* Welcome Church, guests, and online family & kids for our 1st Sunday morning!
* Happy Birthday to Shannon Dean
* Friend Day Reminder
* Prayer requests:
  + Judy Dunn
  + Lou Dean

The Road to Revival

Ezra 1:1-5 / Ezra 8:21-23

3/5/23

I have to tell you, I hunger, and I thirst for God. My desire for his movement in my life; and desire for God’s restoration, and reformation for my life, our church, our community, and nation has been so much more than ever the past few months. Let me ask you: Do you desire that too?

In your prayer time with God are you praying that the Lord moves in such a way that his move shatters your hearts & breaks the darkness in this community and bring a great light to lift the hearts and burden of those in bondage and captivity.” Do you truly want to that? I pray you do.

Last week we discussed the “Signs of Revival”. Revival has always been available for the church. God has always been stirring the hearts of those in His Church to seek the Him for spiritual renewal. We’ve also heard the term “hunger” used a lot the past month in the church vocab. Here’s the question I want to post this morning. How’s that hunger, how’s that desire, how’s that prayer life going? If the hunger desire and prayers are in the “stirring” motion, then our prayer should be that God moves in the hearts of all those in our community. We should have a hunger for a breakthrough of God’s working in us and His Church. We should be in this place a church because of the times we’re in.

The church has to get back a place of prayer & fasting. A place of serious commitment and not just living in the microwave age and doing the Wednesday, Sunday thing. In order to see change, God expects a people who don’t just stop in and say hi, or just go through the motions. He is looking for a people who pull up a seat, fall down on their face, and lift up their earnest and humble desires to see Him move in their lives, their family’s life’s, their church, and their community!

Throughout the Bible we see those who sought God for real change...Stood in the gap, per say for real change in their lives and their lives of those in their community!

* We can see this in Daniel. He prayed for his community. He prayed that God would break them free out from their captivity. Here’s the thing...Daniel’s prayers were affective. He trusted God would protect him all the days of his life. And with such a heart for his people, in chapter 9 He turns to God and pleads with him in prayer and petition (request, appeal, plea, or beg), in fasting, and in sackcloth and ashes, so that the Lord God would deliver his chosen people out from captivity in Babylon, and back to the Promised Land.
* Daniel’s life and ministry of presence was so powerful that he affected the heart of mind of his King, King Darius of Persia. Darius, more than any world leader today, decreed that all needed to give their hearts and minds to the God of Heaven. In Daniel 6 he decreed: *“... that in every part of my kingdom people must fear and reverence the God of Daniel.*
* What’s amazing here is that what we just read was the softening of a pagan nation to release the captives God desired to set free, and the beginning of revival. But none of that would have been possible had not Daniel, and those around him, prayed for God’s stirring in the hearts and minds of others.
* How amazing would it be if the churches of Lompoc, the Christians of Lompoc, would seek God out in earnest prayer & fasting to bring revival in that the Mayor and Lompoc Council would catch it and a “Public Announcement” would be issued that everyone in the city must fear & show reverence the one True God!

English Christian evangelist, Leonard Ravenhall wrote about this kind of stirring in his book “While Revival Tarries.” He said: **“No man is greater than his prayer life. The pastor who is not praying is playing; the people who are not praying are straying.”**

Poverty-stricken as the Church is today in many things, it is most stricken here, in the place of prayer.

* We have many organizers, but few agonizers.
* many players, but few pray-ers
* many singers, few clingers
* many fears, few tears
* much fashion, little passion
* many interferers, few intercessors

**Failing here, we fail everywhere.**

The sad truth is, the Church has been failing America for years and we can see the result of that in how America has turned from God and from Christ. We are in desperate times, and we must become a desperate people of prayer. We need to be a people praying for revival, praying for our churches, communities, and our nation to seek a renewal of heart, mind, and soul, and to turn back to God. That turning needs to be and can only be led by us.

In our scripture text we see how a captive Judah sought God with the fullness of their beings. They watched for God’s stirring; prayed, fasted, and sought God for protection and began a journey along the road of revival.

This morning my prayer is that as we look at this, we too seek God for a new stirring of our hearts, that we too begin the walk on the road to revival. For like Daniel, we too must become a people of prayer so that God can move in our lives, and usher in a time when the captives that God desires to set free, are led into his promised land.

