

Revival and Reformation – Matthew 3-4

This time of year, I am always reminded of the famous day, October 31, 1517 when Dr. Martin Luther posted his 95 Theses on the door of the Castle Church. Luther wrote his famous theses for the academic purpose of debate with his colleagues. But we all know this singular act sparked the Protestant Reformation. But what about Luther's call from God? What do we know of this great reformer's call to a life as a professor, theologian and preacher? When Luther was in school studying for his master's degree, he sensed God's call. But he knew his father, Hans, had already planned for him to be a lawyer. Even though Luther did not want to enter into law, he honored his father's wishes. In May 1505 Luther entered his studies for law. In June of that same year he returned home. During his visit Luther got caught in a thunderstorm. He was knocked off his horse by a lightning bolt. Fearing death, he vowed to become a monk. The truth is for years Luther had slowly been moving to a religious calling. The lightning bolt produced a quick turn from the law to his true calling to pursue God.

Today, we are talking about revival and reformation. And we know from history that spiritual renewal leads to reformation. And while Martin Luther was a great reformer, we also realize he was not the greatest. The greatest reformer is Jesus Christ! Let's read how the reformation of Jesus started.

In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, ² "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." ³ For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah when he said,

"The voice of one crying in the wilderness:
'Prepare the way of the Lord;
make his paths straight.'"

⁴ Now John wore a garment of camel's hair and a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. ⁵ Then Jerusalem and all Judea and all the region about the Jordan were going out to him, ⁶ and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.

⁷ But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? ⁸ Bear fruit in keeping with repentance. ⁹ And do not presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father,' for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham. ¹⁰ Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

¹¹ “I baptize you with water for repentance, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. ¹² His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into the barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.”

¹³ Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John, to be baptized by him. ¹⁴ John would have prevented him, saying, “I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?” ¹⁵ But Jesus answered him, “Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.” Then he consented. ¹⁶ And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; ¹⁷ and behold, a voice from heaven said, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.”

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. ² And after fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. ³ And the tempter came and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.” ⁴ But he answered, “It is written,

“Man shall not live by bread alone,
but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.”

⁵ Then the devil took him to the holy city and set him on the pinnacle of the temple ⁶ and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down, for it is written,

“He will command his angels concerning you,”

and

“On their hands they will bear you up,
lest you strike your foot against a stone.”

⁷ Jesus said to him, “Again it is written, ‘You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.’” ⁸ Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. ⁹ And he said to him, “All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.” ¹⁰ Then Jesus said to him, “Be gone, Satan! For it is written,

“You shall worship the Lord your God
and him only shall you serve.”

¹¹ Then the devil left him, and behold, angels came and were ministering to him.

¹² Now when he heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew into Galilee. ¹³ And leaving Nazareth he went and lived in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, ¹⁴ so that what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled:

¹⁵ “The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali,
the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles—
¹⁶ the people dwelling in darkness
have seen a great light,
and for those dwelling in the region and shadow of death,
on them a light has dawned.”

¹⁷ From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”

¹⁸ While walking by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon (who is called Peter) and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. ¹⁹ And he said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.” ²⁰ Immediately they left their nets and followed him. ²¹ And going on from there he saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets, and he called them. ²² Immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.

²³ And he went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction among the people. ²⁴ So his fame spread throughout all Syria, and they brought him all the sick, those afflicted with various diseases and pains, those oppressed by demons, those having seizures, and paralytics, and he healed them. ²⁵ And great crowds followed him from Galilee and the Decapolis, and from Jerusalem and Judea, and from beyond the Jordan.

A lot of times when we talk about reformation and reform, we speak of history such as the Protestant Reformation. However, the greatest reformation happened when Jesus came to earth and started his ministry. Both John the Baptist and Jesus say, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” That kingdom, the kingdom of Jesus Christ is the greatest reformation there is. There is no person or event greater than Jesus and the coming of his kingdom.

