

A Promised Revival

A sermon delivered Sunday Morning, September 29, 2013
at Oak Grove Baptist Church, Paducah, Ky.
by S. Michael Durham
© 2013 Real Truth Matters

Isaiah 30:23-26

Then He will give the rain for your seed with which you sow the ground, and bread of the increase of the earth; it will be fat and plentiful. In that day your cattle will feed in large pastures. 24 Likewise the oxen and the young donkeys that work the ground will eat cured fodder, which has been winnowed with the shovel and fan. 25 There will be on every high mountain and on every high hill rivers and streams of waters, in the day of the great slaughter, when the towers fall. 26 Moreover the light of the moon will be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun will be sevenfold, as the light of seven days, in the day that the LORD binds up the bruise of His people and heals the stroke of their wound.

Last week I said a revival is the humbling of God's people. It is the recognition of walking in our own ways and the resuscitation of our spirit to the life of God in us. Before revival happens the state of the Christian or the church is spiritually low, the soul is weakened, enamored by the world, and the Lord Jesus has lost some of His attractiveness and His appeal to that person in this low state.

When God revives His people He first causes them to see their sin for what it is. It is no longer the beautiful, expensive, and cherished idol, but it is now filthy, revolting and disgusting. Any idol revealed to the Christian in a state of true repentance is repulsive, nauseating, and loathsome. The Christian gladly suffers whatever loss he or she may incur to be rid of the idols they have allowed to mesmerize their heart. You gladly suffer loss because, in truth, it's not loss; it's gain—gain to be restored in fellowship with God. If you have idols that have captured your heart, you are losing. Genuine godly sorrow working something special in our hearts leads to a “repentance to salvation not to be repented of.”

The results of the reviving of my heart, your heart, the corporate heart of a body of believers is worth the pain and agony of godly sorrow. It's worth it. And that's what our text is about today. It is the oil of gladness being poured on a soul or a people or both. I long for the soothing oil of God to fall on us. It is my prayer that today each of you and us, collectively, experience this outpouring of the Holy Spirit, that we may be revived to see just how beautiful Jesus Christ is and then fall in love with Him again. May the cruse of oil flow today; may God tip it over and pour

it out on us. May this Lord of amazing grace and marvelous mercy pour out on His people and upon this servant so we may receive revival power and the joy that follows.

I. REVIVAL BRINGS SPIRITUAL PROSPERITY

That's what this text is about. In the Old Covenant obedience to God brought physical blessings, material prosperity, and health. But the New Testament explains that the material blessings of the Old Covenant represented something far greater—the spiritual blessings of the New Covenant. In the Old Testament the Lord used material blessings and spiritual prosperity to illustrate what the New Covenant would bring. It seems that man likes nothing more than to have material blessings. Thus, God used material prosperity, the thing most people longed for, as a crude illustration of the greater blessings of the Spirit of the Living God. Spiritual blessings far exceed physical blessings. The Lord promised in the Law of Moses that if they obeyed His commandments He would make them abound in prosperity,

“And the Lord will make you abound in prosperity, in the fruit of your womb and in the fruit of your livestock and in the fruit of your ground, within the land that the Lord swore to your fathers to give you. The Lord will open to you his good treasury, the heavens, to give the rain to your land in its season and to bless all the work of your hands. And you shall lend to many nations, but you shall not borrow. And the Lord will make you the head and not the tail, and you shall only go up and not down, if you obey the commandments of the Lord your God, which I command you today, being careful to do them, and if you do not turn aside from any of the words that I command you today, to the right hand or to the left, to go after other gods to serve them.” (Deuteronomy 28:11-14 ESV)

The promise under the Old Covenant is that if you obey God, He will bless you materially. But that's only an illustration. What bothers me today is that there are Christians who wish they still had this Old Covenant system. They'd rather be materially blessed than spiritually blessed. They consider spiritual blessings less than the physical blessings, or they wish they could have both. If that is you, then you don't understand what God can do in the human heart or in the personality of a human being. If you did you wouldn't care about the material. You wouldn't. You would only want the spiritual blessings of Christ.

