

The Next Revival

“He makes wars cease to the end of the earth; He breaks the bow and cuts the spear in two; He burns the chariot in the fire. Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth! The LORD of hosts is with us; The God of Jacob is our refuge. Selah.”

-Psalm 46:9-11

Right now, everything in the world feels pretty chaotic. In the world of politics, we are entering into a presidential election that is already looking more contentious and ugly than any that I have personally witnessed. On the home front, we are experiencing large amounts of inflation as well as a border crisis. And globally, there are two large wars raging, one in the Middle East between Israel and Hamas and the other in Europe between Ukraine and Russia. Each of these wars has the potential to become much bigger and pull in numerous other nations. With all this bad news I believe that it is more important than ever to remember that God has a plan and a desire for all times, including the one that we are living in right now. As a matter of fact, I genuinely believe that we are living in a time preceding another great revival of faith and I wanted to talk about the causes for this awakening and how we as the church can be prepared to participate with this coming work of God.

What is “Revival”

The term “revival” can be thrown around haphazardly within the church nowadays with many not really knowing what this term means, and others associating it with more charismatic movements within the church. Without getting into the history of the word and how the church has seen this throughout the centuries, I thought it would be easier, and more useful, to see this concept at play within the Scriptures.

Many are tempted to go to the New Testament, specifically the book of Acts, to describe this term, but I don’t really think this is the best place to go. The term “revival” at its most basic sense, would refer to something that was once alive, has fallen into a “dead” state, and then is brought back to life. The book of Acts is not about “revival” per-se, instead it is about the gospel going out for the first time to the world, both to the Jews and the Gentiles. I believe the Old Testament is more instructive for us because in it we can see the nation of Israel go through seasons of spiritual death and revival. By understanding these seasons in ancient Israel, we can begin to understand these same cycles within church history and to better understand what season we are in right now.

“Fools, because of their transgression, And because of their iniquities, were afflicted. Their soul abhorred all manner of food, And they drew near to the gates of death. Then they cried out to the LORD in their trouble, And He saved them out of their distresses. He sent His word and healed them, And delivered them from their destructions. Oh, that men would give thanks to the LORD for His goodness, And for His wonderful works to the children of men!”

-Psalm 107:17-21

The above verse is from a Psalm that speaks about this cycle. The Psalmist uses poetic language to describe the historic cycle that the nation of Israel was stuck in. God begins a work that draws His people to Him, the people grow complacent, they are seduced by Pagan practices, this causes societal turmoil, they call out to God in their distress, God answers their cries, they are reunited to God in passionate worship, and then the cycle repeats itself. It is this last part of the cycle, when God’s people recognize their error and cry out for Him, that I am referring to as “revival”.

What Causes Spiritual Death?

“So the LORD alone led him, And there was no foreign god with him. “He made him ride in the heights of the earth, That he might eat the produce of the fields; He made him draw honey from the rock, And oil from the flinty rock; Curds from the cattle, and milk of the flock, With fat of lambs; And rams of the breed of Bashan, and goats, With the choicest wheat; And you drank wine, the blood of the grapes. “But Jeshurun grew fat and kicked; You grew fat, you grew thick, You are obese! Then he forsook God who made him, And scornfully esteemed the Rock of his salvation. They provoked Him to jealousy with foreign gods; With abominations they provoked Him to anger.”

-Deuteronomy 32:12-16

This particular passage runs contrary to what most people would intuitively believe about spiritual death. Most would think that periods of struggle, warfare, and poverty would lead people to abandon God and seek answers elsewhere. But this passage contends that it is actually prosperity that leads people to abandon their faith. Throughout the old testament this pattern shows itself. In times of desperation the nation turns to God so that He might deliver them, but in their prosperity, they run away from God and towards idols.

In times of desperation, people don’t have the luxury to be “trendy” or agnostic about their faith. Desperate times require people to get serious and ask the ultimate questions about meaning and significance that most people try to avoid in their day to day lives.

The famous Russian novelist Leo Tolstoy wrote about this phenomenon in his own life in his book “Confession” that details his own struggle with depression:

“I could not attach a rational meaning to a single act in my entire life. The only thing that amazed me was how I had failed to realize this in the very beginning. All this had been common knowledge for so long. If not today, then tomorrow sickness and death will come (indeed, they were already approaching) to everyone, to me, and nothing will remain except the stench and the worms. My deeds, whatever they may be, will be forgotten sooner or later, and I myself will be no more. Why, then, do anything? How can anyone fail to see this and live? That’s what is amazing! It is possible to live only as long as life intoxicates us; once we are sober we cannot help seeing that it is all a delusion, a stupid delusion! Nor is there anything funny or witty about it; it is only cruel and stupid.”

-Leo Tolstoy - “Confession”

It is only in immense prosperity that the finality of life can be ignored, when tragedy occurs, ultimate questions re-emerge and demand ultimate answers. But in the grips of prosperity, life can “intoxicate” you and allow you to ignore these ultimate questions and live a life of blissful ignorance.