Now, I believe that spiritual renewal brings reformation. And when God moves, it has the potential to change nations, to change cultures.

Today we are discussing nine keys to reformation. Nine things I believe are essential for reformation and change.

Now, I want to point out the first three things we are discussing are like an introduction to this idea of revival and reformation.

- 1) We must identify the need for revival and reform. There is no way to come to Jesus until he first convicts us that we are broken and need him. If we do not identify our need for revival, I do not believe it will come. Martyn Lloyd-Jones preached a series of sermons on revival and you can get this in print in a book called, *Revival*. In the book, Lloyd-Jones states that in the past to experience an awakening or revival people simply needed to

be shaken or roused out of their spiritual sleep. In times past people were in a state of apathy and could be brought back to life in a simple way. But in Lloyd-Jones time, which was around 1959 for these sermons, the problem was much different. Dr. Lloyd-Jones states, "the problem for us is not apathy, it is not a mere lack of concern and lack of interest. It is something much more profound. It seems to me to be a complete unawareness, even a denial, of the spiritual altogether." (pg. 13) Basically he is saying the problem is much more profound than just stirring people up. He is saying in his day scientific knowledge had replaced God and religion. And many people did not look to the Bible or spiritual things as the answer. This was around 1959 – what about today? You see, our problem is much deeper than singing another song or attending another service. The problem we have is much, much deeper. If you were to visit various churches, which I have done, and look around, you would not think there is much of a problem. And that is just it, there is a problem, and in many places there is no real concern for revival or reformation, it is the same old thing every week. There is a severe lack of spiritual perception. God is always moving and ready to meet us where we are. But many times we are not ready or prepared or willing to do the things God has in store. We must do things God's way. And honestly, we do not perceive all that he is doing and willing to do. We want God to be in charge of our lives and that includes our Church experience. Is God really in charge of our services or man? Do we give him room to move or just do what is planned? Don't misunderstand me, we need planning, and God uses that. But planning always should be laid down at Jesus' feet like everything else. God wants to do so much more, but our hearts are rebellious, we want to be comfortable, to do things our way. The problem is deep, and many are not even aware of it! Is there a real need for reformation and revival? Well, there is an easy way to know. Look at the culture. The Church has been given by God to produce life-giving change. Most people just attend another service, if they go at all, and then go on with their lives, never changing anything. Are we as the Church producing change? Are we extinguishing darkness with the light of Jesus Christ? Are our services filled with the Holy Spirit or just another dead ritual? There is a great need for revival, but do we realize how great the need is? We must realize that we actually need God. Our culture needs God. We must actually believe that. Do you really want God to move in power and completely change our culture? Think before you answer because God's way is hard. We get to choose – death or life. We have to identify there is an actual need for revival – that we actually need him to move and change our hearts. Spiritual renewal produces cultural change. I repeat, spiritual renewal produces cultural change. And that change starts in our hearts. Do you think we need cultural change today? Do we? If so, then where is your passion for God? If you want our culture to change, then pursue God with passion!

- 2) The Bible must be accepted as true and divine. Now, why is this so important? Well, first of all I would say we have a dual problem. We have those claiming to be people of faith that clearly do not accept certain parts of the Bible. Why would I say that? Because the true faith of the Bible is not practiced. For example, if we say as a religious body or denomination that it is OK to have clergy who are gay or LGBTQ, then we are outside of the Bible. The Bible is crystal clear on sexuality. So, from my perspective these groups or