That's what He's showing us here. As I've done many times, let me explain one more time that

this section of Scripture is dealing with the Babylonian captivity. In verses one through seventeen, He deals with the judgment that would come over a century later, and it did come. They would be taken to a far away country—Babylon—and in 70 years He would visit them again. Verse eighteen through twenty-six is that visitation; the prediction that it would happen. He would not leave them in their sin, idolatry or captivity. God would come to them and bring them back to their homeland. This was a specific promise to a specific people at a specific junction of human history. We should not read verses eighteen through twenty-six and say, “God is going to bless America and He’s going to make our crops fruitful and He’s going to make our livestock prosperous and He’s going to pour out wealth upon us and defeat all of our enemies.” That is to read it with an Old Covenant mindset, but rather, as Paul says in Corinthians, “These things happen to them for our admonition.” They’re written so that you can read them today and gain insight into how God works with His covenant people, the people of the New Covenant.

These physical prosperity illustrations show us in measure what God will do for us in revival.

A. The Descriptions of Revival’s Prosperity.

There are five descriptions of revival’s prosperity.

I. Prosperous Crops.

v. 23 —“Then He will give the rain for your seed with which you sow the ground, and bread of the increase of the earth; it will be fat and plentiful.”

This is physical prosperity in their lives through bountiful harvests. At that time, society was primarily agricultural and when the farmer sowed his seed, he always sowed it in faith.

September was planting time in ancient Israel. They planted it hoping for the early rains of October and November. By these rains the seeds would get the needed moisture for good germination and early plant growth. And then in the spring around March and April the latter rains would begin, ensuring the needed moisture to plump up the heads of grain and produce a good harvest. The farmer never knew when he planted his seed what the weather would bring. He didn’t know if the rain would come or if it came if it would be too much. Would it bring rain but not too much rain? Would a drought keep the precious seed from sprouting and all be lost?

Seed planting was, and still is, an act of faith. But they always sowed in hope. There was always the prospect that the rain would come and there would be a harvest.

When this text became so special to me almost two years ago, I was at a very low moment. I was very discouraged and one of the things I had been praying and wrestling with before I came to this text was the question of whether or not all my labors, the many years we had been here, were in vain. Had I cultivated, planted and labored for God in His kingdom all in vain?

I'm sure some of you find it a startling revelation that your pastor could be so human and fragile to be discouraged, but it does happen. I confess I wish it didn't. I've often wondered why I've had those seasons of discouragement but then when I see you struggling with discouragement, I understand. It's a point of relationship—we can relate to one another through it. God brings us through valleys that we can help one another, the consolation He's given me I am now able to give to you.

I was in one of those moments, wondering if the promise He made me almost 20 years ago would come to pass. We had made advances; I don't want to make it sound like God's not done anything in these last 20 years. We've seen great things done. We've seen our missions expanded across this globe and I believe it's only going to expand all the more in the years to come. Certainly there are more here assembled today than 20 years ago. But I haven't seen what I wanted to see.

I look and see the seed planted in Romania and Eastern Europe and Moldova and now we're planting in Africa and I see some fruit there, but my question is: what about the seeds we planted here at home? *God, are You going to let the seed die?* I think of those who were part of our congregation who have already gone on and the investment they made throughout their lives; all those prayers, all those labors, all of their expenditure of energy. *Lord, has it been for naught?* That's where I was that day. Then I came to this text.

By the time I reached the twenty-third verse, mock me if you want, say I'm crazy and I have hallucinations and hear things, but I believe the Lord spoke to me and said, "No, it's not been in vain."

Notice the text carefully.

“Then He will give the rain for your seed.”

Some translations put it in the past tense, which I think is more accurate to the Hebrew.

“He will send rain for your seed that you have sown in the ground.”

