

## Open the Door

### *Preparing the Way for the Next Great Move of God*

The man was near tears. I had just finished speaking to a group of denominational leaders, trying to paint a realistic picture of the church's desperate need for revival.

"Oh, Dale," said one of the denominational leaders, a district superintendent. "It's much worse than you said. I have tried to get the attention of my superiors at the home office, but... they don't acknowledge the critical nature of the situation in our churches. Someone has to tell them that the emperor has no clothes on!"

The man's comments reminded me of what Jesus said to a self-satisfied group of believers in Rev. 3:17: "You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.' But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked."

These words to the first century church of Laodicea clearly indicate that Jesus wants us to confront the truth of our spiritual condition – and find the remedy in Him (Rev. 3:18).

### **The Sobering Truth**

So what is the truth about the church of Jesus Christ in America today? To be sure, there are individuals and churches who love Christ and His work, who sacrifice for His cause, and who are devoted to His ways. However, the picture of the church in America as a whole is sobering.

- In proportion to the U.S. population, there are less than half as many churches today as there were in 1900.
- Roughly 4,000 churches are started each year – while 7,000 die and close their doors.
- In 1991, 21 percent of all adults were unchurched. In 2002, 34 percent fit that description.
- The United States is the fourth largest unchurched nation in the world (behind China, India, and Indonesia).
- The average number of adults attending Protestant church is 90. This represents a 10 percent decline from 1997 and a 12 percent decline since 1992.

Statistically, the church of Jesus in America is not doing well. In fact, research indicates that although the church around the world is graving three times faster than the population rate, the church in the U.S. may be losing ground.

### **The Need for Revival**

And what about the more subjective question of the church's impact on society? Does anyone really believe that our culture is more like Christ than it was 10 years ago? Many Christians believe that we are in a "moral free fall" and that society is to blame. I, however, agree with Henry Blackaby, who said, "If society as a whole seems to be getting darker and darker, it is not the problem of the darkness: the darkness is just acting like its nature. But it is that the light no longer dispels the darkness, and the salt no longer preserves. It's time for the light to say, 'if things are darker, the problem is with us.'"

Perhaps the clearest illustration of this point is what occurred in the church after September 11. Immediately following the tragedy, church attendance spiked. What was the outcome of this unprecedented opportunity? As one researcher commented, "Millions of nonChristians went to churches after September 11 looking for something which they did not possess, only to leave, not finding what they were looking for."

In other words, when nonChristians came into contact with Christians, there was not enough that was compellingly different about us, our lives, or our worship to keep them and draw them to Jesus. We and our churches have become like the world. The only thing that separates many churches from a Rotary Club is religious-sounding words and activities.

A local church is simply a reflection of her members. A denomination or fellowship is simply the sum of the churches in that group. If the people are drifting from an intimate relationship with Christ, the church will by definition do the same. That's why we need revival.

## Revelation Model

The seven churches in Revelation provide a good template from which to prepare for revival. In these chapters, Jesus points out positive and negative issues – and individual and corporate issues – that need to be addressed if His presence is to return to or remain with a church. The Revelation passages are deeply convicting, but also encouraging. Despite the desperate state of the church today, “Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me” (Rev. 3:20). Jesus desires to have intimate fellowship with *anyone* who opens the door to His knock – right here, right now! On that, Scripture is abundantly clear.

Revival is always a sovereign work of God: “‘Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,’ says the LORD Almighty” (Zech. 4:6). Corporate revival will come only when God is ready to bring it. “It is not ours to create; it is ours to receive,” says *An Urgent Appeal*. The Holy Spirit, however, often chooses to work through the things that prepare us, such as prayer, repentance, desperation, Bible study, or worship. By not preparing ourselves for revival, we may virtually guarantee His continued absence and judgment.

In this theme section, you will find a Bible study on the seven churches of Revelation to help you and your church discover the issues and attitudes Jesus commends and condemns. You’ll find an exciting account of how the ongoing revival in Uganda came about, as well as short pieces on how to prepare for revival and what we can look forward to when it comes.

Someone once asked the British evangelist Gypsy Smith, “How do you start a revival?” Smith replied, “Go home and get a piece of chalk. Go into your closet and draw a circle on the floor. Kneel down in the middle of the circle and ask God to start the revival in side the chalk mark. When He has answered your prayer, the revival has begun.”

So, my friend, here is some chalk. Will you go into your closet?

Dale Schlafer is president of the Center for World Revival and Awakening, and author of the newly released *Revival 101* (Pray! Books, c 2003, available by calling (800) 366-7788 or going to [www.praymag.com](http://www.praymag.com)). Because of his passion for revival and the role God has given him in helping to bring it about, the *Pray!* editors invited Dale to help us put together this issue.

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