denominations are questioning the authority of the Bible and God himself. And there is absolutely no way for them to accept the Bible as divine and true, and hold these views. If that offends your sensitivities, I do not apologize, because I believe the Bible is true and divine. You see why it is important that we discuss these issues. When we don't the Church slides into error. Jeremiah 14:14 says, "And the LORD said to me: 'The prophets are prophesying lies in my name. I did not send them, nor did I command them or speak to them. They are prophesying to you a lying vision, worthless divination, and the deceit of their own minds.'" Listen to Jeremiah 23:16, "Thus says the LORD of hosts: 'Do not listen to the words of the prophets who prophesy to you, filling you with vain hopes. They speak visions of their own minds, not from the mouth of the LORD.'" And in Matthew 7 Jesus talks about false prophets. Verse 15-16 states, "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will recognize them by their fruits." And Paul in Romans 16 writes, "I appeal to you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught; avoid them. For such persons do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites, and by smooth talk and flattery they deceive the hearts of the naïve." (vs. 17-18) The other side of this is those who do not claim to be Christians, and do not believe in the Bible. We should and must endeavor to engage these people to bring them to salvation in Jesus. And bring them to the knowledge of the Bible as true and divine.

Norman L. Geisler and Ronald M. Brooks wrote a great book called, *When Skeptics Ask*. In this book there are wonderful answers to questions people ask who do not believe. At the beginning of the book, the author gives a great example of why we need to give answers to everyone. The book quotes a letter from a pastor who talked with an atheist college student, and explains how the authors material had helped this pastor answer the student's questions. The end of the letter reads, "At the end of our discussion he was standing in the back of our building with tears in his eyes. He hasn't yet received Christ, but he is now left without reasons to deny that God exists."

- 3) Pure Bible doctrine and interpretation restored. If you think people have a clear understanding of basic Bible doctrine – you are mistaken – we live in an age of Biblical illiteracy. Do you honestly believe our nation would be in the mess we are in if the Church taught correct doctrine. Most of what we hear in churches today is not doctrine at all. Steve Hill wrote a book entitled, *Spiritual Avalanche*, which addresses false teaching. In the beginning of the book Hill quotes 2 Timothy 4:3-4. This is what that text says. "For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths." Hill notes in the book, "If what we are teaching and preaching from our pulpits today is actually a fresh word from God, then why is this nation falling into such disrepair? We are moving away from righteousness and deeper into ungodliness." (pg.12) Now, obviously leaders who are going to teach and preach God's word need to be trained in correct hermeneutic principles. But what I am talking about is much deeper than that. Often the problem is

not accuracy but our hearts. Many denominations will no longer tolerate the truth. In the book of Malachi, the prophet rebukes the priests. Why? Because they were dishonoring God. Chapter 2 says, "So shall you know that I have sent this command to you, that my covenant with Levi may stand, says the LORD of hosts. My covenant with him was one of life and peace, and I gave them to him. It was a covenant of fear, and he feared me. He stood in awe of my name. True instruction was in his mouth, and no wrong was found on his lips. He walked with me in peace and uprightness, and he turned many from iniquity. For the lips of a priest should guard knowledge, and people should seek instruction from his mouth, for he is the messenger of the LORD of hosts. But you have turned aside from the way. You have caused many to stumble by your instruction. You have corrupted the covenant of Levi, says the LORD of hosts, and so I make you despised and abased before all the people, inasmuch as you do not keep my ways but show partiality in your instruction." (vs. 4-9) One of the greatest messages of the Bible is repentance. This is how we come to faith in Christ. Yet, we rarely see this practiced. Hill notes, "I think pastors need to repent for not challenging people to repent." (pg. 31) Indeed, and wasn't that the message we read earlier in Matthew 3-4. Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. Repentance is not optional, it is required to come to saving faith in Jesus. It is also required to have a good and healthy relationship with our heavenly Father. Repeatedly the prophets called the people of God to repentance. And here is the good news, God responds to true repentance. So, you see, it is not just about accurate Bible exposition, it is a matter of the heart. And today, God continues to call people to repentance, just like in the Bible. John the Baptist called people to repentance. Jesus called people to repentance. It is a matter of the heart, not just correct doctrine. In Amos chapter 7, the false priest tells Amos to go away, to go back to Judah and prophecy there. But who did God choose to be his prophet, to speak for him – Amos! You see, it is no different today, we love to hear all the wrong voices, meanwhile we often ignore and refuse to listen to the true prophets of God who say – Repent! Restoring Bible doctrine requires academic study but it also requires prayer and the Spirit moving the man of God in the right direction with the right words at the right time.

