

THE SOLEMN ASSEMBLY



**Learning from various revivals
in the Old Testament...**

A series by David Legge

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The Solemn Assembly - Chapter 1

"Under Jehoshaphat"

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I want to say to you a little bit about what I'm going to speak on in the four sessions that I will be preaching, because I'm going to speak on the same theme. Now that doesn't mean that if you come to tonight, you don't need to come to the rest, because the theme will be taken from various different portions of Scripture. Now I want to emphasise, before I go on any further, that this was not originally my choice. The Faith Mission has not told me what to preach on, but I have to tell you tonight that God has. I know that should be the case all the time, and in a roundabout way it really is - but I have felt compelled, I would have to say by certain supernatural indicators (and I don't want to go into that in any detail), but in a very unusual way and set of circumstances God has brought these messages upon my heart. They are more than mere sermons, I believe they are messages from God for you.

I want to speak to you on 'Solemn Assemblies' - do you know what that is? I told my wife what I was preaching on, and she said: 'Is that depressing churches?'. Now I have been to a few solemn assemblies in my time, but that's not what I have to preach on. It's a biblical practice that is largely unheard of and unknown to the modern church. As we study the word of God, particularly the Old Testament, it appears that solemn assemblies have been an integral part of biblical revivals. Indeed, they are a vital preparation for God to move in and renew His people.

Let me just say a few things about solemn assemblies before we read the Scriptures. Now there's a bit of debate goes about as to whether we should call all the reformation movements, particularly in the Old Testament, true, genuine, spiritual revival with lasting effect - but for the sake of simplicity, let's consider them all under this term 'revival'. Though biblical revivals are very different from one another, there is one common preceding factor in each, and that is the solemn assembly. Richard Owen Roberts highlights four factors concerning this occurrence, this activity of a solemn assembly. Listen to the four: one, first of all there is a tragic declension. Every revival in the Old Testament is preceded by a period of moral and spiritual decline among God's people. I'm not talking about the world or the Gentile nations, we're talking about Israel, God's chosen elect - there is a tragic declension. The second factor is: there is a righteous judgement from God. Without exception, Old Testament revivals have always been preceded by some kind of righteous judgement from God. Now, while some of these judgements are immediate and final, actually resulting in the deaths among the wicked among the congregation of Israel, other of these judgements are gracious, they are remedial, corrective, resulting in a brokenness amongst God's people, prayer, repentance, and an extraordinary seeking of God's face.

So, first of all there is a tragic declension, then there is a righteous judgement from God, and thirdly: there is always a raising up of an immensely burdened leader or leaders. Now I intend to consider solemn assemblies in the four sessions that I have under four godly men. Then fourthly, after someone is burdened, or people are burdened by God, God's people engage in some extraordinary action. Now, while this action varies from revival to revival, the most common action taken was that of a solemn assembly. Now maybe you're sitting here, and you're asking yourself: 'What is a solemn assembly?'. Well, let me put it very, very simply: it was when God, by His Spirit, said: 'Gather My saints together unto Me', and God's people began to confess their sin, they repented of their sin, they changed their mind, they changed their heart, they changed their direction, they renounced their sin, they forsook their sin - and then, positively, they renewed their faith and obedient walk toward God. That, very, very simply, is a solemn assembly.

Now some believers, particularly those who feel they know their Bible better than everybody else, immediately object and tell us that a solemn assembly is an Old Testament concept - and so immediately they are unenthusiastic about engaging in something that is 'old covenant'. I want to say to you tonight that the principles behind the solemn assembly, these principles are carried right into the New Testament, and indeed, I believe, probably seen in every revival in church history, and in revivals that are yet to be in the will of God. If you are here and in doubt about this practice, thinking that it's not New Testament, I want you to consider just very briefly the birth of the church. Go to the Acts of the Apostles, and I ask you: what were the disciples engaged in during those ten days of prayerful preparation in the Upper Room before Pentecost? It was probably the greatest solemn assembly that ever took place in the New Testament era!

Now let me give a caveat of caution before I proceed any further. We should not think of a solemn assembly as a mere ingredient in a formula of revival. God is never about technique. We've got to realise this! We cannot manipulate the Almighty. Now, yes, we can, I believe, make preparation to invite God and welcome God to meet us - but solemn assemblies, if they are truly that in a biblical sense, must be motivated by the Holy Spirit. This is not merely cause and effect - if you do this, that will happen - solemn assembly will only bear lasting fruit if it is initiated by the Spirit, and if it is not it will be a form of godliness denying the power. Can I say to you, whilst I believe it is in the heart of God - and I wouldn't be bringing this message otherwise - for a true solemn assembly of God's people to happen in our land, God detests and despises false solemn assemblies!

Now this is not our text tonight, but I want us to look at it in introduction. I want you to turn with me to Isaiah chapter 1 verse 10, this is a description of an empty solemn assembly: 'Hear the word of the LORD, you rulers of Sodom; give ear to the law of our God, you people of Gomorrah: To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices to Me?'. Now let me just pause in case you missed that: God was talking to the leaders of His congregation in Israel as the rulers of Sodom and the people of Gomorrah. Let that sink in: "To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices to Me?', says the LORD. 'I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fed

cattle. I do not delight in the blood of bulls, or of lambs or goats. When you come to appear before Me, who has required this from your hand, to trample My courts? Bring no more futile sacrifices; incense is an abomination to Me. The New Moons, the Sabbaths", watch this, "the calling of assemblies; I cannot endure iniquity and the sacred meeting. Your New Moons and your appointed feasts My soul hates; they are a trouble to Me, I am weary of bearing them. When you spread out your hands, I will hide My eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not hear. Your hands are full of blood".

What I want us to consider over these next days in these sessions is light years away from that. It certainly is far removed from this concept: 'Oh, we've got a problem in our church, or we've got a problem in the Faith Mission, or we've got a problem in the land and we need to have a big meeting, or we need to have a big series of meetings, or a mission, or a Convention, or we need to form a committee and then all of a sudden this will be blessed and God will come in and do something!'. If this is not God-arranged it will come to nothing, it will be God-despised. It must be God-inspired. The last thing I want to do is for some of you to hear my preaching over these next sessions and get the idea into your head: 'Let's arrange a solemn assembly, and then there will be revival' - no! Solemn assembly must be birthed of God, or it is worthless.

Now I want us to consider tonight 'The Solemn Assembly Under Jehoshaphat', so we're turning to our text tonight - 2 Chronicles chapter 20. In each session I will consider another solemn assembly under a man of God, tonight we're considering Jehoshaphat. Second Chronicles 20 verse 1, and we're reading down to verse 23: *"It happened after this that the people of Moab with the people of Ammon, and others with them besides the Ammonites, came to battle against Jehoshaphat. Then some came and told Jehoshaphat, saying, 'A great multitude is coming against you from beyond the sea, from Syria; and they are in Hazazon Tamar' (which is En Gedi). And Jehoshaphat feared, and set himself to seek the LORD, and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah. So Judah gathered together to ask help from the LORD; and from all the cities of Judah they came to seek the LORD. Then Jehoshaphat stood in the assembly of Judah and Jerusalem, in the house of the LORD, before the new court, and said: 'O LORD God of our fathers, are You not God in heaven, and do You not rule over all the kingdoms of the nations, and in Your hand is there not power and might, so that no one is able to withstand You? Are You not our God, who drove out the inhabitants of this land before Your people Israel, and gave it to the descendants of Abraham Your friend forever? And they dwell in it, and have built You a sanctuary in it for Your name, saying, 'If disaster comes upon us; sword, judgment, pestilence, or famine; we will stand before this temple and in Your presence (for Your name is in this temple), and cry out to You in our affliction, and You will hear and save'. And now, here are the people of Ammon, Moab, and Mount Seir; whom You would not let Israel invade when they came out of the land of Egypt, but they turned from them and did not destroy them; here they are, rewarding us by coming to throw us out of Your possession which You have given us to inherit. O our God, will You not judge them? For we have no power against this great multitude that is coming against us; nor do we know what to do, but our eyes are upon You'. Now all Judah, with their*

little ones, their wives, and their children, stood before the LORD. Then the Spirit of the LORD came upon Jahaziel the son of Zechariah, the son of Benaiah, the son of Jeiel, the son of Mattaniah, a Levite of the sons of Asaph, in the midst of the assembly. And he said, 'Listen, all you of Judah and you inhabitants of Jerusalem, and you, King Jehoshaphat! Thus says the LORD to you: 'Do not be afraid nor dismayed because of this great multitude, for the battle is not yours, but God's. Tomorrow go down against them. They will surely come up by the Ascent of Ziz, and you will find them at the end of the brook before the Wilderness of Jeruel. You will not need to fight in this battle. Position yourselves, stand still and see the salvation of the LORD, who is with you, O Judah and Jerusalem!'. Do not fear or be dismayed; tomorrow go out against them, for the LORD is with you'. And Jehoshaphat bowed his head with his face to the ground, and all Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem bowed before the LORD, worshiping the LORD. Then the Levites of the children of the Kohathites and of the children of the Korahites stood up to praise the LORD God of Israel with voices loud and high. So they rose early in the morning and went out into the Wilderness of Tekoa; and as they went out, Jehoshaphat stood and said, 'Hear me, O Judah and you inhabitants of Jerusalem: Believe in the LORD your God, and you shall be established; believe His prophets, and you shall prosper'. And when he had consulted with the people, he appointed those who should sing to the LORD, and who should praise the beauty of holiness, as they went out before the army and were saying: 'Praise the LORD, For His mercy endures forever'. Now when they began to sing and to praise, the LORD set ambushes against the people of Ammon, Moab, and Mount Seir, who had come against Judah; and they were defeated. For the people of Ammon and Moab stood up against the inhabitants of Mount Seir to utterly kill and destroy them. And when they had made an end of the inhabitants of Seir, they helped to destroy one another".

Let us pray for a moment please. I want us all to bow in prayer, and I want you to pray please now, all of you pray now that God might speak. Have you come here tonight to hear from God? Will you lift your heart now and say: 'Lord, speak to me'? Whatever your situation is - you mightn't even be converted, or you might be a backslider, or you might be thinking that you're walking with God - but you need to hear from God, I need to hear from God as I'm standing here before you tonight. So let's pray for one another, you pray for me, and I'll pray for you: Holy Abba Father, we come to You in that Name that is above every name, Lord Jesus Christ. Lord, we need You, we need You now. We don't need You yesterday, we don't need You 50 years ago, we need You now, Lord! If You don't come and help me, and if You don't come and meet us, Lord, we will be unchanged, and we will be no better, Lord, and no more use to Your kingdom and Your cause if You don't meet with us tonight, Lord. There is a real need tonight, Lord, we feel the burden, we feel the Holy Spirit crying with in us: 'Is there not a cause?'. O God, come and meet with us by the power of Your Spirit, and have Your way. For Jesus' sake, Amen.

The reason why Jehoshaphat needed to gather God's people together for a solemn assembly is found in verse 2: 'Some came and told Jehoshaphat, saying, 'A great multitude is coming against you from beyond''. The reason why it is on God's heart that there should be a solemn assembly now, I believe, among God's people, yes, in

our land, is because there is a great multitude that is coming against us. You might say: 'What's he talking about?'. Well, if you're spiritually in tune at all, you will understand exactly what I'm talking about. Now, of course, the trinity of evil that has always been against God's people is the world, the flesh, and the devil. There's no doubt about it that they are ratcheting up their influence in the church and, of course, in the society in which we live. Take the first, the world, and the allure of wealth has a great draw: fame and fortune. We only have to turn on our televisions tonight, if we were at home, and see the cult of celebrity and how our young people in particular are totally and utterly intoxicated by the thought of being famous. Jarvis Cocker, the 90s pop star, recently said - it was reported, I think, in The Independent newspaper - 'Fame has taken the place of going to heaven'. That's profound. You can have heaven now, if you're famous - everything that you could ever want, that is the concept that the world has sold particularly to young people, and they have fallen hook, line and sinker for it.

Then there is the flesh - we could take a whole series on that one, lust in particular. The new gods of the age are Baal and Ashteroth, no doubt about it, in our land and in the whole global society. The Internet has brought this to epidemic proportions, and the biggest threat upon families today, most likely, is Internet pornography - and it's wrecking the church! We're afraid to mention it, we're afraid to deal with it. Then there is the devil, and he hasn't gone away you know. I heard a Roman Catholic exorcist say recently that it's not that the devil has upped his game, it's the fact that people are more willing to play the game that is the problem. Whatever you think of his theology is irrelevant, he was speaking in relation to one of these new possession films that has come out recently, 'The Devil Inside'. Now I actually disagree with him, I think the devil has upped his game, and as we come closer to the return of our Lord Jesus he will up his game - but he is correct in saying that more people are willing to play his game, and because of that they're coming into bondage and all sorts of oppression.

We in the church have to realise, if we haven't already, that there is a great multitude coming against us. These three are more bold than ever in living memory, perhaps in modern-day memory: the world, the flesh, and the devil. Consider the proposals of our present government to make marriage no longer between a man and a woman, but between a man and a man, a woman and a woman. The audacity and the arrogance to redefine a God-given institution! The church is under attack! I read in The Times on the 13th of last month regarding this gay marriage debate, a quote from Dr Jeffrey Johns, the openly homosexual Dean of St Albans - listen, this was the headline: 'The Church Is the Last Bastion of Prejudice'. Is it any wonder Paul said: 'We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places'. There is a great multitude that is coming against us, and it is fearful!

That was Jehoshaphat's experience, if you look at verse 3: 'Jehoshaphat feared'. Now what is our reaction to this multitude that is coming against us in our day and age? Well, we ought to be somewhat afraid - but you know that Jehoshaphat didn't stop

there, he didn't give in to fear, in verse 3 we see that his fear drove him to God, and he 'set himself to seek the LORD, and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah'. Now, we have a choice, in the face of such a multitude that is against us, we have a choice to capitulate - and many of God's people are just giving in, they're just rolling over. 'We can't change it!', and many of them do it theologically, and they say, 'Well, the Lord's coming soon, things are going to get worse and worse, so let's hold the fort for He is coming', and they don't fight at all. They capitulate, effectively, with the enemy; or they conform, and they allow worldliness to enter into the church, and into their lives, and into their lifestyle practices. But there is a small remnant of God's people, and I believe God is infusing, by His Spirit, into their spirit in our day and age this: 'Confront this multitude! Do not capitulate! Do not conform, but confront!'. Let's do something about it!

Now many of those folk don't know what to do, but they know something needs to be done. So how do you confront? Well, Paul tells us in 2 Corinthians 10:4-5, listen: 'For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Jesus Christ'. Now those are profound verses, and we don't have time to expound them, but what we need to do is use our God-given weapons to bring the influence of the world, the flesh, and the devil among God's congregation into the obedience of Jesus Christ, to bring captivity captive in other words!

I'm sure I don't need to remind you that the blessed Lamb of God shed His blood, every drop, that we might have these weapons. He, on the cross, spoilt principalities and powers, and made a show of them openly, triumphing over them through His cross. He led captivity captive and gave gifts to men, and He has given the church weapons through the victory of the cross. Listen: they are not political! They never were, and they never will be! They are not organisational, you can't organise this. They're not ecclesiastical, they will not come through a denomination. They're not legal, you can't go to court to bring the kingdom of God. Neither are they intellectual. They are not even, dare I say it from a pulpit, doctrinal. You can fill your head with all the doctrine you like, but you will not pull down these strongholds with mere doctrine. Now I'm not suggesting that we don't revere these things, or seek to influence them even in society, but the weapons of our warfare are spiritual. 'It is not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit', says the Lord of Hosts. We as the church need to take up these spiritual weapons again.

Now let's look at this man Jehoshaphat, and how he used these weapons. I want you to see, before we look at the solemn assembly as such, that Jehoshaphat sought the Lord himself first. Now that's vital, I feel, because it would be easier for me here at the convention to preach, or to stand up and say: 'You all need to get your act together, and this is what you need to do', but I as the preacher refuse to humble myself to seek the Lord. Now I have to say this to you, and I feel convicted in even saying it myself, but much modern pulpit ministry is doing that: they are telling people from expounding the word of God what the church needs to do, but it's pharisaical in essence - because, as Jesus said about the Pharisees, 'Do what they

teach, but not what they do'. So often that can be said of us as preachers, and it's a great danger of expository preaching of God's word, where we can comfortably preach things with a complete absence of experience in our lives, and consequently with no authority!

