that he succeeded Asa.

- Later, 1 Kings 22:42 tells us that he was 35 years old when he began his reign and that he reigned for 25 years (from 873 to 848 BC).
- Now why we are even talking about King Jehoshat for this sermon series is because spiritually, it is important for me to note that Jehoshat began his reign in a very positive way; which is reflected in our single verse of scripture this morning.
- For biblical scholars would denote Jehoshaphat's reign as being characterized by two major enterprises: (1) building extensive fortifications against attack (v. 2), and (#2) following after Jehovah (v. 4).
- For as a result of Jehoshaphat's obedience to the Lord, his kingdom became **strong** (v. 5).
- For the strength of Judah was re-enforced by the efforts of the king to provide instruction in the law.

- So the million dollar question that I would like to begin to flesh out more, as I believe this will be a very meaningful conversation, that will aid in all of our revivals, is for us all is to explore, **“What made King Jehosophat strong?”**
- Well the short answer to this question is that Jehosophat was known to be strong, **simply because he sought after God and walked in God’s commandments.**
- A simpler way to name this, is that King Jehosophat **strengthened himself in the Lord.**
- Which then leads some of us to then maybe want to ask, **“what does it mean to strengthen yourself in the Lord?”**
- And the immediate scripture that comes into my mind to begin to answer this question, comes out of Ephesians 6:11 that instructs us to; **1 *Put on the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.***

- For as I attempt to pair this newly introduced piece of scripture of Ephesians into the equation, one of the myths that was busted wide open in our *Wednesday Night Applying the Sermon to Life* class this past week, came from one of the classmates who expressed that after being in this sermon series for now 7 weeks, **she never recognized how hard revivals are to achieve.**
- She went on to say how the assumption she made, when first learning that we were going to be discussing revivals, was that it would be based off of this idea that **revivals are here to essentially make us feel good;**
- Thereby making then the goal of this sermon series perhaps—**to make us feel good—**
- **To make us feel good** in our day to day lives;
- **To make us feel good** in our faith journeys;
- **To make us feel good** in our relationships;

- To **make us feel good** in this work of the harvest; that involves preaching the good news, healing the brokenhearted, restoring the sight of the blind; and releasing those in captivity.
- So let me just put this little disclaimer out here before the Spirit of God would have me wrestle with this “feel good,” outcome.
- For I need to share that in many ways, when I chose to preach about revivals, subliminally I think my thought was similar to our classmate as well;
- To think that this would be one of our easier sermon series.
- For when I think about all of the justice training I have received up until now, one of the most memorable things that I was taught, was that a good justice worker needs to know when to turn the thermostat up, and when to dial it down, when attempting to convey a message to the people.

- So initially, I believe I too thought that this would be an ideal summertime preaching series, that would metaphorically dial things down a bit;
- For we tend to talk about heavy topics here at Lincoln First don't we?!
- **We tend to talk about** race relations;
- **We tend to talk about** women's issues;
- **We tend to talk about** human sexuality;
- **We tend to talk about** climate issues;
- **We tend to talk about** political issues;
- **We tend to talk about** a lot of things that quite frankly are not easy to broach, especially in the church setting;
- However, **when we think about** what it means to achieve the work of justice for all;
- **When we think about** how to make things accessible for all (such as contextually for us being a member of Justice in Action as an example; mental healthcare reform and criminal justice

reform are two priorities where we are seeking better accessibility for all);

- **When we have come to this painful collective awareness that in the midst of it all;** there are people with power in our world; choosing to glory in the midst of other people's suffering as we discussed last week;
- For I'm thinking about recently the people of Maui, where as their land and property have been completely eradicated by both the wildfires and the winds of the hurricane; meanwhile there are greedy people trying to benefit and glory in their suffering, by trying to purchase their land right from underneath them for a quick profit;
- My biggest revelation is that revivals are not here **to help us to dial things down;**
- Revivals are here **to help us to be able to build one another up;**

- So that we may be strong in this battlefield that we are all battling in; some of us being deeper in this spiritual war zone than others.....
- For **when you have no** food,
- **When you have no** clothing,
- **When you have no** shelter,
- **When you have no** means or resources to keep you and your family healthy,
- Then this becomes the battlefield for the one just trying to simply survive.
- For it this vision of people suffering in these conditions, where dialing things down does not become an option.
- Furthermore, why King Jehosophat becomes so important for us to look at in our revival conversation, is because at this point of his reign, he knew where he needed to point his focus towards to survive in his own leadership.

- For King Jehosaphat embraced this idea that our empowerment comes from being able to accept God's presence in everything that we do.
- For in his brief story, the gist of the verse that we are studying, reveals what being structured with a spiritual center and framework in God can produce;
- For Jehosaphat's success was characterized solely through his **loyalty in God**.
- And so it would be this concept of what it means **to be loyal to God**, where I would like to bring in our second lesson for fuller discussion.
- For we are still in the Book of Acts;
- Furthermore we have previously noted the approval of the Gentile evangelization at Caesarea, by the Jewish Christians at the close of Peter's defense (Acts 11:17, 18).
- It becomes clear, however, from verse 19 that the evangelization of Antioch was carried out by the disciples scattered abroad under the persecution

that followed Stephen's death (Acts 8:1), rather than by Gentile disciples from Caesarea, as some have supposed.