Throughout church history this same pattern can be seen. When the nations that embraced Christianity became prosperous, they became decadent. This leads to a bloated, corrupt, and ineffectual church, and most people cease following Christianity and instead start experimenting with wild “trendy” theories about the world and morality. This causes the churches to empty out with some churches remaining faithful to the Scripture, but others becoming desperate to maintain attendance through guilting people into attending, or through attempting to become more culturally relevant.

What Causes Revival?

“They wandered in the wilderness in a desolate way; They found no city to dwell in. Hungry and thirsty, Their soul fainted in them. Then they cried out to the LORD in their trouble, And He delivered them out of their distresses. And He led them forth by the right way, That they might go to a city for a dwelling place. Oh, that men would give thanks to the LORD for His goodness, And for His wonderful works to the children of men!

-Psalm 107:4-8

God in His goodness wants to share good with His children. But, since we are fallen, we have a tendency of looking at the blessings of God as gods in their own right. This is the source of all pagan idolatry:

“...who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.”

-Romans 1:25

God is not merely a giver of good gifts, He is the source of every good in the universe. The good we experience in the world is supposed to lead us on to our true purpose which is worshiping the God who gave us these things in the first place. But since we don't actually want to serve the true and living God, and in the process, submit our wills and our passions to Him, we end up turning away from Him and towards a worship of the creation and the self. However, by turning away from the source of all truth and goodness, we have turned our back on the very source of our prosperity. Worse than this, we have also turned towards false gods that can not give us the prosperity and the happiness that we are seeking, but instead disappoint us and put us into bondage towards our passions.

This turn will inevitably lead to a dissatisfaction, characterized as a cosmic “hunger” and “thirst” by the psalmist and reflective of the words of Tolstoy. A revival occurs when a nation or a culture becomes aware of this truth. For the Israelites, God actually placed them in physical bondage and/or exile from Israel when they turned away from Him. While they were being oppressed, God sent a leader of some sort in order to point out to the people the cause of their bondage and their need to repent and turn back towards God.

Sometimes these leaders were political, like the judges and the kings, and other times these leaders were religious figures like the prophets. Each of these leaders came from differing backgrounds and carried unique messages and ministries, given to them by God, designed to help the people see that the cause of their distress was their abandonment of God. They did this by revealing the false nature of their idolatry, as well as the overall goodness of God. What this means is that the conditions for revival are set when a nation, or a culture, goes through a crisis and begins to “cry out” to God, God then sends a particular message, as well as messengers, that help people see their need for Him.

This seems to be the exact location our culture is in. The west has largely turned away from Christianity and instead erected idols of secularism and humanism. After the fall of the Soviet Union, the west ascended into a vastly prosperous age. We believed that we

were ascendent that there were no more global threats, and in this time of complacency, the west turned away from God. We thought this turn would be fine, but we are now seeing a convergence of radical Islam, as well as an egregious overstepping of modern progressive ideology. It is at this time, when the gods that we had been elevating are starting to threaten us, that we are ready for a message of revival, a message that will lead us out of our present darkness and towards the light of the gospel.

The Message of Revival

“...whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them. For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your bondservants for Jesus’ sake. For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.”

-2 Corinthians 4:4-6

This leads to the obvious question, what does a message of revival sound like? Throughout the old testament this message remained fundamentally the same, with minor tweaks based on what ideology was blinding the Israelites at the time. This is why each old testament prophet sounds similar, but each has a clear distinction in what they emphasize and how they convey their message. As you can see from the above text, what the message must overcome is the blindness caused by Satan. Since Satan is a fallen angel, he has no ability to create an ideology for himself, his only power lies in corrupting the message of God and casting a shadow over the light of the gospel. Whatever message emerges at the advent of a revival must be successful in peeling back the layers of Satan’s deception, and revealing the light of God that he has covered.

It was this component of revival that confounded me for the last couple years. I had seen something changing starting around 2017 or so, but I couldn’t figure out what this change was and what it might lead to. With the success and popularity of figures like Jordan Peterson, the hosts of the Daily Wire, and even British intellectuals like Douglas Murray and Tom Holland (the historian not the actor) I was starting to see change at the top levels of our culture. Most of the individuals mentioned are not Christians themselves, and even the ones that are, are political commentators and not renowned religious figures. Nevertheless, each of these individuals, and many like them, are intellectual figures at the tops of their respective fields, all giving a much more generous and encouraging view of Christianity and the Christian legacy on the west. The odd thing for me though was again, that these men are not sharing the gospel message, so I couldn’t figure out what these figures signified, or even if they represented something

good. As usual for me, the writings of C.S. Lewis helped me fit the pieces together and see what was happening beneath the surface.