Am I suggesting we stop preaching Bible exposition? No, I'm suggesting that we radically start living it! We need men, including this man, to preach what he already practices, to walk the talk - and that's the first place that Jehoshaphat started. He didn't call the solemn assembly, he sought the Lord himself, he dealt with himself first. But note what happened: this one man's burden moved out into something corporate among God's people, verses 3 and 4: 'Jehoshaphat feared, and set himself to seek the LORD, and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah. So Judah gathered together to ask help from the LORD; and from all the cities of Judah they came to seek the LORD'. One man's burden, as he broke before the Lord and got himself right with God, God's people started to gather around him - do not underestimate the impact of putting your own life right! It's like throwing the pebble into the pond, and the rings; it's like the billiard ball, you knock one and there is a knock-on effect. In the spiritual realm this is what can happen when one man or one woman comes and realises the great need that there is, and the multitude that is against God's people, and they endeavour to seek the Lord.

But note: they didn't get together to have a prayer meeting to tell God what He needed to do. They didn't ask God to bless what they were about to do. No, see their simple petition, look at it, look at the petition: 'Lord, help' - that's it, two words, 'Lord, help'. Do you know that's what we need? We need the Lord's help. We don't need more church growth gurus to tell us how to fill our pews, or to boost our finances. The church doesn't need recruitment of business consultants, or PR executives. We need men and women who know that they are bankrupt without divine aid, without the help of God. This brokenness, and this collective sense of need was communicated to God as they gathered, and they fasted and they prayed to God. Fasting, of course, is the abstinence from food - but what's the significance of it? Well, there are many aspects of significance, but one is that to eat is the natural process of sustaining the body, but when they were fasting they were communicating to God that there was a spiritual urgency that momentarily suspended the natural concerns of everyday life. In other words, the spiritual was taking precedence over the natural!

Here they were fasting and praying, and seeking God's face, to know why they were experiencing divine displeasure, why God was allowing the enemy to overcome them. Now it's all right for us, and I understand what I'm saying and the seriousness of it tonight, believe you me, it's all right us pointing the finger at the government, pointing the finger at various political parties, and various influences and institutions in our society - but we as the church need to take a hard look at ourselves, and we need to turn to God and say: 'Lord, why? Why has all this befallen us? What are our sins for Your divine displeasure upon us?'. Whatever else fasting does, it is a way of humbling ourselves before the Lord. It is a way of communicating our hunger and thirst after righteousness, our desperate need for God.

You look at Jehoshaphat's prayer, and like every true intercessor - and I've studied a great number of intercessors recently in the Bible, and I see that this is a trait in their prayers - they appeal two-foldly. First to the character of God, they touch the heart of God's attributes; and then they appeal to the covenant of God - His character and His covenant. That's what Jehoshaphat does, look at it in verse 6 and verse 7: 'O LORD God of our fathers, are You not God in heaven, and do You not rule over all the kingdoms of the nations, and in Your hand is there not power and might, so that no one is able to withstand You?' - that's God's character! He was acknowledging God as God, and then verse 7, notice the change in emphasis: 'Are You not our God?', our covenant God! The essence of Jehoshaphat's prayer was this: 'God, it is Your faithful name that is at stake. God, it is Your covenant promises that are at stake'. Verse 11, 'Here they are', the enemy, 'rewarding us by coming to throw us out of Your possession which You have given us to inherit'.

It's amazing, isn't it: God's name was at stake. Someone in the prayer meeting behind tonight was praying about how God has set His Word above His Name, and He has. His name is great, His name is high, but that's just an expression to show how important God takes His word, His covenant, His agreement, His promise. All that I'm talking about tonight of this great multitude coming against us, and the need for God's people to have a true Spirit-led solemn assembly, it is for one reason and one reason alone: God's name is at stake! It's not the Faith Mission that's at stake, it's not your denomination that's at stake, it's not even your local church: we need to be a people who are jealous for God's name, God's reputation, God's word! Now, we as the church, of course, are the bearers of His testimony. The heathen around us are saying: 'Where is your God?'. Have you not heard them? On the factory floor, in the workplace, down the main street, 'Where is your God? Where is He now?'. Our children and our grandchildren are questioning, like Gideon did: 'If the LORD is with us, why then has all this happened to us? And where are all His miracles which our fathers told us about, saying, 'Did not the LORD bring us up out of Egypt?' But now the LORD has forsaken us and delivered us into the hands of the Midianites'. You know, we need revival, but we need a revival of a passion for the glory of God, His name and His claim.

This prayer of Jehoshaphat's was a prayer for God's glory, and that's why it moved heaven. It appealed to God's character, it appealed to God's covenant, and in verse 9 we see him actually quoting: "If disaster comes upon us; sword, judgment, pestilence, or famine; we will stand before this temple and in Your presence (for Your name is in this temple), and cry out to You in our affliction, and You will hear and save us'. If you go back a few chapters to 2 Chronicles chapter 6 you will find that covenant reiterated in the dedication. He was standing upon God's word, claiming God's character and His covenant. Now this reminded me, and I know many of you don't need reminding here in the Faith Mission, but we have to be aware that some folk have not heard these stories - particularly some of our young people have not heard the stories of revival, such as Lewis and the other Hebrides. This reminded me of Duncan Campbell, as he gathered to prayer about 30 people around him to pray, and he says, and I'm quoting him: 'While the hours were passing by, I found myself fighting and not getting anywhere' - have you ever been there? Put your hand up if

you've ever been there! Fighting and not getting anywhere! There's a lot of liars in the building tonight, or very sheepish people! I've been there, and he was there. 'After midnight', he said, 'I turned to a young man and said, 'I feel led by God to ask you to pray''. He recounts that: 'This dear man got up and said', and this is his prayer, "O God, You made a promise to pour water upon him that is thirsty and floods upon the dry ground, and, Lord, it's not happening". Could you be honest with God like that? He paused for a moment, and then he continued, 'Lord, I don't know how the others here stand in Your presence; I don't know how the ministers stand, but, Lord, if I know anything about my own heart I stand before You as an empty vessel, thirsting for You and for a manifestation of Your power'. He halted again, and then after a moment of tense silence he cried, 'O God, Your honour is at stake, and I now challenge You to fulfil Your covenant engagement and do what You have promised to do'. Duncan Campbell records that, 'Believe it or not - and you can check it if you want', he said, 'the house was shaking like a leaf, the dishes were clattering on the sideboard'. An elder who was standing next to him remarked, 'Mr. Campbell, an earthquake'. He said, 'Yes' and gave the blessing right away. They went outside and found the community awake with an awareness of the presence of God. Men and women were carrying chairs and stools and asked: 'Is there any room for us in the church?'

Now, notice there was no arrogant tone in his prayer, it wasn't a know-it-all tone, rather it was what we find here in verse 12. Look at how Jehoshaphat prayed - after he pleaded God's character, he pleaded God's covenant, and then he cried: 'O our God, will You not judge them? For we have no power against this great multitude that is coming against us; nor do we know what to do, but our eyes are upon You'. That was his prayer - not, 'Lord, this is now what You need to do'. From East Belfast, where I come from, we say 'I'm beat' - do you know what that means? 'I'm beat', 'I'm bankrupt', 'I'm done, Lord', 'I have no more answers, I have no more schemes, I have no more programs, I have no more tricks. Lord, we do not know what to do'. Is there any of us who will admit this? 'Lord, we don't know what to do! What we have done has tried and failed, we're at the end of ourselves!'. What a sense!

Look at this scene in verse 13, and then, when they had reached this awful point of bankruptcy: 'all Judah, with their little ones, their wives, and their children', what a picture, 'stood before the LORD'. Can I ask you tonight, and I'm far from finished, but: are you standing before the Lord this evening? If you don't know what that means, well, then it doesn't apply to you - but if you're completely emptied of yourself, standing before God empty, waiting for something to happen because you haven't got the answers, and you don't know what to do, and you don't know what the next step is - well, when you get to that place, this is the wonder of it all: then the revelation came! Look at it, when you've exhausted of your stores of resources that's where God wants you tonight - young people, that's where God wants you - when you're completely at an end of yourself, then the voice came from God, verse 14: 'Then the Spirit of the LORD came upon Jahaziel'.

Wait till I tell you: whether it's Lewis, whether it's 1859, whether it's Acts chapter 2, whether it's Jehoshaphat and every solemn assembly in the Old Testament, and

whether it's the next move of God that is in the heart of God for this land of Ireland, it's only going to come from the Spirit of God falling. We need to return unto the Spirit of the Living God for our power. We need to, as our brother was sharing tonight in his testimony, forget about professions and get born-again believers! We need to get people that are filled, whatever terminology you want to use, in-filled, baptised, unctionised, perfect love, sealed in the Spirit - we need the Holy Spirit! We can't do without the Holy Spirit, we need to be guided by the Holy Spirit, we need to be led by the Holy Spirit, we need to have a revelation through the Holy Spirit - and this is what happened. When they came to an end of themselves, and said: 'Lord, we don't know what to do', the Spirit of God came down. Would it not be wonderful if the Spirit of God came down tonight because you didn't know what to do? God knows what to do, you know. God knows exactly what to do.

We need to be waiting on God to hear from Him, that's what the early church did. Acts 13:2: 'They ministered to the Lord and they fasted' - that's a solemn assembly - 'and the Holy Spirit said, 'Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them''. Now I don't know too much about the Faith Mission, I really don't. I have great respect for them, but I ask you: is that how you do your business? Because I'll tell you: most churches in our land don't do business that way. They don't wait on the Lord, and they certainly don't fast and pray and wait to hear what God says. They have a good idea in a committee meeting, and they pass round the minutes a couple of weeks later; and if the thing is done, well, it's done in human ingenuity. Please don't think I'm being unduly negative tonight, all I'm preaching is that Christ is the Head of the church and we need His direction. Now there's no doubt we cannot arrange a revival, I've said that. A.W. Tozer said you might as well try to plan a lightning strike as to plan a revival, no one has ever done it yet - but you can raise the lightning rod, you can. You can communicate to God the lack of power that you have personally in your life. You can lay hold of God's character, who is more willing to give the new are to receive. You can lay hold of His covenant to pour water upon him that is thirsty, that He may have mercy.

There is a principle here that you can be hungry after God, and if you are you will find Him if you search for Him with all your heart. But there is another principle, listen to it carefully, jot it down even if you will, listen: you will never experience what you have not received - you understand that, don't you? You can never experience what you have never received, equally so: you will never receive what you do not expect. You will never receive what you do not expect. Did you come to this meeting tonight expecting, needing, utterly bankrupt and empty? You need faith to believe that God, in your emptiness, will meet you. The outcome is found in this chapter, look, first of all we see in verses 15 and 16 that there was a direct instruction given. You're here tonight, and you maybe don't know what to do, you may be in the Faith Mission and you don't know what to do. Maybe you've come into this meeting, and in your church situation you don't know what to do, in your marriage, in your job, in your ministry, you don't know what to do. Well, the instruction was given while they waited on God in verses 15 and 16: 'Do not be afraid, the battle is not yours, but God's', and then very specific things in verse 16, 'Tomorrow go down against them. They will surely come up by the Ascent of Ziz, and you will find them at the end of the brook before

the Wilderness of Jeruel'. Very, very intricate details given by revelation, but it didn't come through lifting a book down from the library, or watching cable television, it came by getting on their face before God in brokenness and fasting and prayer - it came through a solemn assembly!

Have you ever sought God like this? Have you? You want direction, sure who doesn't? We treat God like the proverbial satnav, turn right at the next junction, and we want God just to tell us everything - and we're not prepared to come before Him empty to receive instruction directly from Him. Then see the second thing, verse 17, they remained dependent upon the Lord. Sometimes we can get a word from God and, well, we just go off and do the thing that He has told us, and we cease to be dependent upon Him. Verse 17 says: 'You will not need to fight in this battle. Position yourselves, stand still and see the salvation of the LORD, who is with you, O Judah and Jerusalem! Do not fear or be dismayed; tomorrow go out against them, for the LORD is with you', and they slew one another - but here, that took a lot of faith to stand and not fight and allow the Lord to fight for you! Is that a word from God to someone here tonight? You need to stand and allow the Lord to fight for you, and in fact they were to behave like spectators of what God was doing. Now listen: if any of you have even witnessed God moving in a small way, even in a very small way, you will know that that's the way you're made to feel: like an observer, a bystander, because He's doing it. Proverbs 23:26 says, listen to this: 'My son, give me your heart, and let your eyes observe my ways'. What a verse! 'My son', or daughter, 'give me your heart, and let your eyes observe my ways'.

There was a direct instruction given, they remained dependent, and see finally: their only response when God moved, verses 18 and 19, was to worship - that's what they did! At the end of verse 18 they worshipped the Lord, verse 19 they praised the Lord. The only thing that they could give to God was their appreciation for what He did. One test of whether or not a movement is of God is: does it inspire worship? The outcome should be a greater appreciation of God and Christ.

Well, how does the story end? It ends in great victory. Verses 20-23, early the next morning - you read it - the people were to go out to see what the Lord had done. At dawn they marched to the battlefield as if they were going to a festival, the singers were leading the way - not their present SAS, no, the musicians! They led! God heard His people singing their song of faith, and the enemy was destroyed, they turned and destroyed one another! When Judah arrived, all they had to do was to collect the spoils of battle, and we read that it took them three days! With unbounded praise they went on their way home, returning to Jerusalem. Look at what happened to the nations roundabout, verses 29 and 30, look: 'The fear of God was on all the kingdoms of those countries when they heard that the LORD had fought against the enemies of Israel. Then the realm of Jehoshaphat was quiet, for his God gave him rest all around'.

The Lord's reputation was vindicated. I'm finished, but I want to be very personal as I close here tonight, and I want to ask you in this moment of stillness now: are you using your blood-bought spiritual weapons in the life of faith, or are you relying on the

flesh? I believe probably most evangelical church-goers are living, or attempting to live, the Christian life by the power of the flesh. Are you born-again? Are you filled with the Holy Spirit? Have you had that crisis experience of being emptied so that He might fill you, a clean vessel in His hand - with no power, but as He gives graciously with each command? Many of our young people are growing up and they know nothing about this - you could be a worker in the Faith Mission and know nothing about this! Are you seeking God for revelation and direction? Are you concerned about your good name, or your organisation's good name, or are you concerned about God's reputation, God's glory? Maybe there is an army coming against you, a multitude against you personally, the world, the flesh, and the devil, some of the things we have touched on tonight - and you feel overwhelmed? Well, you can be an overcomer tonight if you come with your brokenness and your sin to Calvary, and know the cleansing power, and the liberation of the Holy Spirit.

Or corporately, am I speaking to this organisation, am I speaking to groups of people in this meeting tonight, and corporately there is a great multitude against you? Well, salvation is still of the Lord - hallelujah! But we must seek Him. My question as I close tonight to all of you is: who among us will wait for a word from heaven?

Let us pray. Now, as every head is bowed tonight, I feel strongly - and I hope this is acceptable - but I feel strongly that I should make an appeal tonight. I'm going to ask you, remembering Good Friday, how the Lamb of God hung naked, bloodied, bruised unashamedly for you on the cross, confessed you before men, confesses you before His Father in heaven, will you not confess Him tonight in the meeting. I hardly know what I'm asking you to come for, but I suppose I would put it like this: if God has spoken to you tonight, and God has put His finger on your life - and it could be a myriad of things, it could be a sin that is crippling you, it could be the love of mammon and other things that is choking the seed of the word in your life, it could be something you need deliverance from that has bound you and shackled you - will you stand to your feet and walk to the front, if you're downstairs, and I suppose if you're upstairs you could come just to the sides here, as an acknowledgement of your need before God, of your emptiness, of your prayer, like Jehoshaphat, 'Help, Lord, we don't know what to do!'. That's the place we're in tonight, right? It's like Zacchaeus up the tree, dignity had to go: it's time to forget about who is in the meeting, what your position is in church or this organisation - we're past all that, folks, we're past it all. It's time for us to get real with God, whether you're a pastor or a minister, it doesn't matter. I'm up here at the front, I don't need to come down, I'm already here, and I know I need to be here, I need to be here.