- And for those who are wondering who Stephen was; not to be mistaken for my hubby Stephen (sorry I couldn't resist);
- Stephen in our story was a Hellenist Jew and one of seven men ordained as deacons in the early church.
- He was also the first Christian martyr, stoned to death for preaching that **Jesus was the Christ**.
- The dispersion that took place after the martyrdom of Stephen seems at first to have extended only into Judaea and Samaria.
- However, Jewish Christians, many of whom may have been present for Pentecost and were converted there, soon moved on northward, visiting and witnessing in the Jewish synagogues throughout the coastland of Phoenicia (Phenice), on

the western Mediterranean island of Cyprus (home of Barnabas), and in Antioch of Syria.

- Biblical scholars believe that the emphasis on that they preached **the word to none save only to Jews**, seems evidence that these evangelists were themselves Jewish Christians, and not proselytes.
- Proselytes in this context is of the Greek root, proselytos, which means both "convert to Judaism" and "one who has come over."
- Therefore for them, this idea of accepting Christ as the Messiah, was thought of as being a new spiritual life movement within the Jewish religion only.
- They knew nothing of Peter's vision and did not understand that God had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles also.
- Thereby making where the tension arose and where a potential revival arose was in verse 20 that informs us that, *But among them were some men of*

Cyprus and Cyrene who, on coming to Antioch, spoke to the Hellenists also, proclaiming the Lord Jesus.

- For in researching who the Hellenists were; These particular Christian disciples were Hellenists (Greek-speaking Jews), or perhaps some were even converted proselytes, and consequently were more liberal in their views than were the Jewish Christians.
- The Hellenistic Jews are first mentioned in the Bible in Acts 6:1 where it says; “In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Hellenistic Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food.”
- The believing Jews therefore have become divided into two groups.

- There were those who had remained in Judea, near Jerusalem, who used the Hebrew language, and who were appropriately called “Hebrews.”
- The other group consisted of those who were scattered among the Gentiles, who spoke the Greek language, and who used the Greek translation of the Old Testament, called the Septuagint. These were called “Hellenists,” from a word meaning “Greek” or “Greek-speaking.” To “Hellenize” is to adopt Greek culture and ideas.
- Dissensions arose between the Hellenistic Jews and the Hebraic Jews.
- For the Palestinian or Hebraic Jews prided themselves on the fact that they had always lived in the land of the patriarchs and that they used the language that their fathers spoke. They were near the temple and regularly worshiped there.

- On the other hand, the Hellenistic Jews from other parts of the world were jealous of the first group and made to feel like outsiders.
- Sadly, the strife between the two groups was not automatically eliminated by their conversion to Christianity, as the complaints concerning food distribution to widows of the two groups remained.
- However, there is a wonderful example of godly wisdom and Christian unity, where the early church **worked through** the dispute, and the office of deacon was formed (Acts 6:2–6) that says;
2 And the twelve called together the whole community of the disciples and said, “It is not right that we should neglect the word of God in order to wait on tables.^[a] **3** Therefore, brothers and sisters, select from among yourselves seven men of good standing, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may appoint to this task, **4** while we, for our part, will devote ourselves to prayer and to serving the

word.” **5** What they said pleased the whole community, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, together with Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch. **6** They had these men stand before the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them.

- So I know that I shared a lot of history here, and I did so for a reason.
- For in listening to this extensive history, here arises the million dollar question not just for the Jewish culture within our text, but the same question can be applied to the Universal Church of today?
- The question of whether or not we as the Church **will be able to work through our dissension?**
- That is what inquiring minds wants to know!
- Furthermore, I submit that how we get to this answer in our Church and any other Church for that

matter regardless of our denomination; depends solely on our **loyalty to God**.

- And for me, in order for us to talk about what it means for us to be loyal to God, I believe it is first necessary for us to name how God is loyal to us.
- And God's loyalty to us can be described in one Hebrew Word...*Khesed*... which essentially means unconditional love.
- "It's the kind of love that someone demonstrates when they're keeping a promise, and when the desire to be loyal to their promise motivates them to go above and beyond and be super generous, more than what you would expect—that's *khesed*."
 - *Khesed* assumes a pre-existing relationship and refers to actions that demonstrate loyalty to that relationship.
 - Human *khesed* is expressed by doing justice and humbly honoring God's

commands, thereby living out what it means to bear the image of God on earth.

- In the Hebrew Bible, God is most often the one demonstrating loyal love, often to people who are undeserving and have betrayed their covenant.
- God's greatest demonstration of loyal love was in the sacrifice of his son, Jesus, for the redemption of humanity.
- Either way, where the Church comes in, is deciding whether or not we will keep this *khesed* flowing?
- What the Church needs to decide, is whether or not we will remain loyal to this love?
- And if our answer should be yes, then this becomes the work.
- **Which also means that in this work we must be willing** to work through our dissensions.

- **We must be willing** to work through our discomforts.
- **We must be willing** to work through our hardships.
- **We must be willing** to work through our differences.
- As a participant and member of Lincoln First, **we must be willing** to work through our differences.
- **We must be willing to work through our disagreements;**
- **We must be will willing** to work through our deficiencies and be committed to becoming a part of the solutions.
- **We must be willing** to work through our weariness and be committed to pathways that leads to renewal.
- **We must be willing** to work through whatever the problem or trial at hand is, trusting that

with God, something always awaits us—
that is better at hand.

- For it is through doing this work, that I believe a true revival will be birthed.
- It is a revival that we have already learned does not come easy;
- It is a revival though that allows us to truly stand.