The Pilgrim's Regress

Anyone who has listened to me speak for any length of time knows that I am a huge fan of C.S. Lewis. He is by far my favorite writer and Christian thinker, and he has influenced my faith more than any other non-biblical author. I have read virtually everything that he ever wrote, but it came to my attention last month that there was a book that I had overlooked, "The Pilgrim's Regress". This very odd and obscure book was written by Lewis directly after his conversion to Christianity and articulates his conversion from, and back to, Christianity in an allegorical format likened to Paul Bunyan's "The Pilgrim's Progress". In this story, Lewis tells his own personal story that ironically mirrors British academia in the early twentieth century.

Lewis was raised in proximity to the gospels, but fell away from his faith due to some interesting struggles with the legalistic background that he came from. This caused him to go through a bevy of different thinkers and philosophical ideologies, all in an attempt to make sense of his internal sense of longing that he experienced throughout his childhood. What he found though, is that none of these philosophical ideologies could explain for him what this longing was for, or how to satisfy it. The one that came the closest though was the writings of the Romantics.

The Romantic authors, more notably the poetic authors, were English men like William Wordsworth, John Keats, Samuel Taylor Coleridge and others who were themselves disillusioned with the enlightenment age that they found themselves in. They all thought that the scientific revolution was removing the transcendence of nature, and reducing everything down to material causes. John Keats once accused Isaac Newton of destroying the poetry of the rainbow by "reducing it to the prismatic colors". But while the poetry of these men pulled Lewis out of the despair of atheistic materialism, they could not satisfy the longing of his heart, they only "proved" for him that what he was looking for had to be higher than nature itself. This thought led him on to deism, then to theism, and finally to Christianity.

In "The Pilgrim's Regress" though, Lewis uses his own conversion to Christianity to "predict" a coming Christian revival in the west, and to explain the types of messages that God has used within the church throughout the last few centuries:

"The Landlord sends pictures of many different kinds. What is universal is not the particular picture, but the arrival of some message, not perfectly intelligible, which

wakes this desire and sets men longing for something East or West of the world; something possessed, if at all, only in the act of desiring it, and lost so quickly that the craving itself becomes craved; something that tends inevitably to be confused with common or even with vile satisfactions lying close to hand, yet which is able, if any man faithfully live through the dialectic of its successive births and deaths, to lead him at last where true joys are to be found.”

-C. S. Lewis - “The Pilgrim's Regress”

In his book the “Landlord” is an allegory for God, and He is leading people to Himself, sometimes through the “roads”, which are a picture of the law of God, but sometimes through a “picture” or an “image” that eventually leads people to God through an intermediate longing. Lewis then identifies the people who are drawn to God through the law as “Shepherds” and those who are drawn to God through the pictures as “Pagans”. What Lewis reveals is that a “correct” revival is when the law takes center stage. This is a revival that begins within the church and expresses to people their need for salvation due to sinning against God’s laws. This is more in the mold of the First Great Awakening that took place in the west and was spearheaded by men like Jonathan Edwards and his famous sermon “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God”.

However, Lewis also mentions that most people aren’t built like this. The law doesn’t actually convict them, but it scandalizes them and drives them away from God. For these people, a revival can’t come from the church itself, but from a different source that prepares them to go to the church and receive salvation through the gospel. While he admits this is the “wrong” way to come to God, he also says:

‘But it is more than dangerous. You said it was beginning at the wrong end, while the Shepherd people began at the right end.’ ‘That is true. But if you are a Pagan by birth or by nature, you have no choice. It is better to begin at the wrong end than not to begin at all. And the most part of men are always Pagans. Their first step will always be the desire born of the pictures: and though that desire hides a thousand false trails it also hides the only true one for them, and those who preach down the desire under whatever pretext—Stoic, Ascetic, Rigorist, Realist, Classicist—are on the Enemy’s side whether they know it or not.’

-C. S. Lewis - “The Pilgrim's Regress”

Although the journey to God that doesn’t come immediately through the law is not preferable, for some this is the only way. The truth is, there is no “one way” to come to Christ. Some will come out of fear of death, or desire for political change, or a desire for the spiritual, but regardless of why someone might come to God, the purpose of the church is to welcome them in and help them accept the truth of the gospel.

The Wheat and the Tares

“So the servants of the owner came and said to him, ‘Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have tares?’ ‘He said to them, ‘An enemy has done this.’ The servants said to him, ‘Do you want us then to go and gather them up?’ ‘But he said, ‘No, lest while you gather up the tares you also uproot the wheat with them. ‘Let both grow together until the harvest, and at the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, ‘First gather together the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them, but gather the wheat into my barn.’”

-Matthew 13:27-30

One of the ways to interpret this passage is in light of what we have been talking about. The “wheat” that is sown in the field would be the message that is intended to bring people to the gospel. But as this message is growing within the field, “tares” are sown in amongst them by “the enemy”. These tares represent a corruption of the message that God has sent. This is always the case with a work of God, as quickly as God can sow truth, the devil can sow lies. In the first century, the truth of the gospel went out, and was immediately met with the heresies of the Gnostics and the Judaizers. And in every single revival in church history, new and clever heresies grow up at the same rate that the truth goes out.