Who will come to the front tonight, like Jehoshaphat did, to acknowledge the need. Maybe God is birthing within your heart a seed of revival, even the need for something new in our land that God, I believe, wants to do, and is even moving in, perhaps, to do already in embryo form in the hearts of those who He's sharing His heart with. Will you be moved and say: 'Well, I don't know what I can do, but I'll do something, I'm not going to do nothing'? Now, as every head is bowed, and I close, please come to the front, and I will pray with you and lead you in prayer if you come. It doesn't matter if one comes or 100 comes, but please, if God has spoken to you

tonight, we're not interested in sermons, we're interested in God. If you have heard the voice of God just come, it doesn't matter who's peeking, just come. God sees you, God sees if you have a passion for His name - that's what we're looking for tonight. God sees if you're willing to wait for the Holy Ghost to fall upon you, God sees your need here tonight. It's time for courage, are there any more who will come before we will pray? Just stand if you're in the gallery, just stand where you are, just stand. If you can't come to the front, just stand. There are more coming, we're not going to rush here.

I'm just going to address the folk at the front, and I want you to pray for them. I don't know what your need is, but you know, just bring it to the Lord now. Maybe it's sin, and you need to repent, confess and repent and forsake. Maybe it's deliverance, there's a wee verse in Joel says: 'Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be delivered'. If you call on the name of Jesus, and plead the blood of Jesus, and believe, and you will receive things that you have asked of Him. There's power in the blood of the Lamb! Bring your need to the Lord. I'm not going to pray a prayer for you, you pray, you seek God - this is what we need, we need seeking God! Say: 'Lord, help!' - but you must break through now in faith, and you must receive, you must say: 'Lord, I believe in Your character, I believe in Your covenant. Lord, I haven't come out here to play games, I want to receive from You what I have longed for'. Deal with God tonight, and I'm going to pray for these folk at the front.

Abba Father, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, I pray for these precious souls who have come to the front. Lord, I don't know what You're doing, but You're doing something. Lord, I pray in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and by the power of the blood, that You will meet them, that You will deliver those who need to be delivered from the enemy's oppression. We command the enemy to be bound and cast out in Jesus' name. If he is holding any here, we command him to go now, and the peace of Christ to come. Lord, for those who have come out for to be filled - hallelujah - we thank You that the Lord Jesus was filled without measure, and we pray that in His name You would fill them full of the Holy Spirit and power from on high, and witness it to them. We pray for those who are seeking more of You, to go on with You. We pray for those in the gallery here Lord, and those who are seated but in their hearts something is going on - Lord, You see! O God, that even from this night and from these meetings, that a collection of people drawn out would come to be a solemn assembly to seek Your face that times of refreshing might come from the presence of the Lord.

May God bless you.

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The Solemn Assembly - Chapter 2

"Under Ezra"

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It's wonderful to be here with you, and it was good to start off last night in my little part in the Convention and share fellowship with you. It's great to be here again this afternoon. Now if you were here last evening, you will know that I'm doing a theme throughout the times that I'll be sharing with you in the Convention, and the theme is that of 'Solemn Assemblies'. I want you, if you haven't already turned to Ezra 8, to turn to it - Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Job, and then the Psalms. So if you get Ezra, we're now looking at chapter 9, and we're going to read the first 15 verses of Ezra chapter 9, so beginning to read at verse 1. Last evening we considered 'The Solemn Assembly Under Jehoshaphat', and today we're going to look at 'The Solemn Assembly Under Ezra'.

Verse 1 then of Ezra 9: *"When these things were done, the leaders came to me, saying, 'The people of Israel and the priests and the Levites have not separated themselves from the peoples of the lands, with respect to the abominations of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians, and the Amorites. For they have taken some of their daughters as wives for themselves and their sons, so that the holy seed is mixed with the peoples of those lands. Indeed, the hand of the leaders and rulers has been foremost in this trespass'. So when I heard this thing, I tore my garment and my robe, and plucked out some of the hair of my head and beard, and sat down astonished. Then everyone who trembled at the words of the God of Israel assembled to me, because of the transgression of those who had been carried away captive, and I sat astonished until the evening sacrifice. At the evening sacrifice I arose from my fasting; and having torn my garment and my robe, I fell on my knees and spread out my hands to the LORD my God. And I said: 'O my God, I am too ashamed and humiliated to lift up my face to You, my God; for our iniquities have risen higher than our heads, and our guilt has grown up to the heavens. Since the days of our fathers to this day we have been very guilty, and for our iniquities we, our kings, and our priests have been delivered into the hand of the kings of the lands, to the sword, to captivity, to plunder, and to humiliation, as it is this day. And now for a little while grace has been shown from the LORD our God, to leave us a remnant to escape, and to give us a peg in His holy place, that our God may enlighten our eyes and give us a measure of revival in our bondage. For we were slaves. Yet our God did not forsake us in our bondage; but He extended mercy to us in the sight of the kings of Persia, to revive us, to repair the house of our God, to rebuild its ruins, and to give us a wall in Judah and Jerusalem. And now, O our God, what shall we say after this? For we have forsaken Your commandments, which You commanded by Your servants the prophets, saying, 'The land which you are entering to possess is an unclean land, with the uncleanness of the peoples of the lands, with their abominations which have filled it from one end to*

another with their impurity. Now therefore, do not give your daughters as wives for their sons, nor take their daughters to your sons; and never seek their peace or prosperity, that you may be strong and eat the good of the land, and leave it as an inheritance to your children forever'. And after all that has come upon us for our evil deeds and for our great guilt, since You our God have punished us less than our iniquities deserve, and have given us such deliverance as this, should we again break Your commandments, and join in marriage with the people committing these abominations? Would You not be angry with us until You had consumed us, so that there would be no remnant or survivor? O LORD God of Israel, You are righteous, for we are left as a remnant, as it is this day. Here we are before You, in our guilt, though no one can stand before You because of this!''.

Let's pray together, and I want to invite you, as I did last evening if you were here, to pray for yourself that God might speak. I hope you have come to hear from heaven, I want to hear from heaven, and I want you to hear from heaven. I don't want to get in the way, and I hope that you have an open channel in your heart just now to receive from God. Why not come and just say: 'Lord, please speak to me now. Speak to me by Your Holy Spirit as I come to Your word'?

Let us pray together: Holy Abba Father, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, crucified, buried, and - hallelujah - risen again, we come to You through the new and living way, via the shed blood and through the intercession of our risen Redeemer. We ask now for the impartation of the Holy Spirit to come and minister to each heart. We thank You for the little ones here. We thank You, Lord, for everyone gathered, whatever their circumstances are, whatever their state is before You, O God. We pray, Lord, now that every single person would know what it is to encounter the Living God. We pray, Lord, that we will not be reminiscing about the resurrection of Christ today, but that we will be experiencing an encounter with the risen Jesus. Lord, we pray now that the Spirit of Jesus, by the Holy Spirit, will come and meet with us, and do something, Lord, in our hearts. We pray with Paul that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to us the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him; that the eyes of our understanding being enlightened; that we might know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of His glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come. And He has put all things under His feet, and given Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all. Let us know that power, Lord, we pray now. For Christ's sake alone, Amen.

I was sharing last evening how I felt compelled to speak on a certain biblical practice largely fallen out of our modern church custom, and even, for that matter, our vocabulary. A number of folk stopped me after the meeting last night and admitted, some seasoned Christians, that they had never heard of a 'solemn assembly'. It appears, as we look particularly at the Old Testament, that solemn assemblies have

been integral parts of biblical revivals, a vital preparation for when God was going to move and do something new. Now, though Bible records of revival can greatly vary one from another, there are certain common factors that precede each of them. I mentioned last evening that Richard Owen Roberts highlights four, and they apply to Ezra, and I'm going to apply them each one as we look through this passage this afternoon. Some of you who were here will remember that the first factor in revivals in the Bible is a tragic declension, that is: every revival, particularly in the Old Testament, is preceded by a period of moral and spiritual decline among the congregation of God's people. Now, to these folk, they had been 70 years in Babylonian captivity because of their sins, and that covers a great gamut of Judah's history - but I have to quickly scour over it to when they come out of Babylon. I want you to understand that now, as they have come out, they have been there as a judgement upon their sins, and now as they exit much of their Jewish faith has been lost to them.

Now, we must grasp this: they have lost their Bible. Now we have got a great privilege to have an open Bible here, and I don't know how many Bibles there are in the room this afternoon - but we're coming down with Bibles, at least we are in our house. What a privilege we have, but they lost their Bible - these people of the book, the Jews, they lost the Torah and it has to be rediscovered again, the Law found in the Temple of God. They had even lost their sacred language. There is an allusion to this in Nehemiah chapter 8 and verse 8, we read that when the Law was discovered and it was read, they read distinctly from the book in the Law of God, and they give the sense and helped them to understand the reading. Now that had to be the case because they had actually lost the Hebrew tongue, they had been saturated in the godless culture of pagan Babylon and they had lost their identity as God's people to such an extent - and we don't have time to go into this in any depth, but if you read the contemporary prophet Haggai, in chapter 1 and chapter 2 as he delivers God's prophecy, God actually speaks of His own chosen elect people as 'this people'. Not 'My people', but 'this people' - it was as if God did not recognise them, their identity had disappeared in Babylon.

So, of course, they needed to rediscover the Law of God; but the consequence was that there was a famine of the Law of God in the land, a famine in the Word of God. Now I have to tell you from my heart - and everything that I'm sharing with you today and every day through this Convention, is from the depths of my heart - that I believe that we have a famine in the Word of God here in our land, and particularly in Ulster, but in Ireland and across the United Kingdom and Western Europe. Now some people find that very difficult to understand: how could it ever be said that we've got a famine in the Word of God? We know more about the Bible than we ever have - and I think that is a true statement. We know more of archaeological discoveries, we know more of theological dogmas, we have more knowledge at the touch of a fingertip, even on the Internet for instance - you can get any answer to any biblical question, and some varied answers of course, and not all of them agree - but nevertheless, the fact remains that I think there is a knowledge today, biblically speaking, that there has never been in the history of mankind. Even the multiplication of the word of God is at proportions that were only imagined. I mean, actually as I'm standing here

preaching to you, most likely I'm preaching across the world 1000 times over because of the Internet - it's incredible! I wonder why I'm exhausted at times, well, that must be the reason! It's staggering, and yet what I'm talking about when I say there is a famine in the Word of God: we have lost the spirit of God's Law and Truth. I am now talking about, not adhering to every jot and tittle of the letter of the Law, that is a million miles away from what I'm talking about - I'm talking about the heart of the teachings of the Word of God, the spirit, not the letter of the Law of the spirit of the Law. It's what the Lord Jesus Christ meant when He talked about: 'My Word, My teaching'. It's not just some kind of doctrinal statement, or creedal assent, it is the full weight of the heart of God when He delivered the truth - we've lost it.

When the word is preached it's often preached without power. I'm not saying that in a critical way, because if God should choose to just leave me in an instant as I stand here, I would be completely lost - absolutely blundering my way through some kind of address. I do not take the power of God for granted, and it's not in me, it's not in any of us, it's a gift of God. But a lot of what is preached even in churches around our land today is the Word preached without power, and because of that there is a famine in the land just as there was in Amos' day. Listen to this staggering description, graphic scene that he painted of his own era: 'Behold, the days are coming', says the Lord GOD, 'That I will send a famine on the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD. They shall wander from sea to sea, and from north to east; they shall run to and fro, seeking the word of the LORD, but shall not find it'. That scares the living daylights out of me, because I think we're almost there. There is a tragic declension in the preaching of the Word of God in the power and demonstration of the Holy Ghost - there's not an awful lot of it about, and that's why many people are starving in the pews. Great evangelical tradition in our land, but people are starving! Why is that? There's plenty of Bible teaching... a tragic declension.

Then we see that also in Ezra's day there was a righteous judgement from God. Without exception, Old Testament revivals have always been preceded by some kind of a righteous judgement from God. In this case it was a restorative one, God wanted to bring His people back - for whom the Lord loves, He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives. God wanted Judah restored in the land, He wanted to bring them out of Babylon back to Judah - but the heart of the people had to be renewed if real blessing was going to come! You see, you cannot have restoration without renewal. You cannot have revival without renewal. Now, who wouldn't want revival? Eh? Who wouldn't want our churches to be filled on Sundays? Who wouldn't want our families to be converted and our neighbourhoods to be transformed? But here's a great question that hangs upon us: who is prepared for the repentance that is necessary, and the inner renewal of the hearts, your heart, my heart; the deliverance that is needed in our homes, in our families, and in our churches from the top down - a work of cleansing that needs to be accomplished before God can renew?

Now let me show you this here for Judah. When Judah went into Babylonian captivity there were three stages in the deportation to Babylon. Likewise in their return to Judah there were three stages of return to Jerusalem. The first stage of return was

under Zerubbabel who rebuilt the Temple - first things first. We see in chapter 3 and verse 3 here that the altar had to be set up first, and that speaks of our need for a true heart-relationship with God - before there is going to be corporate revival, we, each of us as Christians, need to (Romans 12:1) offer ourselves living sacrifices unto God which is our reasonable service, it's our expected worship. You'll not get a pat on the back for that, that's what we should do because of what Christ has done for us - that's basic Christianity. That is, if you like, setting up the altar before God. Then in chapter 3 and verse 10, Zerubbabel laid the foundations of the Temple. Now a lot of Christians have never gotten around to laying the foundations. If you have time at some stage today or later on, study Hebrews chapter 6, the first verses, and you will see there that the apostle talks about not laying again the foundations. He mentions a list of things, I'm not going to go into it, but things that many Christians have never entered into: the doctrine of baptism, laying on of hands, resurrection, so on and so forth. That's the foundation.

Now once Zerubbabel started by laying the foundation and building the altar, the work of God was opposed. If you know your biblical history, you will know that here in chapter 4 the work was opposed by certain Samaritans, and God had to raise up two prophets, Haggai and Zechariah, and they preached - and through their preaching the work was resumed. The children of Judah had only laid the foundations and then they gave up with the opposition - and it's so easy to throw the towel in when the enemy comes against us. But then in chapter 5 the work is resumed, it's finished in chapter 6. Now there is a second move of people after Zerubbabel, I want to skip over that one and go to the third quickly.

First of all Zerubbabel came into the land again, and started rebuilding the Temple - but the third return of people was under Nehemiah. Nehemiah constructed the walls of protection around the restored city. Now this is an important principle that I want to emphasise here this afternoon: the principle of building walls - do you know about this? Listen to this verse in Proverbs 25:28: 'Whoever has no rule over his own spirit is like a city broken down, without walls'. Whoever has no rule or discipline over his own spirit is like a city broken down, without walls - in other words, you're vulnerable spiritually, you've no spiritual protection. You might have the altar of God erected, you might be worshipping God in some form of private temple in your heart, but you need protection. As I preach at this Family Service, this is something that I think we really need to understand here in our homes: there are certain gates through which the enemy gains entrance into our lives, into our homes, and into our churches - and they are left open to the enemy. What Nehemiah started to do was: he rebuilt the walls around Jerusalem, and he started from the gates and built out. In other words, he started at the weak, vulnerable places where the enemy could enter, and he built the protection roundabout. Now that's important, and it's only an aside that I mention that.

So first of all they returned into the land, Zerubbabel built the altar, he laid the foundation, they got discouraged and Haggai and Zechariah had to come and preach them up again to building. Then thirdly Nehemiah builds walls, but I want us to home in on the second return which is Ezra. You see, there was no point building walls of

protection if God's people were not renewed in their heart. This was why God raised up Ezra. It's alright having an altar, it's alright having a foundation and a Temple, and having all the rites and rituals, but the people of God needed to be renewed. The heart of the matter is the matter of the heart.

So there was a tragic declension, a righteous judgement from God, but then there was the raising up of an immensely burdened leader or leaders. Now there are several men that I've already mentioned: Zerubbabel, a civic leader, God raised him up for this hour; Haggai, Zechariah, prophets who got the people building again; Nehemiah, the governor; Joshua, another contemporary, the high priest; and Malachi the prophet. All of them had a job to do in relation to the restoration of God's people in the land, and there was even a woman by the name of Esther of course - who was not used in the restoration, but in the preservation of God's people, and her story fits between chapters 6 and 7 here of Ezra, a period of about 58 years. But what I want you to understand is this: God was imparting the same vision to many people. I've got to tell you here today that God is doing that now. I don't know most of you, but I know that God is imparting into the hearts of people - some I have never really known before, and God has brought them across my path - and there is a vision that is reciprocal that God is giving about something that He wants to do, some new thing. You find that whenever God wants to move again, He places the same vision and burden in different people's hearts all over the place. Amos 3 tells us about this, verse 7: 'Surely the Lord GOD does nothing, unless He reveals His secret to His servants the prophets'. I believe God has a way of doing things, and when He's about to move in a new way, He reveals it.

