A New Day Dawns

Over the last several years, Americans have consistently told pollsters that they believe that our country is headed in the wrong direction (by a 2-to-1 margin). We need a fresh touch from God, just as the Jewish people did as the New Testament era begins. From Abraham to the Exodus to the judges to the kings, Israel wavered in following the Lord. Under Solomon the Lord’s presence filled the temple (I Kings 8:10). By Ezekiel’s time (10:18), God’s glory departed.

The Old Testament closed with a promise, “But for you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings. And you will go out and leap like calves released from the stall.” Malachi 4:2. 400 years passed before the silence was broken.

Three Events That Broke the Silence:

1. A _________(Faithful) Couple
   a. “In the time of Herod king of Judea there was a priest named Zechariah…; his wife Elizabeth was also a descendant of Aaron. Both of them were upright in the sight of God, observing all the Lord’s commandments and regulations blamelessly.” Luke 1:5-6.
   b. Zechariah, like Abraham, understood that we are saved by faith alone (Genesis 15:6; Habakkuk 2:4). He confessed his sins to the Lord (Psalm 130:3) and was clothed in God’s righteousness (Isaiah 61:10). This is why he could obey the Lord’s commands blamelessly.
   c. Revival begins with a handful of faithful people. In Is This the End?, Pastor David Jeremiah observes that American Christians are under siege today (stereotyped, marginalized, threatened, intimidated, and sued).
   d. Several times in the past, there was a feeling that the culture was too depraved to ever come back. Spiritual decline in the early 1700s was followed by the Great Awakening. An ungodly American frontier was awakened by a second revival in the early 1800s. Before the Civil War, an anxious America turned to God again beginning with the Businessman’s Awakening of 1857.

2. A _________(Divine) Appointment
   a. “Once when Zechariah’s division was on duty and he was serving as priest before God, he was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood, to go into the temple of the Lord and burn incense.” Luke 1:8-9. Although this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity seemed to be due to the luck of the draw, God was in it. Nothing happens by chance.
   b. In 1968, just as America was rocked by war protesters and inner city violence, Ted and Liz Wise opened The Living Room, a San Francisco coffeehouse ministry targeting hippies. Soon hippies were coming to Christ up and down the West Coast. The press called them “the Jesus People”.


3. A ________ (Surprise) Visit

a. “Then the angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing at the right side of the altar of incense. When Zechariah saw him, he was startled and was gripped with fear. But the angel said to him, ‘Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard.’” Luke 1:11-13. This was the first angelic appearance since another Zechariah had a series of visions (Zechariah 1-6).

b. In 1905, a young Welsh coal miner named Evan Roberts went to Bible school for pastoral training. While home to practice his first sermon, only 17 showed up but the presence of God was there in an unusual way. This sparked a revival that brought over 100,000 to Christ within three months. In America, this sparked the modern-day Pentecostal movement still growing today.

In the movie War Room, an elderly African-American woman named Clara poured out her heart, passionately praying for revival:

*Lord, we need a generation of believers who are not ashamed of the gospel!* Raise up a generation, Lord, that will take light into this world; that will not compromise when under pressure; that will not cower, Lord, when others fall away!

*Raise ‘em up, Lord, that they will proclaim that there is salvation in the name of Jesus Christ!* Lord, call us to battle, that we may proclaim the King of Kings, and Lord of Lords! I pray these things with all my heart. Raise ‘em up, Lord! Raise ‘em up!
Discussion Questions

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1. Do you believe our country is in need of a spiritual awakening? Why or why not? Why were the Jewish people in desperate need of revival as the New Testament era opened? At what times in the Old Testament did Israel seem to be doing well spiritually? At what times did they seem to struggle? Why did they waver so far from one extreme to the other? Read I Kings 8:10 and compare this with Ezekiel 10:18. What happened to cause the presence of God to fill the temple and what happened to cause it to depart? What promise is given at the end of the Old Testament era in Malachi 4:2? How do you think the Jewish people felt after 400 years of silence since the last prophet had taught in Israel?

2. Read Luke 1:5-7. Why were Zechariah and Elizabeth called righteous and blameless? What indications are there that they understood the teaching of Genesis 15:6, Habakkuk 2:4, Psalm 130:3, and Isaiah 61:10? How do these verses teach that salvation is by faith and not by works? How do our works give evidence of our faith? Pastor David Jeremiah observes in Is This the End? that American Christians are stereotyped, marginalized, threatened, intimidated, and sued. How have you experienced or observed this?

3. Why is it important to understand that there have been other times in American history where God’s people were concerned that the spiritual climate had deteriorated to the place of no return? How did the Great Awakening of 1740 heal the lethargy in the early 1700s? How did the frontier revival in the early 1800s bless America? How were we blessed by the Businessman’s Awakening in 1857?

4. Read Luke 1:8-10. Why was this a once-in-a-lifetime event for Zechariah? Do you believe in luck? Why or why not? Have you had events in your life that appeared to be luck but in retrospect you can see the hand of God? How did God use Ted and Liz Wise to begin the Jesus People movement? How does this give you hope for today?

5. Read Luke 8:11-13. Why was Zechariah so startled? Would you be startled? How long had it been since an angel had appeared in Israel? How did God use Evan Roberts to spark the Welsh Revival of 1905? Why do you think God used a young Bible student who was practicing how to preach? Did you see the movie War Room? Do you remember Clara’s prayer for revival? Will you commit to pray for revival in our area and in our country at this critical time in history?