Now, what about accurate Bible interpretation? How important is this? Well, let's be frank – the Bible is the single most read book ever written. So, how we understand it is paramount to how we live and interact with others. Andreas J. Kostenberger and Richard D. Patterson in their book, *Invitation to Biblical Interpretation*, note, "There is therefore an important ethical dimension in interpretation. We should engage in interpretation responsibly, displaying respect for the text and its author. There is no excuse for interpretive arrogance that elevates the reader above text and author. The 'golden rule' of interpretation requires that we extend the same courtesy to any text or author that we would want others to extend to our statements and writings. This calls for respect not only for the intentions of the human authors of Scripture but ultimately for God who chose to reveal himself through the Bible by His Holy Spirit." (pg. 58) Kostenberger and Patterson believe there are three main elements interpreters must address to correctly and accurately interpret a text – and I agree with them. They use a

hermeneutical triad that includes the historical setting, the literary context, and the theological message of the text. Now, why am I making such a big deal about pure doctrine and Bible interpretation - because of what false teaching leads to. We want people to have the truth, not a watered down version of a comfortable man-made gospel. Titus 1:10-16 says:

For there are many who are insubordinate, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision party. ¹¹ They must be silenced, since they are upsetting whole families by teaching for shameful gain what they ought not to teach. ¹² One of the Cretans, a prophet of their own, said, "Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons." ¹³ This testimony is true. Therefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith, ¹⁴ not devoting themselves to Jewish myths and the commands of people who turn away from the truth. ¹⁵ To the pure, all things are pure, but to the defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure; but both their minds and their consciences are defiled. ¹⁶ They profess to know God, but they deny him by their works. They are detestable, disobedient, unfit for any good work.

False teaching leads to rebellion, deception, and manipulation. We mistakenly think we can handle a little lying, but it is like a mole-hill that grows into a mountain. Eventually the darkness that comes from false teaching produces what? What we see manifesting in our culture today! That is why sound teaching using proven principles of interpretation is so important. There is a spiritual consequence for taking the Bible lightly and speaking for God in a lazy and haphazard way. God is holy, his word is perfect. We should approach him and his word carefully, respectfully, and in honesty. Our culture has incrementally become dark. God can change that. We need to take the blinders off and know God's way leads to peace and reformation. Our way doesn't. C.S. Lewis in his famous book, *Mere Christianity*, notes the following, "the right direction leads not only to peace but to knowledge. When a man is getting better he understands more and more clearly the evil that is still left in him. When a man is getting worse he understands his own badness less and less. A moderately bad man knows he is not very good: a thoroughly bad man thinks he is all right. This is common sense, really. You understand sleep when you are awake, not while you are sleeping. You can see mistakes in arithmetic when your mind is working properly: while you are making them you cannot see them. You can understand the nature of drunkenness when you are sober, not when you are drunk. Good people know about both good and evil: bad people do not know about either." (pg. 93)

Now, I have identified three things so far as an introduction to revival and reformation. Now, let's go to the text of Matthew 3-4. The revival in Mathew 3-4 starts with the ministry of John the Baptist. So, to have revival and reformation that brings lasting change – you will have forerunners or true prophets that precede the reformation. Just as John the Baptist prepared the way for Jesus, there can be forerunners to a revival or reformation. We have already mentioned the first message is repent!

What can we learn about forerunners from John the Baptist – what was he like, what did he do? First of all, as we mentioned he called people to repentance. We also notice he was unorthodox, meaning he was not in Jerusalem among the teachers of the law, he was out in the wilderness baptizing people. So, people were repenting, confessing their sin and being baptized. John is preparing them for the coming of Jesus. Matthew 3:11 says, “I baptize you with water for repentance, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.”