What Lewis is warning about in his allegory, is that a message of hope that comes from outside the church can be more easily corrupted by the wicked one, since it isn't based on the texts of Scripture, and it is presented by individuals who don't actually believe in God. This truth provides a two-fold danger for the church. On the one hand we don't want to be the servants in this parable who seek to pull up all the growth in the field simply to get rid of the tares. But we also don't want to be ignorant to the corruption of the enemy.

Some Christians historically have not noticed the “tares” among the “wheat”. So after the revival, they unfortunately imbibed a lot of the negative, corrupting influences that grew up at the same time the revival happened. In the first century you could see the early Christians being so happy that pagan Romans were being led to read the Scriptures that they weren't careful to exclude from their churches the heretical Gnostic teachings that came with them. In modern times, Christians may have been so happy about radical growth of the progressive church, that they didn't realize that this movement was actually rooted in a message that is heretical.

Still other Christians, when a revival like this occurs, instead focus their attention on criticizing the source of the revival. Some could criticize Jordan Peterson because he isn't actually a Christian, or denigrate political movements that are mobilizing in

opposition to the current woke movement or the increase of radical Islam. They do this because such ideas are “beneath” the gospel. They don’t actually present the truth of God’s word, but only act as a way out of the current “spirit of the age”. However, just like with Lewis, such intermediary sources can be crucial in someone’s journey to God. They might be completely turned off to the church or the gospel, but hearing from someone like Jordan Peterson might actually get them reading the bible, and from there actually turning to God.

This means that Christians have to be very careful in times like this one. A wrong movement could lead to either stifling the work of God, or in encouraging the work of Satan. We have to be very careful and personable. When we actually invest in the lives of those around us, we can see more clearly if they are being led towards Christianity or away from it. We can allow the message to go forth without criticizing it or endorsing it. But instead we can be watchful, allowing the “wheat” and the “tares” to grow up together so that the fruits of each can be clearly seen and either embraced or rejected.

To sum this point up, the pursuit of God always begins with a hunger and a thirst, an intense longing that can’t be put into words. The “picture” that God sends is designed to fan the flame of this desire, and He doesn't care what this intermediate picture might be, whether it is a desire for justice, beauty, an afterlife, the transcendent, or any other intermediate thing. The job of the church is to capitalize on this picture and show that Christ, ultimately, fulfills this longing. What Satan does is corrupt the image and convince people that their longing can be satisfied by the thing itself. Therefore, he makes an idol of justice in a political movement, or an idol of nature in a sort of neo-paganism, or an idol of goodness in legalism. The church should be careful not to condemn the image God is using, but to also avoid the snare of Satan in making a god of these intermediate things.

The Current Message

“But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear;...”

1 Peter 3:15

So what do I believe this current “picture” is that God is using? This is more of my speculation, but listening to the thoughts of men like Jordan Peterson and Tom Holland, I believe it is a two-pronged message that is essentially an image of transcendent meaning wedded with Christian ethics. In order to understand this message, I do want to point out what was causing the “blindness” of our current age.

The New Atheists

In the early 2000's we saw the rise of the so-called "new atheists". These were individuals like Richard Dawkins, Christopher Hitchens, and Sam Harris. What made this movement "new" wasn't the message per se, but instead the militant nature of their message on top of the means that they utilized.

For the "new atheists" they weren't really saying anything novel, their belief was simply that religion in all its forms was bad for society, and if only we could get rid of it we could move forward in our culture to a new age of enlightenment and progress. This again is a relatively old idea, going back at least three hundred years in the west. But what was new about it, was that these "new atheists" were becoming popular and mainstream for their abrasive personalities as well as their open ridicule of religious ideas. So, these men used big debate platforms to openly mock Christians in debate as well as to essentially "troll" the thoughts and sincerity of Christians as a whole. While their movement didn't create as many atheists as they hoped, it did have a massive impact on our culture.

What these men were really successful in doing was convincing the culture that "faith" in any form was irrational, and they did this through the open mockery that they subjected Christians to. While I don't think that the Christians who debated these men were wrong to do it, having watched many of these debates, I can say that most of these debates weren't held in good faith. Meaning that the new atheists were really good at using short, witty arguments designed to make Christianity look ridiculous, without any attempt at formulating, or defending their own world view. There is much I can say about this, but for now I only want to focus on the effect of these debates.

One effect, as stated before, is that the word "faith" took on a negative connotation in our culture. While I don't think this created too many atheists, it did lead to a massive rise in agnostics and a-religious people in our culture. The second, which is more difficult to come back from, is that it bated the church into existing in a constant defensive posture towards our worldview. Instead of speaking with conviction about the inherent beauty or goodness of our worldview, many Christians focused all their energy on Christian apologetics and simply proving that Christianity was true. The issue with that, is that this is actually the wrong way around.