The second half of this book is about Ezra, this man, a priest from the family of Aaron. Apparently he requested permission from the King of Persia, realising that the remnant in the restored nation desperately needed spiritual instruction and guidance. The altar had been built, the foundation laid, the Temple was being erected, but there was something wrong with their hearts - it was a form of godliness, if you like, without the power. Here was a man, thousands of miles away, who had a burden! Do you have a burden for Ireland? Do you have a burden for the United Kingdom? Ezra's burden led to sacrifice, and that's always what happens. It took Ezra four months to make the journey of nearly 1000 miles from Babylon to Jerusalem. You see, if God is calling you to give you His burden for this hour, there will be sacrifice that will be involved. Young people, you got to understand this: if you want to go through with God, there's sacrifice. Now don't get me wrong: it is the best thing to be in that place, but it costs and you've got to be prepared for that!

Here was this man, burdened and willing to pay a sacrifice - the Jews called him 'the second Moses'. That's what they nicknamed him! If you turn to chapter 7 and verse 10, you will see why: 'Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the Law of the LORD, and to do it, and to teach statutes and ordinances in Israel'. That reveals that he was determined to be a man of the book, not just a preacher - and, wait till I tell you, the place is coming down with preachers. Now you might find it difficult, maybe you have a vacant church or something like that, but anybody can preach. I'm not demeaning the act of preaching, but what we need today is not another preacher, we need Ezras

who determine themselves to know this book, to obey this book and to teach it. Now it is believed by many scholars that Ezra wrote the books of Chronicles. It is also believed that he organised the sacred writings of the Old Testament into the canon that we now have. It is believed that it was Ezra who wrote Psalm 119, as well as Psalm 1 as a preface to the book of Psalms. Many biblical historians believe that it was Ezra who promoted the concept of synagogue as a local way to teach the word of God to communities.

Now, I said last evening that we need a revival - we need a revival in a passion for the glory of God, but we also need a revival of the preaching of the Word of God. But I'm not talking about Bible exposition, I'm not talking about alliteration and illustration, I'm talking about prophetic, Spirit-anointed preaching of the Word of God - that's what we need! One of the greatest revivalists, George Whitefield, records his own relationship with the Scriptures, I quote him: 'I began to read the Holy Scriptures upon my knees, laying aside all other books, and praying over, if possible, every line and word. This proved meat indeed and drink indeed to my soul. I daily received fresh life, light, and power from above. I got more true knowledge from reading the Book of God in one month than I could ever have acquired from all the writings of men'. Jonathan Goforth, greatly used in China and elsewhere in revival from 1908 onwards, looking back on those years said: 'We wish to affirm, too, that we can entertain no hope of a mighty, globe-encircling Holy Spirit revival without there being first a back-to-the-Bible movement'. Goforth certainly practised what he preached, for in 19 years he read through the Chinese New Testament 55 times.

This is a point of historical fact: revival never springs out of the liberal wing of the church, never! How could it? They devalue the book! Well, I'm telling you today now, and take my word for it: that evangelicals are devaluing the word of God! I'm not talking about translations, it's nothing to do with that, I'm talking about believing what this book says! We need a revival of faith in the Holy Scriptures! I'm not talking about some return to legalistic form - oh, we need delivered from legalism! - I'm talking about an impassioned desire to love God and to obey God in the power of the Spirit. I'm talking about what Leonard Ravenhill meant when he said: 'One of these days some simple soul will pick up the book of God and read it and believe it, and then the best of us will all be embarrassed. We have adopted the convenient theory that the Bible is a book to be explained, whereas first and foremost it is a book to be believed, after that to be obeyed'. Now, I know nothing about the Faith Mission College, but I hope that's the way you teach the Bible - because there are things we cannot explain in the Bible, but we've got to believe it and we've got to obey it.

Now the fourth factor in all these moves of God - a tragic declension, a righteous judgement from God, the raising up of an immensely burdened leader or leaders - but fourthly, there is always some extraordinary action. While it varies from revival to revival, the most common taken was that of the solemn assembly. Here in chapter 8, what lovely words, and to hear a child read it makes it very special, verses 21 to 23. Before setting out on the long journey back to Jerusalem, Ezra proclaimed a three-day fast by the river Ahava, and he was asking God's protection on their journey. That's what he means when he says: 'To seek from God the right way for us and our little

ones and all our possessions' - a right way. He wanted God to be with them. He was like Moses, when Moses said: 'If Your presence does not go with us, do not bring us up from here'.

Now let me ask you a question, in fact it's God asking you the question. God is asking you this question: are you prepared to go on without the consciousness of God's presence? I'm not. I'd rather stack shelves in Sainsbury's than to go on without the consciousness of God's presence. I don't want to be harsh, but I do need you to consider: if the Spirit of God did not show up this morning at most of our churches, Bible-believing, Bible-preaching churches, would they or would they not go on as normal? Would they perceive the absence of the Divine Presence? Ezra didn't want to live in that farce, he didn't want superficiality, and so he fasted and prayed - that was to humble themselves to seek the Lord. There is a great lack of fasting going on today in our modern age, and the only conclusion that we can take out of it is that we must be proud, because fasting is a way that we humble ourselves before God. Ezra knew he needed God, and he met at this river of Ahava - which means 'continual flow', that's what it means - because he knew he needed the River of God.

You see, Ezra understood this, and you have heard - I'm sure - quoted a thousand times at this Convention 2 Chronicles 7:14: 'If My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land'. Do you know who wrote it? Ezra. Oh, he knew all about it, he wrote it, we quote it - but do we humble ourselves? I'm asking you seriously: do we humble ourselves enough to fast and pray and seek God's face in the solemn assembly? You see, we need God's direction, as I said last evening, because the future witness of the church is at stake. From a human perspective the church is only ever one generation away from extinction, the power of God aside - but that's reality. In verse 22 we see in chapter 8, Ezra was ashamed to ask the King for earthly protection. He could have asked for an armed escort but he had already told Artaxerxes that God's good hand was upon him and was upon the Jews. So he had to walk the talk, he had to trust in God's covenant and God's promises, he had to have faith - Faith Mission, we need a revival of faith! It's time we possessed our pronouncements. It's time we stopped looking everywhere but God!

Here in chapter 9 verses 1-15, now he has returned. God has been with them on their journey, and he's in Jerusalem, and the first thing Ezra did when he heard of the compromise of the Jews all roundabout wasn't to form a committee, it wasn't to have a convention, or to even preach repentance. The first thing he did was, he went to the Temple, he sat down on the ground, and he expressed his grief before the Lord. He even pulled his hair out, and he ripped his clothes. Verse 3 of chapter 9 says he was astonished, do you know what that word means in the Hebrew? 'Shocked', 'horrified', 'desolate'. 'How can you who have partaken of the covenant of God be so blessed, and yet have sinned such heinous sins?'. Now listen, I know I'll be accused of painting the picture blacker than black - but wait till I tell you: I've ceased to be shocked when I hear some of the sins that God's people are partaking of. Ezra was broken before the sins of God's people, and then something very interesting happened, something I

believe God is doing and wanting to do today.

During this time of Ezra's fasting and mourning, a crowd gathered around him. Who were they? Look at verse 4: 'Then everyone who trembled at the words of the God of Israel assembled to me'. Now when God gave the Law to Israel through Moses on Mount Sinai, we read that the people trembled - but that was an awful long time ago. They hadn't been trembling since, but now God's Word delivered in the power of the Spirit was convicting them, and they started to tremble. They feared before God, and we read in Isaiah 66:2: 'On this one', God says, 'will I look: On him who is poor and of a contrite spirit, and who trembles at My word'. He sat like a dumb man, shaking, until the hour of the evening sacrifice. Why did he choose the hour of the evening sacrifice to start his prayer of confession in the hearing of Israel? Well, surely he had his eye of faith from the sacrificial lamb that would make atonement for the people's sins. Daniel's great intercessory prayer, if you look at Daniel 9, was at the hour of the evening sacrifice. The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, that's what it was a pointer and a picture to. I think what Ezra was doing is what Daniel was doing, what every intercessor of God does, it's like Aaron, the high priest, on the Day of Atonement, they are placing their hands on the head of the scapegoat, they're confessing Israel's sin and releasing it into the wilderness - and that's what we as God's people need to do in our brokenness, in our burden, we need to come to Calvary again, we need to confess our sins, we need to agree with God that we have gone the wrong way, we have not dwelt in covenant with Him. We need to repent! We need to renounce! We need to forsake! For He says: 'He who covers his sins will not prosper, but whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy'.

They were guilty of the sins of the nations - are we? We are, you know. Do you know that the divorce rate among evangelicals in America is no different than among ordinary people, in fact in some instances it's worse? Paul said to the Corinthians: 'It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and such sexual immorality that is not even named among the Gentiles' - I think we are there now today. Do you know where we need to go? We need to go to Calvary.

'Not all the blood of beasts
On Jewish altars slain
Could give the guilty conscience peace
Or wash away one stain.

But Christ, the heavenly Lamb,
Takes all our sins away;
A sacrifice of nobler name
And richer blood than they'.

Watts said in one of those verses:

'My faith would lay her hand
On that dear head of Thine,
While, like a penitent, I stand,

And there confess my sin'.

Are you walking in the light this afternoon? Father? Mother? Are you walking in the light? For if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another. One of the signs is: are you right with your brother, are you right with your sister? Are you right in marriage? Are you right in your family? Believers, I know, but things aren't right. You're not walking in the light! I don't care how many conventions you go to, how many meetings - the churches that are splitting left, right and centre are not walking in the light. They can have right doctrine, they think, but they're not walking in the light! Then the blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanses us from all sin; then we know that connection, if we confess our sins! That's what solemn assembly is all about: He is faithful and just to forgive us, and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Ezra's prayer, if you compare it with Daniel's confession - I don't have time - Daniel 9, even Nehemiah's prayer in Nehemiah 9, he confesses the sins of the people. In verses 5 and 6, he looks back at Israel's sins and he confesses them. He admits that the people deserve captivity, and he uses several images to show the people's plight. He says in verse 6 that they are like drowning men and women: 'O my God, I am too ashamed and humiliated to lift up my face to You, my God; for our iniquities have risen higher than our heads, and our guilt has grown up to the heavens' - they sin more and more. He says in verse 8 that they were like a little peg, so much of the future was hanging on them: 'We are peg in the house of the holy place' - do you know what that means? The sense in which the future hung upon their testimony. They were elected and chosen of God to be a witness to the nations roundabout, but they failed in covenant. There is a sense in which, as we are gathered here as families, most of us Christians, that the future of God's witness hangs on you and hangs on your family.

The remnant that had to serve as a wall against the awful encroaches of sin, verse 9, to make them a wall around the city - you are God's last line of defence! Have you ever considered that? Your witness in this town, in this province, in your family, in your neighbourhood could be God's last line of defence. Now don't misunderstand what I'm saying: God doesn't need you, and He doesn't need me. I heard Johannes Facius say on a recording there this week that, I think, he wrote a book called 'God Doesn't Need You', and then he wrote another book 'God Doesn't Need Us'. Then he went to his publisher, and he said: 'I'm going to write another one, 'God Doesn't Need This Book''. The publisher said: 'You can't write a book called 'God Doesn't Need This Book', it'll not sell!'. God doesn't need us. Like Mordecai said to Esther, 'If you remain completely silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place; but you and your father's house will perish. Yet who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this'. God doesn't need you, but you can stop the rot! You can make the change! You can turn the tide! Father, mother!

The great issue for Judah was that if the nation was polluted, how could Messiah be born? That's the real issue here, verse 2. In other words, the sin of Judah was hindering Christ's coming down. I don't need to apply that. Nothing has changed,

when God wants to get something done He sends His servant with the Word of God. No sooner had the teacher, Ezra, preached the Word of God than it began to reveal sin - for the Word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of the soul and spirit, the joints and marrow, discerning the thoughts and intents of the hearts of men. Now I want you to picture the scene, close your eyes for me - I'm almost finished - picture this: thousands, perhaps tens of thousands of people converging on the city of Jerusalem. Fathers, mothers, children and grandparents, farmers and city officials and politicians. The scribe, Ezra, stands on a high wooden platform and opens the book of the Law. Ezra reads the Law aloud from daybreak until noon as he faced the square, this solemn assembly. Many could not understand what was being read, they didn't even know the language, but as Ezra read a group of Levites instructed the people in the Law while they were standing there.

When they finished, we read in Nehemiah, Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God, and then all the people answered: 'Amen! Amen!', while lifting up their hands, and they bowed their heads and worshipped the Lord with their faces to the ground, and said: 'This day is holy to the Lord your God'. As Ezra prayed in verse 4, he trembled. He knelt down and bowed down, because nobody can stand before God! Later on we read that the people engaged in public humiliation and putting away the sins, the seeking of the Lord with all their hearts. But I want to ask you, and I'm finished: what will you do before the message of God? What will you do?

Let us pray. Now I want to take a moment, God has been speaking. Ezra proclaimed a fast at the river Ahava - listen - 'That we might humble ourselves before our God, to seek from Him the right way for us and our little ones and all our possessions'. Is there a father in this place, and you know that you have not been operating as a priest in your home, you have not been erecting the altar of God - and I'm not talking about having to do something regimentally every day at a certain hour, I'm just talking about a spirit of worship and godliness in your home. I'm not talking about strict rules and regulations, I'm talking about heart-worship and devotion to the Living Christ. Is there a father here today that will stand to his feet and say: 'I will, from this moment on, seek a way for my ones, my little ones'. Is there a father?

Just where you are, as every head is bowed and eye closed, is there a mother that will join that father? Single parents? Is there a whole family that will stand to their feet and say: 'We will be part of what God is putting into folks hearts. We will seek the Lord in our home for a right way for us, for our little ones, for this nation'? Are there any? Stand to your feet. Are there any? Is there anyone, and maybe you're not a family man or woman, but God has spoken to you, and God has told you about your sin and you need to repent, and you need to sort things out? Is there someone, and God is birthing within you this vision of revival? I'm just addressing folk here whom God has touched, who are trembling before the word of God - is there anyone trembling before the word of God? The word of God is keeping me awake these nights, I'm finding it hard to get to sleep, and when I waken hard to get over again. Is there anyone who feels the burden of Ireland? Is there anyone who feels the burden of this United Kingdom who will stand and say: 'Lord, I will take the burden, and I will

make the sacrifice, I'll make a sacrifice, whatever it is I'll make it, and I'll be there for You. Whenever small or great You want me to do, I will do it in obedience to You'?

Now, I'm going to pray for those who are standing, and everybody please pray as well. You address God, I'm not going to give you the words to say. You come in repentance, just bear your heart to the Lord, confess whatever is in your spirit, you talk to the Lord, you deal with Him. I know counsellors can be available at times, but you really need the Holy Ghost to counsel you. You need to seek on with the Lord, maybe you need to sit on in the church, or wherever, and just seek the Lord. Let me pray for you now: Father, I thank You for these dear ones whose hearts you have touched. Lord, I just pray that You will seal the work of the Spirit that has been done in them. If these fathers need to set things right and put walls of protection around their little families - so many avenues and gates for evil to enter in. We pray for the little ones gathered here, that You will protect them, Lord; O God, spiritually, that you will protect them - but that we will be a covering for them, and not allow anything harmful to enter into their lives, that will not be guilt on our part for exposing them. Help us to get the balance right, to not be too tightfisted in everything; and yet, Lord, to have spiritual boundaries in our lives so that what we do, to an extent, they will not take to extremes. I pray for the fathers, we need godly fathers, Heavenly Father, who will be examples and will take the lead. We need godly mothers who will respect godly fathers. Oh God, we pray for those whom You are birthing something of revival in. Thank You for what You're doing, it's the Lord's doing and it is marvellous in our eyes. Lord, fan the embers to a flame, we pray, even in this convention: 'Revive us, O God!', we pray - that Your people may rejoice in Thee, that the fires of revival will spread across the whole of Ireland. Open up more revelation to us in the sessions that are yet to be. Lord, bless these dear souls. If any are under the oppression of the evil one, in the name of the Lord Jesus we rebuke him, the strongman, in the name of the Stronger Man, the Lord Jesus Christ, and command him to depart and leave them. For the glory of the risen Lord Jesus Christ we pray, Amen.