My heart was revived at that moment, thinking that all of the teaching, all of the counsel, all of the prayers, all of the labor has not been in vain. The efforts of the past will be productive when God pours out His Spirit upon them. What we have done has been preparatory for the harvest. The farmer has to break the ground. He has to toil and plant the seed. He has to cultivate that which has been planted and germinated with the anticipation and hope that the work will not have been in vain but preparatory to a harvest. So I say to you today that nothing you and I have done in the name of Jesus shall be in vain. What we have done to His glory shall come back manifold. That's the promise of this text.

I want to encourage you parents that God shall not forget your efforts with your children. It is well that you labor by gathering your family daily and opening up the Bible and talking to them about the Lord and teaching them the ways of God. I know it's easy sometimes to be discouraged as you're sitting with your children trying to communicate truth to them on their level and in a way they can understand it. You want to see God work in them, but often you labor with them and see nothing. You see no results. In fact, sometimes you think you're seeing them digress rather than progress toward Christ. I know you can be discouraged, but I want you to hear me today—I believe this text is promising, in application, that when the Spirit of the Living God is poured out on what you've done it shall not come back in vain. It will prosper.

Every prayer prayed, the Bible says, is bottled up. If our prayers are not wasted nor forgotten why should our labors for Him be any less important? Surely, He keeps a perfect record of them all and they are not forgotten.

Let me ask you something. Do you think God keeps a short account of your labors for Him? The only short accounts God keeps are with our sins. Thank God! When I've sinned the ink in heaven's registry barely has a chance to dry before it's wiped away by the blood of Jesus Christ. God keeps short accounts with our sins, but not with your labors. Everything done for Him and for His glory in obedience to Him is recorded in the archives of heaven and one day God is going

to open the books and say, “Now is the time. Now is the harvest. Now is the time for the results to appear.” And they will come. The efforts of ministry will bring produce.

2. Livestock Prosper.

v. 24 — “Likewise the oxen and the young donkeys that work the ground will eat cured fodder, which has been winnowed with the shovel and fan.”

Normally, the oxen and donkeys, the work animals, received chaff mixed with a little barley, if the farmer could afford the barley. The chaff would have been the refuse, the waste of the stalk of grain. We can equate it with straw mixed with some grain to give it some substance. In other words, the animal got the leftovers and the farmer and his family got the grain. But here the text says the animals were going to be fed the grain. Winnowing was the process to remove the pure grain from the stalk and outer husks. So this grain is going to be exactly what the farmer and his family ate. What that means is that the grain was going to be so plentiful it would be feed it to the livestock. They would be able to give their work animals pure grain. No more hay, no more straw, but the good stuff.

Notice the text, there are two important words here—*cured fodder*. Times are going to be so good that the grain will be mixed with a salted concoction that is a delicacy to an animal. This is what cured fodder is. This is eating at its finest for a cow or donkey. God was going to so bless the people that the increase would spread over.

The illustration speaks for itself, does it not? The success of what God does when He pours out His Spirit and revives a people is that ministry will extend beyond them. The point is this: the spiritual blessings of Jesus Christ in our souls will be so full, powerful, and abundant that there will be an overflow that will spill out and affect people around us.

What God has promised me and several of you is that He is going to do something here in us that will so impact our lives that we will impact the lives of others. We will have so much “grain” (the spiritual blessings of God) that the vats will be running over. Our granaries and barns will not be able to store it all, therefore, we as we freely receive, we will freely give. This is the result of a move of God. This is the result of revival. This is what happens when God’s people repent and get real about their sins. God will not ignore it; He will infuse their hearts and will respond

to their repentance with much mercy and great blessing. We won't be able to contain it.

You wonder why your life doesn't impact others. We pray for the lost to be saved, but, dear friend, have you considered praying for you own soul to be so full of Christ that you can't help but have impact upon others?

This is New Testament evangelism.