What else do we learn? We learn what happens when forerunners encounter false, rebellious religious leaders. What happens when the religious leaders come out to see John? He denounces them, just as Jesus would. “Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.” (Matthew 3:10) This tends not to be our focus, but that is part of the message. Rebuking false leadership is something righteous prophets do. It is Biblical; it is a warning for them to repent. The religious leaders could have repented, but they didn’t. What else do forerunners do – they introduce us to Jesus. The prophets that precede Jesus prepare the way. John gets the privilege of baptizing Jesus before he starts his ministry. Forerunners are necessary, they warn, they prepare people for what is coming, they point to Jesus. Then, these prophets fade out of the picture and Christ becomes the centerpiece. This happens so that Jesus alone is the focus! So, to have revival and reformation there will be true prophets and forerunners that precede the work.

Next, we are going to talk about the first stage of revival. What must happen, what always happens. Let’s read Exodus 33.

The LORD said to Moses, “Depart; go up from here, you and the people whom you have brought up out of the land of Egypt, to the land of which I swore to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, saying, ‘To your offspring I will give it.’² I will send an angel before you, and I will drive out the Canaanites, the Amorites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites.³ Go up to a land flowing with milk and honey; but I will not go up among you, lest I consume you on the way, for you are a stiff-necked people.”

⁴When the people heard this disastrous word, they mourned, and no one put on his ornaments.⁵ For the LORD had said to Moses, “Say to the people of Israel, ‘You are a stiff-necked people; if for a single moment I should go up among you, I would consume you. So now take off your ornaments, that I may know what to do with you.’”⁶ Therefore the people of Israel stripped themselves of their ornaments, from Mount Horeb onward.

⁷Now Moses used to take the tent and pitch it outside the camp, far off from the camp, and he called it the tent of meeting. And everyone who sought the LORD would go out to the tent of meeting, which was outside the camp.⁸ Whenever Moses went out to the tent, all the people would rise up, and each would stand at his tent door, and watch Moses until he had gone into the tent.⁹ When Moses entered the tent, the pillar of cloud would descend and stand at the entrance of the tent, and the LORD would speak with Moses.¹⁰ And when all the people saw the pillar of cloud standing at the entrance of the tent, all the people would rise up and worship,

each at his tent door. ¹¹ Thus the LORD used to speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend. When Moses turned again into the camp, his assistant Joshua the son of Nun, a young man, would not depart from the tent.

¹² Moses said to the LORD, "See, you say to me, 'Bring up this people,' but you have not let me know whom you will send with me. Yet you have said, 'I know you by name, and you have also found favor in my sight.' ¹³ Now therefore, if I have found favor in your sight, please show me now your ways, that I may know you in order to find favor in your sight. Consider too that this nation is your people." ¹⁴ And he said, "My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest." ¹⁵ And he said to him, "If your presence will not go with me, do not bring us up from here. ¹⁶ For how shall it be known that I have found favor in your sight, I and your people? Is it not in your going with us, so that we are distinct, I and your people, from every other people on the face of the earth?"

¹⁷ And the LORD said to Moses, "This very thing that you have spoken I will do, for you have found favor in my sight, and I know you by name." ¹⁸ Moses said, "Please show me your glory." ¹⁹ And he said, "I will make all my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my name 'The LORD.' And I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy. ²⁰ But," he said, "you cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live." ²¹ And the LORD said, "Behold, there is a place by me where you shall stand on the rock, ²² and while my glory passes by I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by. ²³ Then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back, but my face shall not be seen."

The first stage of revival is always the realization of our situation compared to God. He is holy and righteous – without him we don't go anywhere or do anything. We must realize the state we are in, we must repent, we must fall on our face before a holy God. We must recognize his strong hand of correction and humble ourselves before him.

Let's read I Samuel 7:3-13

And Samuel said to all the house of Israel, "If you are returning to the LORD with all your heart, then put away the foreign gods and the Ashtaroath from among you and direct your heart to the LORD and serve him only, and he will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines." ⁴ So the people of Israel put away the Baals and the Ashtaroath, and they served the LORD only.