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The Solemn Assembly - Chapter 3

"Under Hezekiah"

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Well, good morning to you all. It's good to be here with you, and good to see such a wonderful number out on a Bank Holiday Monday to hear the word of the Lord. It has been a privilege to be with you these days of convention. It has been a real blessing to my heart to fellowship with you all, and it's been good to know that the Lord has met with us as we have gathered around His word. We're expectant today, as has already been expressed in prayer and in the opening remarks, that the Lord will come and will meet with us in a very definite way.

I want you to turn in the scriptures with me to 2 Chronicles chapter 29. I have been taking a theme through the meetings that I've been preaching at, 'Solemn Assembly'. I'm not sure if you know what that is, I did say on Saturday night I think it was that it's not a depressing church! There are plenty of those around, that's why we need God to revive - but it's a different thing entirely. It's a very biblical concept, a part of biblical revivals: when God was just preparing His people to come and to move in their midst, He often did it by a solemn assembly. We're going to look at some of the common features, as we have been doing. We're looking this morning at 'The Solemn Assembly Under Hezekiah'. We've already looked at 'The Solemn Assembly Under Jehoshaphat', yesterday afternoon in the Family Service we looked at 'The Solemn Assembly Under Ezra', the priest - and now this morning we're looking at 'The Solemn Assembly Under King Hezekiah'.

Verse 1 of 2 Chronicles 29: "Hezekiah became king when he was twentyfive years old, and he reigned twentynine years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Abijah the daughter of Zechariah. And he did what was right in the sight of the LORD, according to all that his father David had done. In the first year of his reign, in the first month, he opened the doors of the house of the LORD and repaired them. Then he brought in the priests and the Levites, and gathered them in the East Square, and said to them: 'Hear me, Levites! Now sanctify yourselves, sanctify the house of the LORD God of your fathers, and carry out the rubbish from the holy place. For our fathers have trespassed and done evil in the eyes of the LORD our God; they have forsaken Him, have turned their faces away from the dwelling place of the LORD, and turned their backs on Him. They have also shut up the doors of the vestibule, put out the lamps, and have not burned incense or offered burnt offerings in the holy place to the God of Israel. Therefore the wrath of the LORD fell upon Judah and Jerusalem, and He has given them up to trouble, to desolation, and to jeering, as you see with your eyes. For indeed, because of this our fathers have fallen by the sword; and our sons, our daughters, and our wives are in captivity. Now it is in my heart to make a covenant with the LORD God of Israel, that His fierce wrath may turn away from us. My sons, do not be negligent now, for the LORD has chosen you to stand before Him, to serve

Him, and that you should minister to Him and burn incense'. Then these Levites arose: Mahath the son of Amasai and Joel the son of Azariah, of the sons of the Kohathites; of the sons of Merari, Kish the son of Abdi and Azariah the son of Jehallelel; of the Gershonites, Joah the son of Zimmah and Eden the son of Joah; of the sons of Elizaphan, Shimri and Jeiel; of the sons of Asaph, Zechariah and Mattaniah; of the sons of Heman, Jehiel and Shimei; and of the sons of Jeduthun, Shemaiah and Uzziel. And they gathered their brethren, sanctified themselves, and went according to the commandment of the king, at the words of the LORD, to cleanse the house of the LORD. Then the priests went into the inner part of the house of the LORD to cleanse it, and brought out all the debris that they found in the temple of the LORD to the court of the house of the LORD. And the Levites took it out and carried it to the Brook Kidron. Now they began to sanctify on the first day of the first month, and on the eighth day of the month they came to the vestibule of the LORD. Then they sanctified the house of the LORD in eight days, and on the sixteenth day of the first month they finished. Then they went in to King Hezekiah and said, 'We have cleansed all the house of the LORD, the altar of burnt offerings with all its articles, and the table of the showbread with all its articles. Moreover all the articles which King Ahaz in his reign had cast aside in his transgression we have prepared and sanctified; and there they are, before the altar of the LORD'".

Let us pray. I have invited you before I've preached each session thus far to pray for yourself. I want you to come to God now and open your heart, and say: 'Lord, please, would You speak to me?'. It's vital that we've come expecting to hear from God. We will not receive if we do not expect. God is the rewarder of those who diligently seek Him - He rewards faith. So why not come, if you haven't already prepared your heart, come now and say: 'Lord, I want You to speak to me'.

Let us pray: Almighty God, Holy Abba Father, we come to You in that name above every name, Lord Jesus Christ, the name that You have exalted far above all principalities and powers, and all things that exist. We acknowledge that name afresh in this place today. We say that Jesus is Lord, and we know that there is coming a day soon when every knee shall bow, and every tongue confess - of things in heaven, and things on earth, and things under the earth - every knee shall bow and tongue confess that He is Lord to Your glory, Father. But Lord, we want to make Him Lord now of our lives, we want to make Him Lord of this place. We would long for Him to be Lord of our land. Lord, we just pray that You will come, and that You will be even pleased to make this gathering more than a mere meeting, that it might even become a solemn assembly of God's people seeking Your face and finding You as they search for You with all their hearts. Lord, help me, help us all. God help us, in Jesus' name, Amen.

I've been sharing with you some of the common factors that precede biblical revivals, particularly in the Old Testament. I've taken certain points that Richard Owen Roberts highlights, and using them, fitting them into each of the particular revivals and solemn assemblies that I have brought to you. The first factor that has been very common is that revival is preceded by a period of moral and spiritual decline among God's people. There is a tragic declension, something goes wrong among the

congregation of God's people. We've seen that, and we will see it again today. Then secondly, there is the factor, very common, that because of the declension of the people of God there is a righteous judgement that comes from God's hand toward them. Without exception in Old Testament revivals, they have been preceded by some kind of judgement from God. We have said some of them are very drastic and final, and result in the death of some of the saints of the congregation - but more often God's judgement are gracious and remedial, and they result in a brokenness among the people of God, an unusual spirit of prayer and repentance, an extraordinary seeking of God's face.

First there is a tragic declension, then there is a righteous judgement from God, and thirdly there is often a raising up of an immensely burdened leader or leaders - some person that is willing to share the heart of God. We have noted Jehoshaphat on Saturday evening, yesterday afternoon we saw the priest, Ezra, and this morning we're going to look at Hezekiah the King. There are others, we will look at another this evening over in Trinity - burdened people who get that spirit that God has poured out upon them, of brokenness and a real need that there is among God's people. Then fourthly, very, very common, when this happens - after the tragic declension, after the judgement that God brings and allows upon His people, after the raising up of burdened souls - there is often an extraordinary action that is carried out that brings forth God's blessing, and the most common of these is the solemn assembly. Some of you, as I've been talking with you, have not known until now what a solemn assembly is. It is simply a gathering together of God's people: 'Gather My saints together unto Me' - but it's the Spirit of God doing it. He is drawing God's people from different backgrounds, different shades in the spectrum of profession, and He is burdening them with the same vision of brokenness and repentance, and a seeking of God in a very extraordinary way.

The tragic declension among God's people is very evident in this portion of Scripture. If you look at verse 3 of 2 Chronicles 29, we read: 'In the first year of his reign', Hezekiah's reign, 'in the first month, he opened the doors of the house of the LORD and repaired them'. We know from verse 1 that Hezekiah is a relatively young man to be ascending to the throne, he's 25 years of age. The first thing he does is, he immediately reopens the doors of the Temple, the House of God. Now that implies that the doors of the Temple had been shut, the Temple had been closed down. We then read that he also repaired the doors - the implication is that the doors had become derelict by neglect. They weren't being used, people weren't going in and out of them.

Now it took great courage and zeal for this young man to behave in this way, opening the doors of the Temple, because his father, Ahaz, had defiled the Temple. It was he who had closed the doors and stopped Levitical ministry - you see that in chapter 28. So God's people now were His chosen, elect congregation, but they no longer believed that it's better to be a doorkeeper in the house of the Lord than to dwell in tents of wickedness. It's perilous to think that God's people can get to such a place, isn't it? But they did.

Do you know that from 1980 until the year 2005 the United Kingdom population increased by 6.7%, yet in the same time period the total number of churches fell by 5.16%? To spell out what that means to you very simply: churches are closing in the United Kingdom almost at the same rate that the population is increasing. That is staggering - but that's only a figure that really relates to church buildings, church attendance is another story altogether! A report called 'Churchgoing in the United Kingdom' that was published by Tear Fund in April 2007 shows that only 15% of our population go to church at least once a month. The decline in church attendance forecasts a 55% fall from the level that it was in 1980 until what it will be in the year 2020. A European Social Study published in 2002 put the United Kingdom at the fourth lowest rate of church attendance in the whole of Europe. Do you remember what the Lord Jesus Christ said to the church at Philadelphia? 'See, I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it'. That is true, and it's still true today, and yet the fact remains that we as God's people, by tragic declension, can, ourselves, shut the door to God's blessing. We'll see the Laodicean church later, and the door is firmly shut, and Christ is outside knocking to get admittance.

Well, the first thing Hezekiah did after he opened the doors of the Temple was in relation to a solemn assembly. The first people he gathered to this great occasion, we find them in verse 4: 'Then he brought in the priests and the Levites, and gathered them in the East Square'. He first of all gathered together the spiritual leaders of the congregation of God's people. He started with the Levites, because the servants have to be clean if God is going to bless their work - as Isaiah said: 'Be clean, you that bear the vessels of the Lord'. Now this is a very interesting principle, and I believe it can be proven: a congregation seldom rises above the level of its leadership. Can I repeat that? A congregation seldom rises above the level of its leadership. That's not to say there can't be spiritual people in such a congregation, but they will be frustrated! The priests had to come together first - and if there's a message from God today, it's to the leaders of God's people in our land and wherever you're from: we need to be right with God if God is going to come and bless. The formula is very simple here: first of all the leaders had to get right, they had to be sanctified, and then the Temple, God's building, had to be sanctified.

Look at verse 5: 'Hezekiah said to them: 'Hear me, Levites! Now sanctify yourselves, sanctify the house of the LORD God of your fathers, and carry out the rubbish from the holy place''. Here's the formula: sanctify yourselves, and sanctify the house of God. Those are my points, so let's deal with the first: first, sanctify yourselves. Here is a principle: whenever God is going to move, He prepares His people. I've been sharing my heart these days with you, I believe God is starting to move! I believe God is placing in the hearts, particularly of young people, a desire for reality, a desire to see God move. They are fed up with the sham, they are fed up with superficial, they are fed up with froth and bubble - they want truth, transparency, reality! They want God! Not all of them, but some of them. But you see, God has to prepare His people - as it was in Joshua's day, Joshua 3:5: 'Joshua said to the people, 'Sanctify yourselves, for tomorrow the LORD will do wonders among you''. There is a preparation work that God has to do before He does a new work, and He starts often with the leaders. Are you prepared for that today? Maybe you're a pastor here or a minister, an evangelist,

a missionary - are you prepared for God to start with you? Maybe at conventions like this, when we have an appeal, or however we close up, we are looking at others to come forward - we should be the first to come forward, for God to do a work in our lives!

Now I believe one of the myths of Christian history is that revival comes through one man. I think those of us who have studied revival to an extent will know that there might be a personality who might be a public figure to rally the people, but it is the people, the people of God, who need to get to the point to seek God's face. There is a corporate seeking, a solemn assembly. Here in verses 12 through to 14 we have leaders who are named, men who set the example, they led the way for a new beginning for Temple ministry. I want to address servants of God in this place - and I know we all are - but those in full-time Christian ministry: will you lead the way? Are you hearing the call of God in your heart? Have you a vision for what God wants to do, something new? Are you ready for the new beginning in Temple ministry? We are the Temple now of the Holy Ghost, the church of the Living God, living stones - and always in these solemn assemblies, God calls His leaders to repent. Are we good at that?

I was reading recently about John Davidson of Prestonpans in Scotland. Many years ago he became burdened for the welfare of the church, and he give expression to his concern at the Synod of Fife in 1593, and the Assembly met in 1594. His presbytery of Haddington joined with him in petitioning the General Assembly of the Church to set aside time for a solemn assembly at the annual meeting of 1596. The Assembly was in St Giles Cathedral in Edinburgh in the month of March, and a very thorough catalogue of sins was prepared - that's right! A book of the sins of God's people that covered the misdeeds of every class and person from the King right down to the meanest subjects of the land - but listen: if you looked through that catalogue today, you would see that more space was given to the sins of ministers than the wickedness of other classes, all of them all lumped together. The solemn assembly occurred on Tuesday of the second week of the General Assembly, and some 400 men, mostly ministers, participated. Davidson preached on Ezekiel 13 and Ezekiel 34, and dealt with the lying prophets, and the shepherds who feed themselves and not their flocks. He then exhorted his brothers to enter into private meditation and confession, and it was then that the Holy Spirit of God came down, and the ancient cathedral church resounded with the sobs and cries of hundreds of ministers humbling themselves before God on the dirt floor. A public pledge of fresh surrender to God Almighty was called for, and all but one of those men - I wouldn't have liked to have been that man! - all but one waved their hand as evidence of a binding commitment that they would repent and seek God. There was a spirit of corporate repentance that was carried through the presbyterys, and eventually led to the revival of 1596. I believe that is what God is calling for us to do, and particularly the leaders among God's people - as Joel called: 'Let the priests, who minister to the LORD, weep between the porch and the altar; let them say, 'Spare Your people, O LORD, and do not give Your heritage to reproach, that the nations should rule over them. Why should they say among the peoples, 'Where is their God?''.

Hezekiah presided over a solemn assembly where there was confession of sin. Look at verse 6: 'Our fathers have trespassed and done evil in the eyes of the LORD our God; they have forsaken Him, have turned their faces away from the dwelling place of the LORD, and turned their backs on Him' - the sins of their fathers they were confessing. Now when the covenant keeping God of Israel met His people on the grounds of covenant, He revealed His character to them, and He revealed His attributes to them. We read it on several occasions that He revealed Himself to be the Lord, long-suffering and abundant and mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression, but by no means clearing the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers on their children to the third and the fourth generation. Now that is not an old covenant text that you can rubbish into some prior dispensation, it's a revelation of the character of God in patience and long-suffering - and yet there is a consequence for our sin, and that expression 'to the third and fourth generation' doesn't mean literally to the third and fourth generation, it means that there is an ongoing effect of sin from our fathers right down to us.

Now I know that this can be seen as a controversial subject, but I believe in it, and I've seen the fruit of it. I believe we see the fruit of it in our church, I believe there are personal applications in our own lives. I mean you can look at the facial expressions of a child, and say 'Oh, he has his father's nose', maybe that's not a good thing, or 'His father's ears', or 'His father's colour of hair' - and we have this genetically, and I believe it is the case spiritually. There are certain that are learned in our homes, learned in our churches, learned our land, but even passed down spiritually that can affect the next generations. We have this right throughout the word of God: Daniel, when he prayed, he confessed the sins of his fathers; Ezra, we saw yesterday, did the same; Nehemiah did the same. They actually went further, because in the congregation of Israel they weren't just confessing the sin of their father, and grandfather, and the rest, but they were confessing national sins - sins of their society and their community. They were pleading for God's forgiveness.

Now, I want to ask you: what are the sins that affect you, that maybe have been passed down in your family? Corporately I want to ask: what are the sins of our nation? How has the church of Jesus Christ, how has she played a part and contributed to the sins of our nation? I believe, historically and spiritually, we are at a very specific vantage point in our nation - and I'm talking about Ireland. I want you to consider just now, having exited many years of troubles and strife: where are we now in relation to confessing the sins of our fathers, and dealing with certain things that the church has played a part in? Now, when I was in school I learned British history, I didn't learn Irish history. I'm not an historian, but the more I learn of history the more I realise how little I actually know, and the more I realise how there is so much guilt on every part. There is a mass, a multitude of national sins that have been committed.