Acts 1:8—“But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

That's God's system of New Testament evangelism. It's not going to some class and learning a script and apologetic arguments; it's not learning four spiritual laws; it's not going to a soul-winning class. That's not God's method in the New Testament. His method is His Spirit energizing His people so they can't help but be a blessing to others. The power of God in them is unleashed and it touches people where they are.

3. *The Mountains' Prosper.*

v. 25 —“There will be on every high mountain and on every high hill rivers and streams of waters, in the day of the great slaughter, when the towers fall.”

If you've ever trekked through the mountains it's not uncommon to come across a mountain stream. I love it; the babbling of the brook over the rocks, the clear cold water with no fear of it being contaminated, you can cup it in your hand and drink. Here in America it's not uncommon to see waterfalls or rivers and streams in the mountains, but in Israel it's very uncommon. Mountains aren't like they are here. They're dry and seldom in the mountains of Israel do you ever see greenery. Now and again you'll see snow peaks but you don't see rivers and streams flowing out of the mountains. They are just non-existent. But in here in the text, the prophet is foreshadowing the great blessing God was going to pour out on His people when He brings them out of captivity. One of the great ways to do that was to share in illustrative form a way that was unimaginable. Rivers coming out of mountains? That's unbelievable! Yes, to a Jew in Israel, but that's how great God is.

When God shows up spiritual dryness vanishes. Do you want to see dryness evaporate? That's

an oxymoron. If you want to see dryness evaporate, get full of the Holy Spirit. The barrenness of our hearts is eradicated immediately when the Spirit of God is poured out upon us. There will be rivers of living water.

This is what I pray for. I pray for you to experience this every single day. I pray that Christ will be so real to you that the love of God that passes understanding will be so real and tangible that you will say that there are rivers flowing out of your life.

I think of the English missionary to China, Hudson Taylor, who labored in ministry for years without experiencing these rivers of living water. Still he was faithful, hard worker. He saw some victories of course, but he knew something was missing out of his life. He would say, "I'm not fruitful as I ought to be. That *more fruit* that Jesus talked about in His parable is not my experience." For years he languished and even came to a point where he contemplated giving up the ministry.

One day he got a letter from a friend who had been going through the same spiritual dryness who told Hudson Taylor that God had poured out His Spirit upon him. As Taylor read that letter, something happened to him. He was quickened on the inside and it showed him the reality of what Christ had promised in John 7:38.

"He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water."

Do you remember that promise? Hudson Taylor knew he didn't have that life more abundant. He had life but not more abundantly. *Pastor, aren't you taking that verse out of context? He's talking about salvation there.* In verse thirty-seven He is, but in verse thirty-eight He's not. That's to all of us.

Here is one of the many problems we have in American Christianity. We make the act of getting saved the sum total of the Christian life. We say all that matters is that you've had an experience or somebody has prayed a prayer with you or you've been baptized and joined a church. We tell them, "Now you're a Christian and there's not much that's going to happen between now and when you get to heaven, but be encouraged that you're going."

That's not what Christ promised us! He said, "I have come that you may have life, and life more abundantly." Listen, dear child of God, we had enough faith to get saved. We've had enough faith to believe God for the forgiveness of our sins. My question—I think it is God's question to us—is

do you trust God enough to believe Him for life more abundant? He's come that we would have life, salvation, but He also came that we would have life more abundantly. The normal Christian life is a life that is Spirit-filled, a life where there is not one river but rivers, plural, flowing out of you.

That's what Hudson Taylor saw that day when he read his friend's letter. God did something that changed his ministry and life forever. Where there had been little fruit there was much fruit and he found the reality. Do you really trust that God can pour into you life more abundantly? That is the issue. If you can answer that question sincerely in the affirmative I believe you will experience it. I am convinced. Christ cannot lie. He doesn't take back what He has said. He has no caveats, exceptions or qualifications except one—do you believe that there is more to your Christian experience than you are presently experiencing? I'm not talking about second blessings or second works of grace nor any of these kinds of things; I'm here to tell you that the promise of Jesus Christ is real. He died for more than just your sins' forgiveness, for more than a clean conscience; He died that you might be saved by His life.