READ EZRA 1:1-5

*1 In the first year of King Cyrus of Persia, the Lord fulfilled the prophecy he had given through Jeremiah. He* ***stirred*** *the heart of Cyrus to put this proclamation in writing and to send it throughout his kingdom: 2 “This is what King Cyrus of Persia says: “The Lord, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth. He has appointed me to build him a Temple at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. 3 Any of you who are his people may go to Jerusalem in Judah to rebuild this Temple of the Lord, the God of Israel, who lives in Jerusalem. And may your God be with you! 4 Wherever this Jewish remnant is found, let their neighbors contribute toward their expenses by giving them silver and gold, supplies for the journey, and livestock, as well as a voluntary offering for the Temple of God in Jerusalem.” 5 Then God* ***stirred*** *the hearts of the priests and Levites and the leaders of the tribes of Judah and Benjamin to go to Jerusalem to rebuild the Temple of the Lord.*

Look again in verses 1 & 5. There’s a word there that is very important. The word “stirred.” We’ve mentioned this word a few times today. This word “stir” means to awaken, or to open the eyes of our heart to God’s willful redemption. This stirring, this awakening, this opening of the eyes, was, and still is, the first step in the heart of renewal for the children of God. This “stirring” has to start within us, and from us, and then it will pour into the community.

In knowing the scriptures, we know Judah had been put into captivity & wanted nothing more than to return home and establish Godly worship in a newly rebuilt temple. Most of them had never seen the glory of the Lord’s temple. A few had, but the vast majority of them had never seen or known the Promised Land, Salvation, or freedom with God. Most at this time were born in captivity but were given a chance to live in freedom and to start a new life with God.

* Like Judah, we were all born into captivity — we’re all born captive to sin, and in bondage to a life of selfishness away from God. Yet, through Jesus Christ, we who by faith, confess Jesus as our Lord and Savior have been set free from a life of sin and eternal death. But let me ask you, are you grateful for your freedom?
* Are we serving God with all our being? Or have we become too comfortable in our faith? Judah became comfortable and Babylon took away their livelihood, chained them, and hauled them on a 543-mile journey into captivity for 70 years!

Our churches, our communities, and our country has been going downhill quickly, especially the past few years. All we have to do is go on the internet or turn on the TV, to see the evil & blatant disregard for God in so many places. The unrest in our nation and world for that matter is like never before. Millions are screaming for something real, something to save them. A savior to free them from the burdens they’ve created. Unfortunately, most are looking to the government to save them, but I’ve got some bad news for you...the government cannot save!

But the one today who has been found by the Savior, you’ve been set free! You’ve been given new life, and it’s your duty and obligation to share that new life with others; not to hold on to it or keep it a secret. We have a Lord and Savior who desires to stir the hearts of the many — beginning with us — so that He can set the captives free as He has for you!

I mentioned last week how we should have a burden for the lost. As Christians, as the church, I pray that we would desire a release of those the devil is holding captive. Unfortunately, though this burden can’t & won’t be there if your heart hasn’t been stirred!

Is God stirring your heart? Is God awakening your heart to his desires? Are your eyes open to see the hopelessness and despair of the many who are muddling through life and holding onto something, but not God?

* If we are not broken for the lost, then we have become too good at being organizers, and not agonizers.
* If we are not broken, we are playing Church, but not devout pray-ers.

Maybe we don’t have enough passion. Maybe we fear change and the moving of God’s Holy Spirit. Is your heart stirring? God is here, right now within our midst; in this church, and in our community, and he’s stirring the hearts of many. Is yours one of them? You see, if we hesitate and choose not to allow the stirring of the Holy Spirit or we fail to open our eyes, we will not be able see that which God desires. Church, we need to become sensitive and open our eyes to God’s stirring and get radical for God by becoming a people of prayer and fasting, and a people willing to travel the road less travelled.

The journey on this “Road less traveled” STARTS WITH PRAYER AND FASTING

In Ezra 7 we’re introduced to a man named Ezra. The Bible says, “*the gracious hand of the Lord his God was on him”.* Ezra was devoted to prayer and fasting.