This year, 2012, is the centenary of the signing of the Ulster Covenant. I don't know if you know much about it, you should find out a good bit about it - you'll be hearing a lot in the media over the next months. That was a covenant that much of the Protestant clergy encouraged people to sign, which was a blood covenant. I'm not

getting political here, I'm only interested in the spiritual. A blood covenant is a very serious thing. What has happened in our land, certainly over the last 40 or 50 years or more, there has been a politicising of the Gospel of Jesus Christ that I believe is abhorrent in the eyes of the Living God! It is high time that the church confessed it and repented of it - whatever contribution we had to make in it. You say: 'Well, I didn't sign anything!'. Well, maybe you stand representing forefathers in your denomination, in your church, who did? There could be a spiritual bondage on us now because of it.

The entire nation of Judah had to face its sins and make matters right with the Lord. Johannes Facius writes in his book, 'The Powerhouse of God', listen: 'There is one major problem that stands in the way of healing the land, that is the unconfessed, historical sins of the nation. Unconfessed sin is the foothold of satanic forces, whether we speak of the individual or the nation. Unconfessed sin constitutes a basis for Satanic rule. We must therefore find a way of dealing with it if we are to see our people delivered from demonic strongholds'. In verse 7, Hezekiah says of the sins of his fathers: 'They have also shut up the doors of the vestibule, put out the lamps, and have not burned incense or offered burnt offerings in the holy place to the God of Israel'. The sins of their fathers had put out the lamp of witness, now that's highly significant. When we go to the seven letters to the churches at the beginning of the book of Revelation, we read to the church at Ephesus Jesus said: 'Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place; unless you repent'.

Do you know what I'm going to tell you? The reason we are in the state we are in this land is not the government's fault, whose is it then? Could it be the church's? Could it be? Certainly there must be a need for us to repent, because the light of our witness is going out. I know that Ulster is a spiritual utopia to many people who don't realise we are rapidly on the decline. We're going down on old steam, and we need God before the lamp is put out! I want you to understand that it is Jesus who is taking away the candlestick in Revelation, He is doing the disciplining because they're not abiding in covenant with Him.

Here in Hezekiah stay the incense altar was cold, and that signifies, surely, that no prayer was going up to God. There was no sacrifice, therefore, on the altar, and God is crying out to hearts here and now: 'I beseech you therefore, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. Be not conformed to this world: but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may be able to prove what is that good, acceptable, and perfect, will of God'. God is calling for all of us - one of the young men said that - it's not just for folk going to Bible College. I believe Brother Shearer was preaching on discipleship last night - that's what God wants: 100%, the whole man and woman, body, soul, and spirit; everything, all that we are, all that we have - and He deserves it! The blood of Calvary merits it! The slain Lamb is worthy of it!

First Hezekiah said 'Sanctify yourselves', and then the second call was 'Sanctify the house of God'. In verse 5 we read: 'Carry out the rubbish from the holy place' - what

a statement! Rubbish had filled God's house. Now, what was it? Well, if you look at chapter 28 verse 24, we see what his father had done: 'Ahaz gathered the articles of the house of God, cut in pieces the articles of the house of God, shut up the doors of the house of the LORD, and made for himself altars', pagan altars, 'in every corner of Jerusalem'. What was this rubbish that had been thrown into the house of God that had escalated? Could it have been the artefacts of worship? The Levitical priesthood and everything that Ahaz had abandoned, and he just broke it all up and threw it in a garbage pile! These were, if you like, the broken artefacts of a past devotion - rubbish in the house of God! We could liken them spiritually, perhaps, to the old wineskins that the Lord Jesus talked about in Judaism; the old wineskins, the form, the rule, and the rite of Judaism that was not able to hold the new wine of the new covenant.

These old artefacts were useless, they were broken, they were bursting like the wineskins. Can I say to you: we cannot worship a history broken by the passing of time. I say that to you in the Faith Mission - and I'm sure most of you know that anyway. I say it to everyone represented here. We glory in the heritage that we have in our land, and praise God for it, we do not take for granted - but we cannot worship a history broken by the passing of time. Hezekiah knew this, and he knew that it wasn't a case of taking superglue and putting all these things back together and doing things the way we did it before. It was a case of throwing all the rubbish out of God's Temple, and allowing God to do a new thing. In fact, in 2 Kings 18 verse 4 it mentions very specifically something that Hezekiah did, it mentioned how he destroyed the bronze serpent that Moses had erected. You know in Numbers 21, when the people were being killed by a plague that God had sent for their sin, and they had to look to the bronze serpent to be saved. Well, what had happened in Judah was this had become a religious relic. They were starting to worship this, it had reached idol status - they even gave it a name: 'Nehushtan'. Hezekiah realised that this instrument that had been used in the hand of God for deliverance and salvation had to be discarded, because it had gotten in God's way of doing the new thing!

How easy it is for us to want to honour relish religious relics of the past that have no longer any power. It is high time in our land that we get rid of the rubbish out of God's house, the religious rubbish - and there's tons of it! It's high time we got rid of the political rubbish, got rid of it all! It's idolatry in the eyes of God, and I believe it's bringing a curse upon God's people! That's not all Hezekiah did either, he went to all those corners where his father had erected pagan, godless, sexual idols and altars, and he went to every one of them and he wrecked them, he destroyed them, he cleansed them, and he placed the Lord's altar where it belonged. On the first day of the first month, we read later down the chapter, they began to cleanse the Temple beginning in the Holy of Holies - that's interesting, in the very presence of God, where it was meant to be at least - then into the Holy Place they carried out all this accumulated rubbish, the remnants of idolatry. They took it down, it says, to the Kidron Valley - do you know where that is? That was Jerusalem's rubbish dump, that was the city incinerator, where the worm dies not and the fire is not quenched - and they burned it all! Then the leaders of God's house began to cleanse the vessels of the Temple and the instruments that were used in Temple service, and they put them back in their proper place. Do you know how long it took them? Sixteen days to

complete the work, and they even missed Passover! Boy, that's something for a Jew, to miss Passover.

Passover was on the 14th day of the first month, however Hezekiah didn't hold it until the second month. Why? Because things had to be put right. There are some Christians I know, and they think it's the unpardonable sin to miss a meeting, they really do! But we're doing what Jesus said, many of us, we're going to the altar and we're not right with our brother, and there's things not right in our lives. As I read on Saturday evening from Isaiah chapter 1, that type of solemn assembly is abhorrent in the eyes of the Holy God of Heaven - He desires heart-righteousness. You know, when I talk about dumping the rubbish out of God's house, immediately some people, they go to certain modern trends that they don't like - the music, or the way young people dress - that's not what I'm talking about! I'm talking about the heart: God is interested in our hearts, the idolatry that is there that is competing for the rightful kingship of Messiah Jesus in our lives! Hezekiah was man enough to put things on hold, to suspend the programs till things were right.

Now please listen to what I'm going to say, because it's been a very heavy burden on my heart over these days: over the years individuals can gather rubbish in their lives. It can come from past generations, but a great deal of the time we invite it upon ourselves by the lifestyles that we live, the things that we do and the things that we leave undone. Churches, over their history, gather together a great deal of rubbish. Organisations, missionary and otherwise, can gradually accumulate a great deal of religious rubbish, while at the same time neglecting the essentials that really matter to God. As Jesus said to the Pharisees: 'You tithe mint and cummin an anise', and that you ought to do, 'but the weightier matters of the law you leave undone'. Even organisations, just like individuals, at times need cleansing. Maybe you're here, and you have identified with what I'm talking about, and you know there are things in your life that you need deliverance from. You need to be freed. Oh, you're a Christian, and you're born-again, and we think 'That solves everything, doesn't it?' - praise God it's the start, but it's only the threshold experience. Then God starts a cleaning up process, it's called sanctification, and it goes on until we get to heaven. Many of us stop at conversion, and we wonder why we're not getting through with God, and there's many things, rubbish, that has been built up and has never been dealt with, we've never brought to God. But what applies to the individual, we may not realise, often applies to organisations, it applies to denominations. Sometimes they need cleansing. For instance, if a structure of elders is not right before God, that oversight need cleansing, a presbytery, whatever you want to call it, a session. If a group of Christians has been affected by an ungodly authority, and they have come under that spiritual authority, or there has been underhanded or even immoral practices among God's leaders, that needs to be cleansed! We can't apply this to individuals and then say, 'Ach, well, that doesn't apply to groups' - it does apply to the groups! The wonderful news is: if we confess our sins, we can get rid of the rubbish! If we're honest with God, and if we're honest with ourselves, and if we desire to have a conscience void of offence toward God and others, and we walk in the light and we confess our sins, and we don't deceive ourselves, and we stay under the blood, we can know the blessing of God - but God wants reality! God requires us to deal with

things like bitterness and unforgiveness. He says: 'If you do not forgive your brother his trespassers, I will not forgive you' - that's God's word! Now, you can jump around, and do exegetical somersaults all you like, but that's what it says.

We've got to deal with compromise. Then, when we confess our sins, and we light the lamps, and we burn the incense, and we offer ourselves as living sacrifices to God - just like what happened in Hezekiah's day - He will see, He will hear, and He will send the blessing He longs to! But I have to tell you today, the alternative is terrifying, for there is judgement if we don't repent. Look at verse 8: 'Therefore the wrath of the LORD fell upon Judah and Jerusalem, and He has given them up to trouble, to desolation, and to jeering, as you see with your eyes' - what a statement! He gave His own people up to trouble. Now, I hope you agree with me that the church has become a laughing stock in the marketplace - that's not all her fault of course. The powers of darkness are rising, and there is an onslaught, as we saw on Saturday night, a multitude that is against us. We don't deny the world, the flesh, and the devil their strength - but we've got to ask ourselves: have we contributed, in any shape or form, so that the Lord has, in a sense, left us to this predicament that we find ourselves in in the decline spiritually in the Western world? I see a correspondence here with Romans chapter 1. Although this is God's people, we read in Romans chapter 1 about the Roman Empire three times: God gave them up, God gave them up, God gave them over! It wasn't a sign that judgement was coming, it was a sign that judgement was already upon them! This was a nation, and it is in the New Testament era, I know it's not referring to the church but it's referring to a Gentile people - God gave them up! Has God given the United Kingdom up? Has He? Our people are perishing!

Look at verse 9: 'Indeed, because of this our fathers have fallen by the sword; and our sons, our daughters, and our wives are in captivity'. Here was one of the signs of God's judgement: Judah was defeated in war, her sons were dying in war, her fathers were dying in war, their loved ones were in captivity. There's no doubt that we in the United Kingdom have been fighting a series of unwinnable wars, am I wrong? I'm going to tell you something that I believe, I'm not saying it has to be the case, but if the United Kingdom ever was to come under threat of an invasion as it did in World War II, I think she would be defeated. Our people are in captivity, they are in bondage, one of which is addiction. Do you know that deaths - listen to these statistics - from alcohol abuse are up 112% since 1991? Underage drinking is up 140% since 1991. Do you know that young Irish men spend four times more on alcohol than any of their European neighbours - that was in the Irish Independent. The Belfast Telegraph just last month recorded that children as young as 10 are more familiar with leading alcohol brands than those for popular snacks: 79% surveyed recognised logo for Smirnoff vodka, but only 41% recognised that Mr Kipling cakes were food! The Irish are more addicted to antidepressants than anyone else in Europe, did you know that? Prescription drugs like Valium and Diazepam kill more people in Dublin each year than heroin and crack cocaine - the Irish Examiner.

Our people are in captivity to addiction, not to mention pornography and all sorts of other things that has a grip upon even God's people. There is so much immorality around. The BBC reported in June 2011, listen to this, that in 2010 Northern Irish men

spent half a million a week on prostitutes. There are 88 brothels in Ulster, and that means that there is more demand - according to the population ratio - for prostitution in Ulster than anywhere else in Europe! That ought to shock you. BBC Northern Ireland did an investigation and discovered that hundreds of Ulster children, some as young as 13 are being lured into prostitution across the province, and family members are involved in grooming children for paedophile rings. Did you hear on the news last week that every twenty minutes in the United Kingdom a child is sexually abused? Such immorality. We are under pressure to change the definition of marriage. I preached in an evangelical church not that long ago and mentioned homosexuality from Romans 1, and a comment was made from the young people's fellowship: 'I didn't know that the Bible had anything to say about homosexuality'.

All these are signs, friends, that judgement is not coming - judgement is here, judgement is God withdrawing His gracious influence upon our nation! The way of the transgressor is hard, it applies to the corporate as well as the individual. God is not mocked, be not deceived! Whatsoever a man sows, that shall he also reap! We have sown to the flesh, we're reaping a whirlwind! Where are the Hezekiahs? Where are the Ezras? Where are the Jehoshaphats? Do you know what 'Hezekiah' means? 'The Lord Strengthens'. His judgements are remedial, He wants us to see the need, He wants us to hear the broken hearts, He wants us to hear the unborn children that never see the light and are slain! He wants us to feel the beat of His heartbeat! He wants intercessors who will come under the burden and will intercede and break through with God! He doesn't want to withdraw His grace, but He's no choice!

Hezekiah was one of the few Kings who actually remove the high places and put an end to idol worship. Are you burdened for the sins of our people of the United Kingdom, of the island of Ireland, of Europe? Are you burdened with a passion for the glory of God? I ask this morning, this afternoon: who will be drastic enough? Who will be daring enough? Who will be radical enough to do something about it? I know some of you think: 'You're wasting your time' - but Hezekiah teaches us, and he's not the only solemn assembly, there are many more even into the New Testament I believe, shows us that it's not a waste of time! If we burn our bridges, count the cost, lose our reputation perhaps, and cry unto God - whatever it means - God will move! I don't need to remind you folk, you know more about the Faith Mission than I do: the Faith Mission in its origin was radical, I mean it was really radical. It was on the cutting-edge, so much so that it was a sign spoken against - every move of God is. That was your spiritual identity, I read a book recently and it encouraged people in the Lord's work to, when they feel that they are not getting guidance from God and they don't know which direction to turn, to go back to the origination of their call and the burden that God gave them at the beginning and renew it. That's your identity, Faith Mission, spiritual renewal - and the wonderful thing is: you're in a great position, because you're already interdenominational, you're already across the whole of the island of Ireland. You have known a series of revivals in your history - that, I think, perhaps, is unique. Most organisations that know revival, after the revival, well, they become a monument to something that happened way back in the past. But what I want to call you to, Trevor Matthews gave me this book yesterday - there's only four of them left, so you better rush if you want one! - he apologised for the cover, 'Spirit of Revival',

I.R. Govan - it's your story, but do you know what needs to happen? There needs to be a new cover, not on the book, but on all our lives! We need to take the rubbish out of the house of God, and we need to let God do the new thing. We need to be radical again, whatever it costs - and the wonderful thing is this: things can change rapidly!

Look at verse 36: 'Then Hezekiah and all the people rejoiced that God had prepared the people, since the events took place so suddenly'. Do you know what Alan Redpath says? Listen carefully to this: 'Half a dozen men on their knees for sixty minutes, waiting upon the Lord with the absolute conviction that they have no answer, that their human ideas and programs are ineffective and bankrupt - they will accomplish more than fifty men around a table discussing problems for a whole year'. We as the church ought to know this: 'And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting'.

Let us pray. Now we're not hurrying in the presence of God. God is speaking, thank God He is speaking. He's speaking to individuals about their sin, why they're not breaking through to God, about their need for freedom and deliverance. He's speaking to you, He's put his finger on specific areas of your life that only the Holy Spirit knows, perhaps, and you. He's speaking to you about a call, He's calling to you, He's perhaps planting this vision in your heart for renewal and revival in the church and in the land. He speaking to Faith Mission, He is speaking to the Faith Mission. He's speaking to some ministers and pastors, church leaders - you know what He's speaking to you about. Maybe He's speaking to you about a sectarian spirit? Who will respond to God this morning? Who will say: 'Lord, have Your way'? Who will, as an act of confession and faith, those downstairs come to the front, those upstairs rise to their feet, by way of taking the rubbish out of your Temple that is your body and dumping it in Kidron Valley? Kidron Valley is the picture of hell, and Jesus took our hell on Calvary - so what we're asking you is to come to the foot of the cross and leave it there, and claim the victory of the blood, claim the deliverance that you need by faith. There is no formula, there's no little ritual or routine, there's no wee prayer to pray - it's just you seeking God with all your heart, and with faith and repentance, and laying hold of His promise to meet you on those grounds. Who will come? Come to the front if you're downstairs, rise to your feet if you're in the balcony. Who will respond to God?