⁵ Then Samuel said, "Gather all Israel at Mizpah, and I will pray to the LORD for you." ⁶ So they gathered at Mizpah and drew water and poured it out before the LORD and fasted on that day and said there, "We have sinned against the LORD." And Samuel judged the people of Israel at Mizpah. ⁷ Now when the Philistines heard that the people of Israel had gathered at Mizpah, the lords of the Philistines went up against Israel. And when the people of Israel heard of it, they were afraid of the Philistines. ⁸ And the people of Israel said to Samuel, "Do not cease to cry out to the LORD our God for us, that he may save us from the hand of the Philistines." ⁹ So Samuel took a nursing lamb and offered it as a whole burnt offering to the LORD. And Samuel cried out

to the LORD for Israel, and the LORD answered him. ¹⁰ As Samuel was offering up the burnt offering, the Philistines drew near to attack Israel. But the LORD thundered with a mighty sound that day against the Philistines and threw them into confusion, and they were defeated before Israel. ¹¹ And the men of Israel went out from Mizpah and pursued the Philistines and struck them, as far as below Beth-car.

¹² Then Samuel took a stone and set it up between Mizpah and Shen and called its name Ebenezer; for he said, "Till now the LORD has helped us." ¹³ So the Philistines were subdued and did not again enter the territory of Israel. And the hand of the LORD was against the Philistines all the days of Samuel.

Now, we are talking about rebellion and repentance, but we cannot read this text without noticing something really important. What is needed for revival? What has to happen? Prayer, crying out to God. No revival or reformation ever occurs without fervent prayer. Verse 9 tells us the prophet cried out to the Lord and God answered him. Nothing will happen without people crying out to God for help.

The first stage of revival is to realize we are in sin, and we need a holy God. To repent of our great sins and return to God – it is a reform in our hearts. Does God respond to repentance? Yes! He brings revival, reformation, and change. And in I Samuel 7, he defeats the enemies of Israel. Martyn Lloyd-Jones in his book, *Revival*, tells us that there was a great preacher in Wales whose name was John Elias. He once preached a sermon at a fair. This fair was well known for all its vice and sin. But Elias preached one sermon and ended the fair forever. The fair ended and was never revived. That is the power of God, when he defeats the enemy by using his people.

Now, going back to Matthew 4 when Jesus starts his ministry, we see several things that happen. First, we know he preached. If we are going to have revival, it comes by the preaching of the Word. There is no way revival will come without that. Jesus preached to the people.

In the 1980s, a Congress on Biblical Exposition (COBE) met. Its purpose was to encourage and warn the American Church. The main message from the event was that churches must return to biblical preaching or the Western world would continue its decline into a valueless culture. (*Preaching: How to Preach Biblically*, John MacArthur, pg. 4) Take a look around today! We live in such a culture – true, biblical, sound, doctrinal preaching is needed to save our culture. Revival does not occur without it.

Again looking at Matthew 4, we find that Jesus calls his first disciples, brothers Peter and Andrew, and James and John, telling them to follow him. Then, Jesus proclaims the gospel, teaching in the synagogues and healing the sick. This included all kinds of people with afflictions, diseases, physical ailments, and those oppressed by demons. He healed them all. So, we should be very careful here to understand this is how Jesus started his ministry – preaching, teaching, calling disciples, and healing. That is what the Bible says, and it is instructive for us. Revival may come in many forms as God wills it, but if we look to Jesus as our example, who

started the greatest reformation in history, then we know revival includes all these things, and many more. The question today is what about us? What do we need to do? What has the Holy Spirit told you to do? God has called each of us to do something for his kingdom. What has he given to you? What has he sent you to do? The kingdom of Jesus Christ manifests in the world when each of us does our part, when we do what God has gifted us to do. Jesus proclaimed the kingdom, and that is big, it includes many, many things. We all have a part to play, each of us is required for the full manifestation of the kingdom of God.