* Ezra 8:21-23 says: *21 And there by the Ahava Canal, I gave orders for all of us to* ***fast*** *and humble ourselves before our God. We* ***praye****d that he would give us a safe journey and protect us, our children, and our goods as we traveled. 22 For I was ashamed to ask the king for soldiers and horsemen to accompany us and protect us from enemies along the way. After all, we had told the king, “Our God’s hand of protection is on all who worship him, but his fierce anger rages against those who abandon him.” 23 So we fasted and earnestly prayed that our God would take care of us, and he heard our prayer.*

Like Daniel, David, Ezra and countless others we see in the Bible, fasting was a part of change.

* Jesus fasted forty days — he took in no food, only water -- just before his ministry began.
* In Luke 2 we see an 84-year-old Anna “never left the temple, serving night and day with fasting and prayer until the Messiah came.
* Before Barnabas and Paul left on their missionary journey, they prayed and fasted as the Holy Spirit stirred their hearts before sending them off.

All these people knew that the combination of prayer and fasting was (and is) a powerful means to kick-start a revival of one form or another. It’s in this way, when we fast and pray, that we’re able to hear from God the Father, through the power of the Holy Spirit, without anything getting in the way. Like us —although He is the Son of God —Jesus was FULLY human, and tempted in all the ways you and I are tempted. But his wilderness fast gave him a clarity of mind and spirit, spiritual strength, and an unbridled ability to minister for God the Father.

* Let us consider the fruits of Jesus’ fast. His faith became emboldened. Because of the commitment he made to His Fathers work through fasting and prayer, He began to preach, called his first disciples, healed the sick, and performed signs and miracles that controlled the elements of this earth.

If Jesus fasted and prayed to bring change and taught about those things in the sermon on the mount, is it not good for us too? Revival begins with the stirring of God in our hearts, then moves into prayer and fasting, so that the Kingdom of God can blossom.

* Now, we should know that fasting isn’t easy, as we just went through a fast as a church. The bible records that Jesus hungered after 40 days, and that he was tempted in many ways by the devil. Despite the discomfort in fasting, it is vital for our faith and for the renewal of our hearts, our community, our nation, and the Kingdom of Heaven.

I want to encourage us to become a people of fasting and prayer. I urge us to be a church that will seek God in diligent prayer, and if you feel Him stirring you to begin a fast, then obey. For if you do, you shall not be alone. We’re coming up next month on a time where the story of Salvation will be in the primetime lights with Good Friday and Easter. What greater time for us as the church to seek and to reflect upon Jesus’ path. To seek God with greater meaning for our lives, and those around us. Is God stirring your heart towards revival? He may be but know that the road ahead to renewal may not easy.

THE INCONVIENENT ROAD AHEAD

The bible says it took Ezra and the exiles 4 months to reach Jerusalem. Their journey would have taken them over 500 miles of desert terrain, inhabitable wilderness, up mountains, and down valleys that consistently rose and fell by thousands of feet.

* Now, imagine having to walk from San Francisco to San Diego This road travelled is about 507 miles, but that’s along a paved highway. Imagine if we had to walk that road, without the convenience of proper shoes, pavement, or automobile.

But this was the journey Judah made. They prayed and sought God with fasting and asked for protection for their journey. They took all they owned and all the temple treasures and headed out for the Promised Land. They didn’t look back, they just went, despite the inconvenience, for the reward and destination ahead was more desirous than the comfortableness of Babylon and a continued existence in bondage and captivity.

We have to believe that their journey was worth it. Upon arriving, the people set out to do God’s will as a people called by God to be lamplighters for the world. Over 2500 years ago, God stirred the hearts of his people to return to the Promised Land and revive godly worship. Judah was willing to allow God to stir their hearts; as they sought the Lord in prayer and fasting; and as they travelled the road less travelled, so that, in time, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ Messiah could be born to set the captives free.

Closing:

It is my hope and prayer that those in our community would come to know Jesus Christ as Lord, friend. Do you desire that too? If it is, then we need to become a people willing to walk the road to revival, a people of commitment to prayer & fasting, a people willing to share our faith!

Now, in this moment, at this time, in this place, God is stirring us. He is stirring our hearts in order for us to travel the road of revival. We should find, through this stirring, an urgent desire to travel this road, so that through Jesus, others too can be stirred and in that stirring be freed from their bondage of sin and live a life free in Christ and salvation as we are!

My question to you all this morning:

* Are we willing to allow God to stir our heart today?
* Are you hungry enough to ask him to open your eyes to that which He desires to do in your life, in your church, in your community?
* Are you willing to travel the road less travelled so that Jesus can set the captives free?