In the 1 Peter 3:15 passage, Peter tells us that we should be ready to: "*give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you...*" What this means is that the majority of people do not come to faith in God through a purely intellectual argument. Instead, they are drawn to Christianity by a longing for God, a hope that is satisfied in their relationship with Him. In Peter's words we see that our relationship with

God isn't about the "reason" but instead the "hope". I love how the Christian philosopher Blaise Pascal put this:

"Men despise religion; they hate it and fear it is true. To remedy this, we must begin by showing that religion is not contrary to reason; that it is venerable, to inspire respect for it; then we must make it lovable, to make good men hope it is true; finally, we must prove it is true. Venerable, because it has perfect knowledge of man; lovable because it promises the true good."

-Blaise Pascal - "Pensées"

What the church failed to realize during the "reign" of the new atheists, is that most people naturally don't want religion to be true. They were projecting onto the church when they said that we were irrational and only believed in God as a form of "wish fulfillment". When in reality, that was precisely what they were doing. The idea of a holy, omnipotent God who will eventually judge us is terrifying and something that we don't want to be true. By attempting to merely prove Christianity true, Christians were actually running into a trap. The heart of man resists the truth of the gospel and desperately wants it to be false. This means that the mind of the Christian shouldn't be to convince someone against their will, but instead to make "good men hope it is true..." Apologetics is merely there to give someone intellectual permission to accept the hope that the gospel offers, not to singularly draw and maintain the Christian in their faith.

Notice also in 2 Corinthians 4 that the mission of Satan is to blind people to the *"light of the gospel of the glory of Christ..."* While the fear of God is inherent to man, the gospel is inherently glorious because it alleviates that fear. But notice that Satan's job is not to blind people to the "truth" of the gospel, but instead to blind us to the "glory" of the gospel. Satan is the father of lies, he doesn't care about truth or about making people rational, his campaign is always to accuse God of evil and corrupt God's message. If a truth is abhorrent to us, none will actually take it seriously enough to believe. When Christians fell for the new atheist's trap, we actually aided Satan's campaign to blind our culture to the beauty of the gospel.

Goodness and Beauty

"So perhaps that ancient trinity of Truth, Goodness and Beauty is not simply an empty, faded formula as we thought in the days of our self-confident, materialistic youth? If the tops of these three trees converge, as the scholars maintained, but the too blatant, too direct stems of Truth and Goodness are crushed, cut down, not allowed through – then perhaps the fantastic, unpredictable, unexpected stems of Beauty will push through and soar to that very same place and in so doing will fulfill the work of all three?"

In that case Dostoevsky's remark, "Beauty will save the world", was not a careless phrase but a prophecy..."

-Alexandr Sozhenitsyn - Nobel Lecture given in 1970

However, just like with all the Jewish revivals, the idols that our culture had raised up ultimately failed us. People thought that through our intellect and technology we could achieve Utopia. So we put unlimited trust in our "expert" class, and believed that these people, armed with reason, would lead us on to our hearts desire. I believe that the veil started to fall around 2016, but with repeated failures seen at every level of our culture, really culminating in the Covid fiasco, people began to be disillusioned. And in this disillusionment, we became open to a new message sent by God.

It was in this vacuum that Jordan Peterson began to rise to popularity. Although he wasn't a Christian, he directly challenged the new atheist claims, but not on their terms as they were so used to. Instead of appealing to an intellectual argument for God, he instead focused primarily on man's internal longing for meaning, and showed how even the atheists lived their lives as though they had an ultimate meaning. I really believe that it was his message of meaning that has spoken to the hearts of so many nihilistic and frustrated young people.

The world that we inherited from the new atheists was not one of hope, but only one of pointless cruelty and indifference. As Richard Dawkins puts it:

"The total amount of suffering per year in the natural world is beyond all decent contemplation. During the minute that it takes me to compose this sentence, thousands of animals are being eaten alive, many others are running for their lives, whimpering with fear, others are slowly being devoured from within by rasping parasites, thousands of all kinds are dying of starvation, thirst, and disease. It must be so. If there ever is a time of plenty, this very fact will automatically lead to an increase in the population until the natural state of starvation and misery is restored. In a universe of electrons and selfish genes, blind physical forces and genetic replication, some people are going to get hurt, other people are going to get lucky, and you won't find any rhyme or reason in it, nor any justice. The universe that we observe has precisely the properties we should expect if there is, at bottom, no design, no purpose, no evil, no good, nothing but pitiless indifference."

-Richard Dawkins - "River Out of Eden: A Darwinian View of Life"

Jordan Peterson's message instead presumed the dignity and worth of all who listened to him. He doesn't teach people to seek out internal self worth, but to live in light of the

assumed reality that you are worthy. By speaking, not from a defense of truth, but a presumption of it, he defanged many of the new atheist assaults and breathed meaning back into a culture that felt aimless and hopeless.