Now, in wrapping up our study on revival and reformation, I am reminded of a book. The title is *Crucible: The Choices That Change Your Life Forever*, by Phil Tuttle and Chris Tiegreen. The book is about King David and critical times in his life when the choices he made defined who he was and also who he was becoming. There are severe tests in life that change us. How we go into a situation is not how we come out. God changes us. The choices we make during difficult tests determine where we end up – it is a test of our character. Now, I will say this about the church in America. We are in a time of difficulty, a time of testing, and we will not come out of this time the same as when it started. We are not supposed to stay the same – we MUST change. The choices we make during this season will determine many things in the coming days. Will we respond like Jesus, will we experience revival? What choices will we make when things get hard; we have to choose between what is right and what is convenient or comfortable. Or what is right versus having money or wealth. Will we trust God or man? In the book of Revelation there are two churches that Jesus commends and does not rebuke. These are the churches of Smyrna and Philadelphia. Listen to what Jesus says to the church of Smyrna:

“I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich) and the slander of those who say that they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. ¹⁰ Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have tribulation. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life. Revelation 2:9-10

Listen to what Jesus says to the church at Philadelphia:

“I know your works. Behold, I have set before you an open door, which no one is able to shut. I know that you have but little power, and yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name. ⁹ Behold, I will make those of the synagogue of Satan who say that they are Jews and are not, but lie—behold, I will make them come and bow down before your feet, and they will learn that I have loved you. ¹⁰ Because you have kept my word about patient endurance, I will keep you from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world, to try those who dwell on the earth. ¹¹ I am coming soon. Hold fast what you have, so that no one may seize your crown. ¹² The one who conquers, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God. Never shall he go out of it, and I will write on him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down from my God out of heaven, and my own new name. Revelation 3:8-12

Smyrna was experiencing tribulation, poverty, and slander, and Jesus simply says for them to be faithful and he will give them the crown of life. In Philadelphia there is an open door and they have kept the word, yet the church has little power. Does the text tell us these churches are wealthy? No! Are they experiencing tribulation? Yes! What does that communicate? God's kingdom is not like the world. God blesses his people in the midst of tribulation, and he rewards faithfulness. Are there churches like this in America today? Yes there are. However, in general the American church is like the church of Laodicea in Revelation 3. Listen to what the text says.

I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot! ¹⁶ So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth. ¹⁷ For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked. ¹⁸ I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire, so that you may be rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself and the shame of your nakedness may not be seen, and salve to anoint your eyes, so that you may see. ¹⁹ Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent. Revelation 3:15-19

The Church has a choice to make – if we want things to change, if we want revival, we have to choose Christ. Christ over everything. We may suffer, but God will still bless us. But we can also choose to compromise and continue our slide into rebellion. We can choose life or death. We can choose the world or God, it is up to us. It is time for us to get about the business of the kingdom - to be apart of the radical revival and reformation of Jesus Christ.

We have mentioned several ideas around revival and reformation. My question for you is which one are you supposed to be doing? What is God telling you to do? Listen to his voice.

Here are the nine points on revival and reformation –

- 1) Passionate realization for the need for revival and reform
- 2) The Bible must be accepted as true and divine
- 3) Pure biblical doctrine and interpretation restored
- 4) We need true prophets and forerunners like John the Baptist
- 5) Repentance – revival always started here
- 6) Prayer
- 7) Preaching and Teaching of God's word
- 8) Healing
- 9) Resolve to do what is right and be faithful to God in the midst of tribulation

The question remains, what are you going to do, what has God asked you to do, what is your part in his reformation? And once you know that, you must act, you must in obedience do all God has asked. This will bring the reformation of Jesus Christ.

Oh that you would rend the heavens and come down,
that the mountains might quake at your presence—
² as when fire kindles brushwood

and the fire causes water to boil—
to make your name known to your adversaries,
and that the nations might tremble at your presence!
³When you did awesome things that we did not look for,
you came down, the mountains quaked at your presence. Isaiah 64:1-3