Is the life of Christ in you flowing out of you? Are you experiencing this work of God that Paul says is a strange work that cannot be explained? Paul said that Jesus does more than he could ask, think, or imagine. The apostle said that God worked in him mightily. Do you know what it's like to have God work in you mightily? I do not doubt that you're saved, most of you in this room I'm sure you have had enough faith to believe that God has canceled out your sin debt. But that's not what we're talking about here. Do you believe that your life could make a difference in somebody else's life? Do you believe that your life, lived for the glory of God with the stamp and smile of God on you, could impact others?

Dear friend, you and I live under an open heaven now.

*“Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,”
(Romans 5:1)*

He doesn't stop there. Why have we in this present age stopped with that and said, “There it is—that's the Christian life”? No it isn't. There's much more to Christianity!

Read verse two.

“through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.”

I have an open heaven before me. There are no bars or gates. The windows of heaven aren't closed, shut or locked to me. Jesus has flung them open and He wants to pour out a blessing on you that your cup will not contain. Access to God! Life at it's best, more abundant, rivers of living water! These are the promises for the children of God. Do you believe it?

I love to pray Isaiah 44:3.

“For I will pour water on him who is thirsty, And floods on the dry ground; I will pour My Spirit on your descendants, And My blessing on your offspring;”

Oh, God, do it here right now.

4. Prosperity Over Enemies.

v. 25 —“There will be on every high mountain and on every high hill rivers and streams of waters, in the day of the great slaughter, when the towers fall.”

Notice with me that last phrase, *in the day of the great slaughter, when the towers fall*. What does that mean? If you consult commentaries you'll only walk away puzzled because they don't agree. I give you my opinion, but I think it's more than that. I think I'm right. But humility refrains me from saying this is the answer. I think it means victory over their enemies.

When they came back from the Babylonian captivity it wasn't easy. There were enemies. There were Sanballat and Tobiah who were constantly a thorn in Nehemiah's side trying to hinder the work. There were others writing to the kings of Persia trying to stop the building of the temple of God and for about 15 years they did. They suspended it according to the decree of the king.

There was even a temptation to go back into idolatry. I was reading in my devotions this morning in Nehemiah how he had to take some by the beard and correct them. Now that is really church discipline. He took them by the beard, plucked some of their beards out and said, “You're not going to do this anymore.” It wasn't easy, but God gave them victory of their enemies.

The word *tower* in the Old Testament represents security and protection. The Psalmist said of God, “You are my High Tower.” So the word *tower* used in this manner means great strength and fortification. In the case of Israel it is not referring to their defense and might but that the strength of their enemies would fall. The enemies were going to fall in this period of revival. It’s not hard to see the New Covenant parallel. It’s victory over spiritual forces of darkness.

Ephesians 6:12 —“For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.”

There is a raid against you and me. Demonic forces are resisting us in order that they might destroy us.

When we came here almost 20 years ago we strongly sensed spiritual bondage. Many times we’ve prayed over the years through similar seasons of spiritual opposition, when we were doing exactly this—wrestling against these principalities and powers, these spiritual beings of darkness who wish us only evil.

Do you think God has drafted you into His army to lose? To be defeated by these forces? Answer the question! Do you really think He’s drafted you into His army to experience defeat by the hand of a defeated enemy? You are aware that the head of this dark army has already been defeated and crushed? How can you crush the head and not crush the arms and legs, feet and hands? This is a defeated army we are up against. The towers have fallen and He, Christ—our champion—has made a public spectacle of them all. They have no place in us unless we give it to them.

This motivated the Apostle Paul to write in Ephesians 4, “Do not give place to the devil.” He has no place in you, but you can give him place. The spiritual powers that have hindered us are going to be broken because they have already been broken. It’s already done. Do you believe it? Do you believe God has already defeated these enemies?