It is this reality that Alexandr Sozhenitsyn, in the above quote, defends the miraculous statement of Dostoevsky that “beauty will save the world”. In our current age that has seen an absolute explosion of information coming from every corner of the world, “truth” can be a very elusive concept. This doesn’t mean that truth is non-existent, only that it isn’t the most clear reality to understand. A message that simply seeks to prove itself true, is a message that will perpetually be on the defensive and never show itself to be good or beautiful. But a message that is revealed to be beautiful, softens the heart of man to be ready to see it as true.

But this isn’t the totality of his message. Another thing that he does so well, even better than most Christians, is show the morality of the Bible to be good. Dawkins and the new atheists sought to place God on trial and find Him guilty of crimes against humanity. They contended that God was a monster and was Himself guilty of all the evils that He unjustly seeks to judge. Christians became so obsessed with defending the Biblical reality of slavery, or the destruction of Canaan, that they failed to ask the more fundamental question, why is this all of a sudden an attack on Christian values? Or to put it another way, why are we the first culture in human history to have a real problem with these stories?

What Jordan Peterson and men like Tom Holland did so well is to show the history of Christian values and their impact on the west. They didn’t defend these instances in the bible, but instead showed all the amazing morality that the Bible has given the west, and the utter moral bankruptcy of atheism. By showing the hypocrisy of the atheist claim on meaning, they were also able to show the hypocrisy of someone calling God “evil” when their worldview doesn’t allow for the category of evil. Instead of being wrong footed by these accusations, Peterson was able to turn this accusation against the ones making it. By showing that the evil of man cries out for justice, he forces us to ask, where will that cry for justice be satisfied? Without justice at the bottom of reality, the only answer to that question is the kind of “social justice” that is sweeping away our culture right now. This message shows our culture, our thirst for justice, and how that thirst can only be met by a divine lawgiver.

*“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, For they shall be filled.”
-Matthew 5:6*

What Can The Church Do?

“That is why the best thing of all is to find Mother Kirk at the very beginning, and to live from infancy with a third thing which is neither the Rules nor the pictures and which was brought into the country by the Landlord’s Son. That, I say, is the best: never to have known the quarrel between the Rules and the pictures. But it very rarely happens. The Enemy’s agents are everywhere at work, spreading illiteracy in one district and blinding men to the pictures in another. Even where Mother Kirk is nominally the ruler men can grow old without knowing how to read the Rules. Her empire is always crumbling. But it never quite crumbles: for as often as men become Pagans again, the Landlord again sends them pictures and stirs up sweet desire and so leads them back to Mother Kirk even as he led the actual Pagans long ago. There is, indeed, no other way.”

-C. S. Lewis - “The Pilgrim’s Regress”

Again, as good as this message is, it isn’t the gospel message itself, and can be easily corrupted by the enemy. In order for this message to actually be used for good, the church must mobilize to “catch” those who are being brought out of the present darkness and bring on into the light of the gospel. This truth is shown in the above quote by Lewis when he speaks about how “Mother Kirk” (“kirk” is an old Scottish - English word for church) and how only she can actually harmonize the “pictures” and the “rules”. While the church can’t prevent the overall corruption of the message, we can preserve the true message of God, and use the message of our current moment to bring many to God. Before we talk more specifically about how I believe the church ought to act in this current moment, I want to limit expectations and explain the true purpose and scope of revivals.

The Purpose of Revival

“So it was, when Elijah heard it, that he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood in the entrance of the cave. Suddenly a voice came to him, and said, “What are you doing here, Elijah?” And he said, “I have been very zealous for the LORD God of hosts; because the children of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars, and killed Your prophets with the sword. I alone am left; and they seek to take my life.” Then the LORD said to him: “Go, return on your way to the Wilderness of Damascus; and when you arrive, anoint Hazael as king over Syria. “Also you shall anoint Jehu the son of Nimshi as king over Israel. And Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel Meholah you shall anoint as prophet in your place. “It shall be that whoever escapes the sword of Hazael, Jehu will kill; and whoever escapes the sword of Jehu, Elisha will kill. “Yet I have reserved seven thousand in Israel, all whose knees have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him.”

-1 Kings 19:13-18

In the above passage, the prophet Elijah was sent by God to start one of these revivals in the northern part of Israel. Although this revival had amazing miraculous works accompany it, and it did result in the deaths of the priests of the pagan deity Baal, the political rulers of Israel remained and sought to kill Elijah. Elijah flees from them and begins to despair thinking that his efforts were in vain. God meets him in his despair and explains to him that a revival did happen, it just wasn't the one that he had anticipated.

