

## Prayer and Renewal

- In this service, the last Sunday of the year, we focus on prayer to God for the past year and the new year coming forward
  - Prayer for vision for the community
  - To rededicate the community to God
  - Prayer for a filling of the Holy Spirit to guide us and empower us
- Throughout the Old and New Testaments and church history, every spiritual awakening was founded on corporate, prevailing, intensive, kingdom-centered prayer
- We cannot create spiritual renewal by ourselves, but we can ask God to send his Holy Spirit to change our hearts, our churches, and our communities

### OT Prayer and Renewal

- Continual pattern of God's people falling into spiritual stagnation and turning towards other idols to worship.
- They needed periods of constant renewal which took on various forms--
  - Joshua 24—formal covenant renewal
  - Judges 3:7-11, 10:6-16—turn away from God, but then cry out and are restored
- If we look at all of these various revivals, we are first struck by how different they are. Some are formal ceremonies. Some seem to be spontaneous. Some are led by a strong central leader, and some seem to bubble up from the grassroots. But one thing is stated over and over again: the people “cried out to the Lord.” It is the only factor that is always present in every revival. It is corporate, intense, prevailing prayer—not for personal needs, but for the presence and reality of God among his people.

### NT Prayer and Renewal

- Most famous is Acts—Pentecost in Acts 2 (but others appear in Acts 4:31; 7:55; 8:17; 10:44; and 13:9.)
  - Easy to be distracted by “tongues” but what else do these events have in common?
    - Believers were together in prayer (raising their voices to God)
    - They were filled with the Holy Spirit
    - They were declaring the wonders of God

### Content of Corporate Prayer

- Common components in prayer
  - A request for grace to confess sins and humble ourselves;
  - A compassion and zeal for the flourishing of the church; an enabling of power to speak the word
  - A yearning to know God, to see his face, to see his glory.
- Most interesting is to study biblical prayer for revival, such as in Acts 4 (power to speak the word and perform signs) or Exodus 33 (wanting to see the glory of God) or Nehemiah 1 (confessing the sins of the people), where these three elements are evident. Notice in Acts 4, for example, that the disciples, who had been threatened, did not ask for protection for themselves and their families, but only for boldness to keep preaching!
- Analyze Acts 4
  - They pray, but not in a petition. They don't ask for a change in their circumstances. They don't ask for an explanation from God as to why they are suffering. They don't ask for revenge against the leaders (Alexander “their demand is not now for miracles of vengeance or destruction, such as fire from heaven, but for miracles of mercy”.)
  - They pray Psalm 2 which shows the object of their prayer is on the Anointed One—Jesus—the one who was rejected. They know they can be free only inasmuch as they turn their gaze towards Jesus and away from their circumstances.
    - Freedom and liberation from the fear of loss and suffering come only when we fix our eyes not on our circumstances but on our savior.
    - They preach the gospel to their hearts again—not theology, not advice, not strategy—but the pure “good news” that Jesus, though killed, conquered death and therefore there is nothing to fear.
  - The result? They gave and shared

- When we're captive to fear and not free, we become petty, obsessed with small things, making mountains out of mole hills—we shut ourselves off from others and refuse to be vulnerable. Everything little thing bothers us and we hoard our time, energy and money for ourselves fearful of losing it.
- Meditate on the phrase “shaken” that occurs when they pray—this wasn’t just some spiritual Pentecostal or emotional experience
  - The presence of God frequently shakes (Exodus 19:18 Mt. Sinai, Isaiah 6:4, Judges 5) because his presence is so much bigger than our present reality.
    - Something of greater reality encountering something of lesser reality
    - If God's presence, the reality of the gospel, hits home to you it should shake you down to your very core.
  - Matthew: The earth shook and the rocks split—something was coming down
    - God coming down in judgement on Jesus
    - He was shaken to pieces
  - But then on Easter there was another earthquake—death was cracking (the deep magic according to C.S. Lewis)
    - When we turn our eyes to the stone the builders rejected, we get a new cornerstone-We are freed to love, be vulnerable, lose our wealth, give lavishly because our gaze is not on ourselves but on Jesus! The gospel frees us to live this way.
  - The gospel, God entering into our lives through the life death and resurrection of Jesus, shakes us-breaks us down to see that we are fleeting, captive souls and yet, by what Jesus did for us, we are eternal, freed children of God who can love and give lavishly because our gaze is not on our own lives and circumstances but on the One who first gave to us lavishly his own life.