As people are coming, let me read a verse that we've already read: 'My sons and daughters, do not be negligent now', that's what Hezekiah said. Do not be negligent now, God is speaking now. Has God spoken to you here? Who will come? Are there any more before I pray with these dear folk? Some of you have come forward in other meetings, I'm not saying don't come again, you come again if you want to come again, it doesn't matter. We're dealing with God, some are seeking God over the whole weekend - who will come and lay down the rubbish?

I'm going to pray with these folk, I'm not going to lead you in prayer, you seek God yourself. You bring to the Lord now, where you are, the thing that He has spoken to you about, the issue, whatever it is. His voice has been heard in your spirit, you respond by faith and repentance, and He will meet you. Seek His face, just where

you're at, and we'll all pray for you now: Abba Father, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ we pray for these dear ones upstairs and downstairs at the front, and others who have not felt able to stand or come to the front, but You're doing a work in their heart. As they come to unite in the name of the Lord Jesus, Lord, I pray that You will give them the assurance that You have met with them, that Your Spirit will witness with their spirit; as they repent, Lord, that You will deliver them; as they cry out to You, whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be delivered, that You will deliver them from bondages, oppressions, spirits even that have hounded them, Lord - things that are upon their lives from past generations, things that they have dabbled in, break it in the name of the Lord Jesus, we pray. We pray that You will fill them with the Holy Spirit. O God, start that process of deep, deep cleansing; O God, move in, even in this place; O God, we need to get the rubbish out, and we need to let You come in all Your Shekinah glory. Lord, come and meet with souls, and start something Lord - we believe You already have, but we pray: accelerate it, intensify it, even throughout this day, for the glory of Jesus alone and for the benefit of His church and our perishing countrymen and women, Amen.

Transcribed by Andrew Watkins, Preach The Word - April 2012
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The Solemn Assembly - Chapter 4

"Under Joel"

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by David Legge

It's good to be with you, and it has been a true privilege and a delight to be ministering over this Convention weekend with you. I'm glad that tonight my job is done and I can have a rest tomorrow - some of the speakers can't say that, but it's good to have been with you, and particularly to have known the Lord's help bringing messages from His heart. I want to do that again tonight, let me just say before I launch in that often we as evangelicals pray - and I find this in Gospel Missions in particular - we pray before the event, and we pray during the event, and then we give up praying after it. I want to appeal to you to not just pray for these meetings after, but pray for the preachers after. Please do that, because I am quite afraid at times of after, when God has helped and God has visited. Sam Workman has already been mentioned tonight, and what a man of God if ever there was one - he said to me on one occasion: 'Make sure, David, that the devil doesn't get your victory'. What an important principle that is. Do pray for us please, that the Lord will protect and preserve us.

I want you to turn with me to Joel chapter 1, and we will be looking at chapter 2 as well. We'll not be reading them all, but a few verses from each - Daniel, Hosea, Joel; find Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, and then Joel. If you haven't been at any of the sessions where I've been preaching so far, we have been taking a theme right throughout, that of 'Solemn Assembly'. If you don't know what that is, you will by the end of the message. A solemn assembly appears to have been an integral part of biblical revivals, a vital preparation for when God was going to move and do something spectacular and supernatural. We've been applying certain factors, common traits in revivals, to four portions of Scripture and four Old Testament characters. The first on Saturday evening was that of King Jehoshaphat, then on Sunday afternoon we looked at Ezra the priest, this morning we looked - what did we look at this morning? - King Hezekiah, I was going to have to ask somebody there! Tonight we're going to look at God's man, Joel.

So we're looking at verses 13 and 14 of chapter 1 first of all, and then skipping over to verse 12 of chapter 2. So chapter 1:13-14, the prophet, inspired by the Lord, says: *"Gird yourselves and lament, you priests; Wail, you who minister before the altar; Come, lie all night in sackcloth, you who minister to my God; For the grain offering and the drink offering are withheld from the house of your God. Consecrate a fast, Call a sacred assembly; Gather the elders and all the inhabitants of the land into the house of the LORD your God, and cry out to the LORD"*.

Over to chapter 2 verse 12, and we're reading just down to verse 17: *"Now, therefore', says the LORD, 'Turn to Me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping,*

and with mourning'. So rend your heart, and not your garments; return to the LORD your God, for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness; and He relents from doing harm. Who knows if He will turn and relent, and leave a blessing behind Him; a grain offering and a drink offering for the LORD your God? Blow the trumpet in Zion, consecrate a fast, call a sacred assembly; gather the people, sanctify the congregation, assemble the elders, gather the children and nursing babes; let the bridegroom go out from his chamber, and the bride from her dressing room. Let the priests, who minister to the LORD, weep between the porch and the altar; let them say, 'Spare Your people, O LORD, and do not give Your heritage to reproach, that the nations should rule over them. Why should they say among the peoples, 'Where is their God?''".

Now I've invited you every session so far to come to the Lord now in prayer. I want you to pray now, I want you to pray for yourself, pray for those around you if you feel that way, but I want you to pray that God might speak to you. I hope we have come tonight - I'm expecting God - and I hope that you have come to hear from heaven. You know, we do hear from heaven, but not often are our hearts tuned to hear. So let us come, and if you're not prepared, get prepared for God has something to say. So let's come to the Lord and seek His face now: Father, Abba Father, Holy Father, we bow before You in that all-victorious name of the Lord Jesus, and through the merits of His precious, shed blood. We thank You, Lord, for the new and living way that we have to come in boldness to the throne of grace, where we can find grace and mercy to help in time of need - and, Lord, we're in a time of need! A time of need, now, in this moment - but we're in a time of need as the church of Jesus Christ at this particular epoch of our history. We're in a time of need in our land, O God, on this island and in this group of island nations - Lord, we're in time of need, and we need grace, nothing but Your grace will do, Lord. Lord, You know the message that's on my heart tonight. I have sought not to be disobedient to the heavenly vision. O God, I pray tonight, that You will speak with the voice that wakes the dead, and make Your people hear. Lord, do something tonight, we're desperate - when shall we come and appear before God? O Lord, we long for You, our hearts thirst and cry after the Living God. Lord, nothing else but Your presence will do. Come, Lord, we pray - we're hungry, we're thirsty, we're longing for You, Lord. Come tonight and meet with us, for Christ's glory and for the good of His church, Amen.

Solemn assemblies have been an integral part of biblical revivals, a vital preparation for when God was going to do something. Just to recap where I've been for a moment or two: a solemn assembly is simply when God, by His Holy Spirit, says to the hearts of His people: 'Gather My saints together unto Me', and there is a move of God - this is not an orchestrated or human-organised thing, it is not based on effort or human ingenuity, it is a move of God where God births something in His people's hearts, sometimes independently. People who have not known one another, separately, never have their paths crossed, and God imparts something to them of a great need and a burden. It, in a very strange, supernatural way, brings those people together, and over a period of time a solemn assembly takes place.

Some of the factors that have preceded revivals, Richard Owen Roberts has

highlighted four in particular, and I've applied them to all these four solemn assemblies. The first thing that happens is that there is a tragic declension among the people of God. Revival is preceded by a period of both moral and spiritual decline among the congregation of God's people. Joel's era is no exception among God's people. Joel is a pre-exilic prophet, that means he prophesied before Judah was taken into Babylonian captivity. We believe that most likely he prophesied during the time of Elisha, who was prophesying to the Northern Kingdom of Israel. It was the time when Joash was the boy king of Judah, so that might be able to place it into some kind of chronological history for you, biblically speaking.

The people of Joel's day were guilty of flagrant sin that had to be confessed and had to be put away, and that's what happens at solemn assembly. God draws, by His Spirit, His people together for the main purpose of getting right with Him: repentance, confession, renunciation, forsaking of sin; and then a renewal of their faith and obedience toward God - that is a solemn assembly. Boy, did these people need to do it. Yet it's quite strange in a way, because the only sin that Joel the prophet mentions against the people is the sin of drunkenness. If you look at the passage, you will see that in verse 5 of chapter 1: 'Awake, you drunkards, and weep; And wail, all you drinkers of wine, because of the new wine, for it has been cut off from your mouth'. Now, does that mean that the only sin they were guilty of was drunkenness? Well, let me just say that that was a serious enough sin! As you look at the prophets, Hosea and Amos, we see that this was a sin that the prophets often condemned, and it's increasingly becoming a problem among God's people as social drinking becomes more acceptable, particularly in middle-class evangelical homes that have never seen the wreckage that alcohol can do to a family. I'm not being legalistic, I'm not telling you what to do, I'm just warning you of the danger of drunkenness.

But why did Joel, by the Spirit, home in on this particular sin? Here's why: drunkenness epitomised all the careless people in the land who just lived for pleasure. We are living in a similar generation. In fact, Paul the apostle gives us an insight into what it will increasingly be like in the last days, in 2 Timothy 3:1-2 and verse 4 he says: 'But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God'. Now don't get me wrong, I'm not a killjoy - I love a good time like anyone - but we live in a society today, if ever there was one, and it would be applicable to say as Paul did of some in Philippians chapter 3, that their god is their belly. They live to satisfy the flesh, the sensual appetites, as if all there is is the physical, material realm. They are agnostic, gravely atheistic some, in regard to the spiritual realm - and so they just live for the things of the flesh. We were driving home over the M3 I think it was yesterday afternoon, passing the Odyssey last night, that great arena, and I told my wife: 'Just look over there at the cars, the myriads of cars there on a Lord's Day evening!'. I said to my wife: 'Barbara, that is the cathedral in Belfast tonight, that is where worship is going on'. Their God is their belly, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God - just living to satisfy the sensual appetites.

This was a tragic declension that came upon the people of God that necessitated the prophet to announce a judgement that was upon them, and that is the second feature

that is common, preceding each revival of God's people. There is a righteous judgement from God. Without exception in the Old Testament revivals have always been preceded by some kind of a righteous judgement from God. Some of them have been drastic, but many of them have been remedial, disciplinary, in order that God's people should awaken, that they should come to their senses, that they should be quickened, and they should return to the Lord. Joel's message grew out of such a judgement, in fact it was a national calamity for Judah. As we read this prophet, we find out that God visited a plague of locusts of such proportion upon the nation that nothing like it had ever happened before. Look at chapter 1 verses 2 and 4: 'Hear this, you elders, and give ear, all you inhabitants of the land! Has anything like this happened in your days, or even in the days of your fathers? Tell your children about it, let your children tell their children, and their children another generation. What the chewing locust left, the swarming locust has eaten; What the swarming locust left, the crawling locust has eaten; and what the crawling locust left, the consuming locust has eaten'.

Now some translations would give us the impression that there are four different insects that are described here - the canker worm and so on - but it's not the case. These are not four different insects, rather they are four different stages in the growth of the locusts. What is probably trying to convey is the idea that there were successive swarms of locusts that came upon Judah destroying what the previous battalion of locusts had left behind, successions of destruction. I'm led to believe that there are 90 varieties of the locust, and any is well able to destroy a nation. In fact, in our modern age in some parts of Africa, locusts have been known to cover the whole surface of the ground over areas of more than 2000 square miles. Do you know what that is? That's an area about half the size of Northern Ireland! Their excrement can be smelt 150 miles away, and they are a source of pestilence because of the putrefaction of their accumulated bodies. God sent this locust swarm upon His people. If you look at chapter 2 and verse 2, you will see it suggests that the great swarm was so dense that it blotted out the sun and the moon. If you look at verse 11 of chapter 2, you will see that God actually calls these locusts 'My army', they were like horsemen. He repeats this in verse 25 as well: 'My army' - so right away we are aware where this judgement is coming from, it is divine chastisement! Does God want to judge His people? No. Does God want to chastise us? No. But because we do not dwell in covenant with God, and when we are disobedient we move from out of under His blessing and we move into an area where He must - by covenant right as sons and daughters, and as His bride, the church - He must deal with us. So He withdraws His gracious influence and allows such judgement to take place.

Judah was not abiding in covenant. In Deuteronomy 28 we have the covenant, verses 38 and 39 read thus, listen carefully: 'You shall carry much seed out to the field but', because of your sin, the implication is, 'you will gather little in, for the locust shall consume it. You shall plant vineyards and tend them, but you shall neither drink of the wine nor gather the grapes; for the worms shall eat them'. Israel and Judah knew the consequence of not abiding in covenant with God, and so God allowed this plague to come upon them. In fact, it's called here: 'The Day of the Lord'. Now, of course, there is an end-time interpretation of an army that will invade Israel in the last days,

but there is a sense in which, as Campbell Morgan said, it is always the Day of the Lord. No matter what calamities may come to men and nations, God is God, and He is always in control. Do you know what 'Joel' means? 'The Lord Is God', and these calamities reminded the people that there was a judgement coming, that there is an end-time, that there was a God with whom they had to do, whom they were in covenant with. As you read through this book, in addition to the terrible plague of insects, there was a fierce drought that inflicted the land. The fields were ruined, the drunkards, we read, wailed because they had no wine to drink. The priests mourned because no one could bring the grain offering and the sacrifices to the house of the Lord.

I want you to see that, because of the sin of the people of God, the actual land itself mourned! It was as if the land was wailing and weeping because of a lack of God's blessing in their midst. The vinedressers wailed, the beasts groaned while the herds of the cattle wandered aimlessly because there was no pasture for them. The people themselves, it says, wailed like a virgin girdled with sackcloth for the bridegroom of her youth. What I want you to see, and it's all very profound, but this is the message: the whole land, whatever land we're talking about tonight, suffers when there is an absence of the blessing of God upon His church - the land suffers! Even the national economy was devastated - does that ring true at all? All these were signs of divine displeasure, God was trying to get the attention of His people.

A righteous judgement from God because of their tragic declension, but we have also seen a third common factor preceding revivals: the raising up of an immensely burdened leader or leaders. Here we have Joel, and he's given divinely inspired instructions for such an hour. Look at verses 1 and 2 of chapter 1: 'The word of the LORD that came to Joel the son of Pethuel. Hear this, you elders' - that was his message, 'Hear!'. What he was really saying was: 'Let the Lord interpret these events for you, hear the word of the Lord!' - that was Joel's ministry, 'This is how you need to interpret the events that are taking place, this awful devastation upon your land'.

Now, I want to ask you tonight: how do you interpret world events? How do you interpret what's going on in Western Europe? How do you interpret what's going on in the so-called developed, civilised world? How do you interpret what goes on in the British Isles, and what is going on here in our province and our island of Ireland? You see, we're not to seek understanding from listening to political or religious commentators - no, no! Neither are we to look to sociologists or even theologians, we are to look to the Lord - and that was Joel's message: 'Hear the word of the Lord! Hear what God says about this!'. That was one role of the prophets in general: to interpret historical events in the light of the word of God in order to help the people of God understand the mind of God and the will of God, what needed to be done.

Well, how do you interpret things? Joel wanted Judah to understand what God was saying to them through these calamities, and no doubt he had to wait upon God for the word from God to know what God's mind was. I want to ask you tonight, and be very pointed in my application: in the light of global and national events, are we asking, is the church asking, are you, believer, asking, 'What is God saying to us?'' In

this recession, this financial crisis - read the prophet Haggai, in his day they were earning money, and he said: 'You will earn money, and you'll put it in a bag with holes. It will come to nothing, I will blow on your produce. Consider your ways! My house lies waste, but your houses are the best palaces available!'. He was trying to get their attention, that's how Haggai interpreted his recession. What about the wars? I mentioned that our nation is fighting a series of unwinnable wars, how are we to interpret this? How are we to interpret the crumbling of the institutions, such as marriage, that have endured millennia, and yet to our generation they are falling to such ungodliness that is unprecedented? How do we interpret this?

I touched on Irish history earlier, how do we interpret the history of Ireland? Most of us think we know it, and we don't, and I'll be the first to admit that I'm far from an expert - but all I had to do recently was take a bus tour around Belfast, and I realised that the problems of Belfast were far more than just Protestant and Roman Catholic, that's for sure. How do we interpret these things, the history of Ireland? How do we interpret where our province is today, the political settlement that there is today? I'm not commenting on what this party, or that party has done, I'm not terribly interested in that, I'm interested in what God thinks! What God is trying to do and trying to say to His people in the midst of such a situation as this! In the light of God's word, what does it all mean? Not in the light of political ideology or religious dogma, but in the light of the living, proceeding word of God from the throne of God now - what does it all mean?