Most of the prophets of God go through this type of disappointment. They anticipate a total revival of the nation in which everyone in the nation, from the people, to the priests, to the king all turn to God and the nation moves forward in complete fidelity to God. Unfortunately, this almost never happens. Usually the revival only touches a portion of the nation. In the case of Elijah, the king and queen remained, but God assured him that many people throughout the nation had been changed by his ministry, and still more things were changing in the nation and outside of it. Other times, you have men like Jotham who was a king who came to God. This results in an incredible top down revival that fills the nation. Unfortunately, the revival didn't have staying power because Jotham is killed while he is young.

Regardless of how it works though, we have to remember that a revival is a work of God and it is for His specific purposes. Even if a revival happens in our midst, it might not touch all corners of our society, and it might not have as much staying power as we would like. The goal of the church is not to get caught up in this minutiae or predict specifically what we think God is up to, instead we merely need to be yielded to the work of God and seek what ways we might participate in it.

But, in order for us to be ready for another revival we also shouldn't fundamentally change who we are in order to maximize our "relevance". Doing this will more than likely result in us becoming corrupted with the message itself. When Lewis says about the church that it is: *always crumbling. But it never quite crumbles...* he is saying that the church never falls away, but it is usually in need of "repair". After a time of spiritual deadness, the church might have allowed certain responsibilities to fall by the wayside, we have to figure out what those responsibilities might be and try to reform ourselves to the best of our ability. I am still thinking through this issue, but I will give just two ways I believe the church could reform and be ready for the current moment.

Encouraging the Beautiful

"The beautiful in nature is a union of the sensible impression and of the sense of necessity. Things must be like that (in the first place), and, precisely, they are like that. Beauty captivates the flesh in order to obtain permission to pass right to the soul."

-Simone Weil - "Gravity and Grace"

As stated before, what I believe the church has allowed to erode in our present darkness is beauty. We became so obsessed with truth that we forgot that the majority of people do not come to faith because they were intellectually convinced that the gospel was true. Instead, many come to faith because we long for it to be true. We experience longing and despair and are met by the person of Jesus Christ, and through this encounter we discover the truth of the gospel which consummates our deepest hopes. This isn't an indictment on apologetics, but instead a recognition of its proper place. The discipline of apologetics (a reasoned defense of the faith) is not for the purpose of directly convincing someone of the truth of the gospel, but instead it is there to tear down intellectual resistance to the beauty of the gospel so that someone might have intellectual permission to walk down the road that leads to God.

This means that the church should, at the very least, be equally supporting the beauty that leads to God. This is more than producing Christian music, which I think is good, but also be tuned in to the major works of Christian excellence coming down the pipe. I am thinking primarily of Angel Studios and the incredible work that God is doing there. Many Christians actually struggle with "The Chosen" because it isn't theological enough, or because they receive donations from many sources, including non-Christian ones. As I stated before, we should be cautious of corruptions to the gospel message, but we equally shouldn't destroy the "wheat" with the "tares". What "The Chosen" does so well is show Jesus to be a person.

In this world of nihilism and emptiness, the glory of the Christian message is not that we offer some ethereal hope, but instead a living hope, a personal hope, in the knowledge of Jesus Christ.

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead..."

-1 Peter 1:3

In our crisis of meaning, an intellectual argument is not going to have the effect that we might think. Instead it is going to be "stories" that move people towards God. Many people watch "The Chosen" and they see the story of Christ brought to life. They recognize Him as a person, and the apostles as people just like us. By doing this, we can center our own struggles and personal stories into the life and ministry of Christ. By doing this we are made ready to know Him personally. This same effect is also

incredibly edifying to Christians as a whole, in enriching our own personal walks with God.

Beyond “The Chosen”, other works are going to be created by Christians. These works might not be directly gospel centered, like “The Sound of Freedom” or the upcoming “Sound of Hope”, but they speak of the beauty of God that overcomes the ugliness of sin and death. It is exactly these kinds of stories that people need to hear. They don’t need an argument for the gospel, they need to “see” the gospel work itself out into the real world. They need to see the beauty of God so that they might be ready to receive God in truth.

I always like to remind people that there was a time when the church was the chief exporter of artistic excellence in the world. We who follow the King of glory should be the ones who are able to create and encourage the greatest works of beauty in the world. And to recognize the work of beauty upon the soul is incredible and should not be stifled by the church in our fears and criticisms. This doesn’t mean we support all of the arts being produced by studios friendly to Christianity, but that we are careful not to be overly critical of what we shouldn’t, nor to endorse something that we shouldn’t. We need to be circumspect and see what we can use to glorify God.

Emulating Goodness

“Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world.”

-James 1:27

One thing that we tend to forget is that the ministry of the early church was not just persuasive and powerful preaching of the gospel, though there was much of that, but also a demonstration of the gospel through practical ministries. In the book of James, he is arguing with the Gnostics who believed that salvation came through “gnosis” (the Greek word for knowledge). For these people, the works of ministry weren’t important to the gospel, but only intellectual pursuits of God. James has to contradict them throughout his book and show the early Christians that the faith of Christ is an embodied one. This doesn’t nullify theology, but instead it consummates our theology through our works. When the body of Christ is truly active they are both theologically sound as well as physically active in showing the goodness of God through our works.