Did Christ not say you shall tread upon the lion and that any poisonous thing you pick up will not harm you? What’s He talking about, drinking poison? Well, some believe that’s what He means, but we know that’s not the correct interpretation. He’s given us vivid illustrations of what evil is and saying that we have victory over them.

5. Increased Light.

*Isaiah 30:26 —“**Moreover the light of the moon will be as the light of the sun, And the light of the sun will be sevenfold, As the light of seven days,** In the day that the LORD binds up the bruise of His people And heals the stroke of their wound.”*

You must remember the prophets knew very little about their predictions. Therefore God had to give them words, terms, and illustrations of things they did know to give a glimpse of the greatness of the things they did not know.

So He says the moon is going to shine like the light of the sun and the sun will be sevenfold brighter. We know that's not possible, but it's an illustration to say as great as that would be—imagine the moon being as bright as the sun at noon or the sun being brighter than seven suns—that's how great the light of God and His countenance will shine on His people. God will give us increased light if we have the eyes to see.

So I say to Oak Grove Baptist Church, wake up. Wake up today. You're missing something. Life is passing you by. Some of us are asleep while some are enjoying this increased light of God.

I think I can say without exaggeration that He's sweeter to me today than He was the day I found Him. The moon shines not dimly but as bright as the sun as He shines His love into my life. Wouldn't it be wonderful to walk with increased light and knowledge of who Jesus is? That's why Paul prayed for the Ephesians in the seventeenth verse of the first chapter to have the spirit of wisdom and revelation in Him. That's the heart of every true Christian here. If I should experience sickness, so be it. If I should experience poverty, so be it. If I should experience failure, so be it. As long as I can know my God and know His intimacy and His fellowship. Isn't that your heart today?

“That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power.” (Ephesians 1:17-19)

“That He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you,

being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height—to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.” (Ephesians 3:16-19)

There’s where I want to be. I’m not satisfied that I have a home in glory, some spot reserved for me. I’m thankful for it; I’m not minimizing it or trying to sound super-spiritual, I’m just saying there is dissatisfaction within this heart that only Christ can satisfy. It isn’t streets of gold and gates of pearl and mansions by and by, it’s Christ now and now that satisfies this heart. He’s real. Prayer closets don’t have to be dark and dull and boring. They can be full of the light of Christ and His voice and fellowship.

I want to remind you this is not new doctrine, it’s the old Gospel. Spurgeon said of Ephesians 3 and the experience of this fullness of God, having the inner man strengthened was not conversion but something beyond conversion and that transformation, which comes as a result, was so great, so astounding that he would dare to say, and I paraphrase, “I think it almost as great if not greater than my transformation from darkness into light, from the kingdom of Satan to the kingdom of God.” We wonder why these men were able to see the fruit they saw—they walked with God! They talked with God. They knew God. They didn’t know Him just with their intellects; there is not a man who can be a greater master to the churches than Spurgeon as far as biblical theology. Spurgeon is one of the most biblical, theologically astute men I’ve ever read, but I tell you that was not the secret to his power. The secret to his power was that he had a hunger for God that only God could satisfy. He sought after Him because he believed Jesus was the exceedingly great reward. I’m thankful that this Jesus is no respecter of persons. This promise is for me. This promise is for this church.

God is going to do something here and I’m not going to make it happen by the power of suggestions or by saying it over and over. That’s not the intent of this sermon series. I probably won’t talk much about it after this, but it’s coming nonetheless. What’s going to be amazing is that some of you will get the benefits of it by putting nothing into it. That’s how things often work in the kingdom. Some of you are going to enjoy the power and the blessing of God reviving your heart when you haven’t prayed or asked Him to do so, it’s just the overflow of revival in your brothers and sisters that spills out and impacts you.

But I’m asking that everyone of you seek to know the Lord afresh and anew today and let not your testimony be when it comes, *Well, so and so really impacted my life*. Rather let it be so that

you were impacted by Christ so that you could influence others. May God help us. *Remember the word upon which You caused Your servant to hope. Amen.*