I'm sure you've heard the expression that Ireland was the land of saints and scholars - well, it used to be known that way. But have you considered, when you look at our history, even at a glance, that our people have unusually had God's hand upon them down through the years. Take Patrick, for instance, the apostle of Ireland who was said to have baptised perhaps around 120,000 Irish men and established as little as 300 churches, some figures go up to 600 churches on this isle - a mighty man of God, blood-washed, a great evangelist - you read his confessions. But it doesn't stop with Patrick, in the sixth century there was Columbkille and Columbanus - who, incidentally, trained in Bangor - aye, this Bangor. Both Columbkille and Columbanus established monasteries, really like modern-day Bible schools, and they sent missionaries all over Europe to evangelise the pagans. In fact, Columbkille believed in people - and this is a quote from him - 'becoming exiles for Christ'. It is reputed that he was the missionary who Christianised Britain. He went to the Isle of Iona in Scotland, and eventually over to Northumbria in England and settled monasteries there, and moved right throughout the British Isles evangelising. Columbanus, a native of Bangor, went to Gaul in 591. He founded two monasteries in France before travelling through modern Germany, Switzerland, and Italy - do you know this history? Do you? This is your spiritual heritage! It was the Irish, the early Celtic saints, who blazed a trail for Christ, and it is not an exaggeration to say that it was from these shores that Christ was preached to much of Western Europe. Might I say, long before there was a Roman Catholic or Protestant church, God's hand has been unusually upon this isle. There was once a great missionary commission upon this nation.

Of course there have been several revivals throughout our history, not least 1859, but that was only one. To come back to Bangor in the 1920s, of course Northern Ireland politically was in a state of chaos, and politicians were at their wits end - murder and mayhem seemed to be inevitable, but another native of Bangor - Bangor is a very blessed place - W.P. Nicholson was raised of God. Some believe that through his ministry the nation was saved from Civil War. Now, of course, we all know very well that there has been a lot of water under the bridge since then, and a lot of blood spilt - but I want to tell you here tonight, and I believe from the heart of God, that God is not through with this nation yet. The heart of God is to do a new thing. Isaiah said it, and it's burned upon my heart in these days: 'Do not remember the former things, nor consider the things of old. Behold, I will do a new thing, now it shall spring forth; shall you not know it? I will even make a road in the wilderness and rivers in the desert' God is putting into the hearts, particularly of many young people, a remnant, a freshness, and a vigour for God to move again - and it's exciting! It's exhilarating! I believe it's a good time to be a Christian!

But I'll tell you: it'll not come easy. Something radical needs to happen, and that's what happened during these revivals. You've been with me, or if you have you must know this as well as I do: a tragic declension, a judgement from God, raising up of a leader or leaders who are burdened, and then some extraordinary action that takes place - and the most common was the solemn assembly, that's what he calls Judah to in chapter 1 verses 13 and 14. In chapter 2 verses 12 to 17 Joel called a solemn assembly, and all the people were required to attend - and that speaks of unity, and that's what we need in the church! Now I'm not naive enough to believe that denominationalism will cease, though I would love it to - but I believe we're moving into an era, particularly among young people, where denominations are less important than they have ever been. Praise God for that! Those in whose hearts God is moving need to unite together, those who are being imparted a vision from heaven need to come together. They were all required to return to the Lord with all their hearts, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning - and it was for a protracted period of repentance, that's the solemn assembly.

They were required to rend their hearts and not their garments. In chapter 1 verse 11, Joel calls the farmers to lament. In verses 13 and 14 he calls the priests to repent. Do you know something? This is costly, and I'll tell you more: it might cause inconvenience for us. I said this morning, as I spoke of Hezekiah, and they had to postpone the Passover because there was rubbish in the house of God that needed cleared out and sent to the rubbish tip. They were prepared as Jews - imagine it! This was a sacred thing that they would never dream of missing, but there was something more important, and that was to get their hearts right with God. They had to suspend the program - I believe that's what God is saying to the church here in the North! You've got to stop going through the motions and admit that there is something drastically wrong, and you need to seek the Lord's face and ask: 'Why has this befallen us?'

Here we see the same, the farmers who wanted to earn money have to suspend their labour. Boy, even the honeymooners had to leave their honeymoon. Look at chapter 2

verse 16, at the end: 'Let the bridegroom go out from his chamber, and the bride from her dressing room'. Oh, how many times do we hear: 'It's the most important day of your life' - sure the law of God even allowed a soldier to miss war for a full year because of marriage. But do you see the seriousness of the predicament among God's people: this was more important than the most important day of your life. You see, this is the heart of God that is being imparted to the people, and it changes everything. The value system is completely opposite. Even the mother with a suckling infant at her breast was required to be there, for it was time to seek the Lord. I ask you tonight from the depths of my soul: is it not time to seek the Lord? They were not to weep because of the consequences of the judgement that their sin had brought on the land, but they were to weep over their sin.

In verse 13 of chapter 1 he calls them to gird themselves, that simply means 'Put on sackcloth'. Now let me inform you of how the Hebrew mind would have worked here: immediately he would have called them to gird themselves, these people who knew God's covenant instinctively would have went to 2 Chronicles 7:14, 'If My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land'. They knew that this is the process that was beginning, that's how they would have understood it: it's time to seek the Lord! Is it not time, I ask you? I'm sorry for folk here who aren't from Ireland, but I, in these messages, have such a burden - and yet it's our isles really, we're all so connected and intertwined - but I ask you, people of our nation: is it not the case that Ireland has been manipulated long enough by Satan? He is the murderer, he is the father of lies and propaganda, and his princes in heavenly realms have bound our people in spiritual fetters long enough: political and religious fetters. The tragic thing is that the church has joined in with it! We must repent! We must purge ourselves of all idolatry, but will we? Will we?

There's nothing more that I would love to see happening in Ulster in particular - not because the rest of the island is unimportant, but because there needs to be a real work done up here, because there is a hardness here that there isn't elsewhere. We're like the Jews, you know, in blindness. I would love to see a stadium, I would love to see the Odyssey, I would love to see a public place filled with the people of God not for a convention, not for a concert, but for a solemn assembly to seek the Lord as to why this has befallen us!

I want you to know that the solemn assembly was not wishful thinking, it wasn't a haphazard hope that God would hear them, but it was upon the basis of God's covenant. They understood that God would hear and answer their prayer if they engaged with God's covenant promises. God promised to answer, it's His covenant-keeping character. It's mentioned here in chapter 2 verse 13, look at it: 'Rend your heart, and not your garments; Return to the LORD your God, for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness; and He relents from doing harm' - that is a description of the attributes of God that were recited to Moses when he met with God on Mount Sinai, when he interceded for the sins of the children of Israel. God revealed to him that He wants to forgive, He wants to restore, He wants to revive, He wants to renew - what an encouragement! There is no reason why we should stay

under the judgement of God for one more moment, if we will choose to seek God's face!

I do want to end on this positive note in my messages: that the Lord might wound, but He also heals. Hosea said: 'Come, and let us return to the LORD; for He has torn, but He will heal us; He has stricken, but He will bind us up'. Look at verse 20 of chapter 2, we see it here, the healing of the Lord: 'But I will remove far from you the northern army, and will drive him away into a barren and desolate land, with his face toward the eastern sea and his back toward the western sea; his stench will come up, and his foul odour will rise, because he has done monstrous things. Fear not, O land; Be glad and rejoice, For the LORD has done marvellous things!'. Do you see this? In verse 20 the enemy has done monstrous things, but those monstrous things of our history will be replaced with marvellous things; and joy will take the place of fear. Look at verse 25: 'So I will restore to you the years that the swarming locust has eaten, the crawling locust, the consuming locust, and the chewing locust, My great army which I sent among you' - I will restore! Glory to God!

There would be a bumper harvest. He promises that the crops would be there for all, everything that they have lost would be restored, all that had disappeared in drought, famine, and the locust plague. Now listen, let's be real: you cannot literally recover years, that can't be done - but God has a strange and mysterious, supernatural, wonderful way of giving back wasted fruit, missed out years of blessing, even centuries of barrenness; God is the eternal, benevolent compensator! 'I will restore to you the years that the locusts have eaten' - is that a personal word to someone here tonight, someone in the situation that Paul had been in? You think you've burned your bridges, and you've lost credibility, and you can't go back, you've messed up - please listen to the word of God to you tonight: 'I will restore to you the years that the locusts have eaten'.

There is a corporate word here, is there not, to the church and to the nation. Listen: these successive waves, swarms of locusts, destruction - one, two, three, four - what one wave left behind, the next destroyed, but God will restore it all. How will He do this? It seems a tall order, doesn't it? Well, He will do it the way He always does it, by an outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Look at verse 28 of chapter 2: 'And it shall come to pass afterward that I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions. And also on My menservants and on My maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days'. Can I ask you tonight: have you had your own personal Pentecost? This isn't preached today, I didn't preach it for years because I didn't know it. Some people call it 'the baptism of the Holy Spirit', 'the fullness of the Spirit', 'a crisis', 'a perfect love', 'a sealing of the Spirit'. I agree with Billy Graham in this much, he said: 'I don't care what you call it, just get it!'. I have my own convictions about what to call it, but wait till I tell you this: times have changed, but the need for the Holy Spirit's power has not. I think because of our increasingly secular and pagan society, we today need more of an apostolic demonstration of power in the Holy Spirit - I really do believe that. We know that these verses are partially fulfilled at Pentecost, but we are still in the last days - they started at Pentecost. These verses can be fulfilled now, and I

believe they will be fulfilled more as we approach the return of Jesus Christ. O, for an outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon Ireland! O, for a nationalist Pentecost!

In response to the corporate repentance of the people, through the use of their divinely ordained means of a solemn assembly, the land rejoiced. The land was made glad, the pastures of the wilderness turned green, the trees and the vines bore fruit because God was in their midst again.

'O for the floods on the thirsty land!
O for a mighty revival!
O for a sanctified, fearless band,
Ready to hail its arrival!'

Are you ready? I've never been in the Faith Mission, I've never studied at the College - they'll maybe never have me back after this, I don't know! But Duncan Campbell is a man who has had such an impact on my life, he's already been mentioned tonight, but what many do not know is that while the Lewis revival was still going on Duncan Campbell came to the Faith Mission Bible College to address the students. He told them of a midwife who had a vision of Ireland. Her vision was of Ireland in darkness, but then all of a sudden the light came breaking out in the South, and then filled the whole land. In 1964, while preaching at a conference in Northern Ireland, it may well have been the Bangor Convention, Duncan Campbell prophesied - I quote him: 'Ireland will have riots, and revival'. In the light of this he came aside to seek the face of God, during which he received a vision of the coming revival to Ireland. He described, and I quote him again, how God would visit the island through small bands of praying people in the country districts. That evening, after preaching his last message at the convention, he just said: 'God took over'. The people were gripped with awe and no one could move for the next best part of a half an hour, during which there was a divine stillness and a quietness. At least four people heard indescribable sounds from heaven, and then they all began to pray and weep.

In verse 20 of chapter 2, God said: 'I will remove far from you the northern army, and will drive him away into a barren and desolate land, with his face toward the eastern sea and his back toward the western sea; his stench will come up, and his foul odour will rise, because he has done monstrous things', and then verse 21, look at it, 'Fear not, O land; be glad and rejoice, for the LORD has done marvellous things!'. This army from the North would be driven away just like the locusts, they would be driven away - and do you know what many believe the fulfilment of this was? In one night, only one night, God killed 185,000 Assyrians who came against the people of God - the Lord did marvellous things for them. Does that sound familiar, that statement? 'The Lord did marvellous things for them' - do you know why it sounds familiar? Because, most likely, out of that event this was written: 'When the LORD brought back the captivity of Zion, we were like those who dream. Then our mouth was filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing. Then they said among the nations, 'The LORD has done great things for them'. The LORD has done great things for us, and we are glad. Bring back our captivity, O LORD, as the streams in the South. Those who sow in tears shall reap in joy. He who continually goes forth weeping, bearing seed for

sowing, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him'.

Let us pray. What is God saying to you? What is God saying to the Faith Mission? What is God saying to you, minister, pastor, elder, church leader? Something drastic needs to be done - we need, as Bible believers, to cut our ties with sectarian spirits and be done with any manifestation of sectarianism that taints the Gospel. I'll not make any friends for saying these things, but I don't care. I want to bring you tonight the heart of God: He is a jealous God, and He will not share His glory with another. Will you be a part of what God wants to do in our land? Do you need to repent of your sin, your own sin, you know there's baggage there and it's keeping you back? Do you need to come to the Lord tonight? Maybe you're not even converted, and you don't understand a word I'm saying, but your spirit has been touched by the Holy Spirit and you know you need Christ. Well, come out for Christ tonight and be born-again. You need to make right things before God - you're a believer, but you need to sever ties, you need to renounce practices. Well, now's the time to do it. Is there a better time than now? You tell me that. You leaders of God's people, are you all that? Have you it all sorted? Have you? I'm not talking down to you, I need the Lord! I need Him, I'm bankrupt, I'm empty, I need the Lord! Do you not? Do you not need to come out?

I hope there's no pride, pride has to go out the window. Maybe if you, as a leader of God's people, took the lead, who knows what would follow? Joel said for the priests to weep between the porch and the altar, to lie on their face all night. Is it hard to come out at a meeting? They were to lie on their belly for a full evening. I don't know what God is saying to some of you, but I know God is speaking, and I want you to respond to God. Are there those in our meeting tonight - and we're much more cramped than down the road - but are there are those who will stand and say: 'I'm repenting of my sin'? Are there those who will seek God for deliverance from things in their heart, bitterness and unforgiveness, and sectarian religious spirits that they have imbibed, and they think it's evangelical Protestantism but they've been sold a pup, for it's of the devil himself at times - it's nothing more than empty religion. Is there someone who doesn't know how to change, doesn't know what to do? Just confess, God will change your heart! Be real with Him, come into the light, He will do the work - if you're willing, He will do it! But you must come. Is God calling some of you to go to the harvest field? I don't know what God is saying to you, but I know He's saying something, and I'm going to ask you to stand as a public demonstration that God has wrought a work in your heart tonight. Just where you're seated, from that place rise to your feet - do it now.

Now I'm going to pray for these folk, if there are any others you can stand, just take your stand. There is a battle goes on, I'm telling you, in the spiritual. The thing I am touching upon, I really feel it is a high, demonic, spirit principality that has held our people for hundreds of years - and he's not going to give up lightly, but the power of the blood of the Lamb can deliver you. Plead the blood tonight and get to your feet. Now you talk to God from your heart where you are, say to Him what you need to say, repent of what you need to repent, forsake, renounce, commit, believe, obey - whatever it is, do it where you are.

Father, I pray for these souls who have acknowledged Your work in their hearts tonight. Lord, we thank You that You're still the God who speaks, You're the God who is and is not silent. We thank You that we're living in the day of open vision, we thank You that where there is no vision people perish, but we thank You that You're speaking to hearts so that people might be saved, that we might snatch some from the fire, that our land even might rejoice that the very fields, and the hills, and the valleys, the very beasts might rejoice at the presence of God in our midst. O Lord, let it come, we say, like the people in Ezra's day: 'Amen! Amen!'. We raise our hands in consent, let it be so Lord! Let it come, O Lord, we pray Thee, let the showers of blessing fall, we are awaiting and expecting, O revive the hearts of all. We pray for our Catholic neighbours - O God, revive Catholic Ireland. O God, send the fire! We thank You for what You're doing already, but Lord, may it completely consume the island for Jesus Christ and His kingdom. We thank You that Your vision, O God, is one new man, where the wall of partition is broken down. Lord, may we see it in our day and generation in this land. Lord, we're not underestimating the hurt and pain, and the tragedy and the heartache, and the desolation that this land and our people have known. I, Lord, pray for those whose hearts are aching tonight. I pray that You'll bring healing to their pain - but, Lord, that You would give us Your vision for true restoration. Lord, restore unto us the years the troubles have eaten - for Christ and His kingdom's sake, Amen.

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