These works are demonstrable in two ways, the first is personal sanctification, and the second is in practical works of charity. One of the main charges against Christianity is that the church is filled with hypocrisy. This is not merely an accusation that the church

is filled with sinners (this is an unavoidable reality) but that the church is filled with people who actively hide their sin. The church is meant to be a place where we actually work towards holiness, not merely a place where we simply learn about it.

The Milk and the Meat

“For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.”

-Hebrews 5:12-15

Some Christians harp on the so-called “milk” versus the “meat”. Unfortunately they tend to describe the “meat” of the word as being deep theological discussions. However, in the above passage, (from which we derive the terms “milk” and “meat” of the word) the emphasis here is not on the depth of the theological truths, but instead on their application. The ones being rebuked here are not those who were lacking in their Scriptural understanding, but instead in their Scriptural practice. This is not to denigrate theology within the Church, as I have talked about before, a church that is not set on understanding their faith is one that is wide open to the corruptions of the enemy. However, our faith can’t end there, the true end is not in understanding, but in practice.

This means that the main cause of the church is not merely to appear righteous or holy, or even to understand these concepts intellectually, but instead it becomes a place in which a community of believers can help us towards the goal of godliness. This requires the church to become more upfront and honest about the struggles of our lives. It is in honesty that we can achieve accountability, and through accountability we can draw near towards God in actuality.

It is here that the church can actually meet the longing of the current “picture” that God has sent out. Another reason why Jordan Peterson is so popular is because he is so practical in his approach. As a skilled clinical psychologist, he understands human behavior and sin better than most ministers. This allows him to distill the practical morality of the bible so effectively. As our culture strayed so passionately away from Christian morality, we have found, through devastating consequences, that the morality of the Scriptures were actually good for us. Many today have had enough of the terrible hedonism that secularism brought us and recognize a strong desire to live morally, but don’t necessarily know how.

When the church merely preaches the moral commands of the Bible, without confessing to the difficulties of morality, we have done people a disservice. We have not answered the longing of those who are seeking to lead a more moral life, we have instead frustrated them and excluded them with an empty religion. For Christianity to really be the answer that people are seeking, the church must demonstrate personal goodness to those who would attend. We can't keep our preaching at surface level moralizing, but we also don't want to preach a casual Christianity that requires no repentance. Instead, we need to demonstrate in humility what it means to walk in the grace of God, and to have the practical help of a community of believers who are doing the same.

Widows and Orphans

When James declares that pure and undefiled religion is to meet the needs of widows and orphans, he is giving a clear command to the church to help the helpless around us. As good as it is to have outreaches where we preach boldly the truth of the gospel, we need to have equal time and attention devoted to actually meeting the practical needs of those around us. When Jesus preached the kingdom of heaven, He spent the majority of His time healing those who came to Him. This doesn't mean that the church has to have an outpouring of the Holy Spirit to perform miracles like the early church. But instead, we act as a church that takes the message of Christ seriously. That if Jesus was willing to sacrifice His body to provide for His people, the church must be ready to sacrifice of ourselves to meet the needs of those around us.

Another beautiful thing that we can see happening right now is the eagerness of this current generation to be active in helping other people. While some could make the argument that a lot of this passion is misguided and leading to greater problems, it still shows a generation who wants to actually help others. As the church our role is not to criticize the spirit present, but instead the application of that spirit. The church is made to be salt and light to this world, we are meant to not only preach, but show the reality of the kingdom of heaven.

In the past, the time when the church has been most effective is also when they have been most active. It was through Christians adopting the orphans, seeking to stop the violent colosseum games, abolishing slavery, ending segregation, and much more that the world took notice of the reality of Christianity. The early church took over the Roman empire in the early centuries A.D. without ever raising a hand in violence. It was through radical acts of charity that the love of God was made manifest, and the gospel became accessible. The church must maintain this role within our society. We have to devote ourselves to prayer so that we might see clearly the practical needs of those around us and dedicate our souls to their service. In doing this, we emulate Christ and we do more than tell people of His love for them, we have the opportunity to *show* it to them.

“For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich. And in this I give advice: It is to your advantage not only to be doing what you began and were desiring to do a year ago; but now you also must complete the doing of it; that as there was a readiness to desire it, so there also may be a completion out of what you have. For if there is first a willing mind, it is accepted according to what one has, and not according to what he does not have. For I do not mean that others should be eased and you burdened; but by an equality, that now at this time your abundance may supply their lack, that their abundance also may supply your lack—that there may be equality. As it is written, “He who gathered much had nothing left over, and he who gathered little had no lack.”

-2 Corinthians 8:9-15