The great awakening

1. The Great Awakening is the third installment of church history in this program of Men Who Rocked the World, following the Reformers and then the Puritans. **Purpose**: to ignite a passion for God within our hearts through the examples of others. We are to imitate them even as Paul told us to imitate him as he imitates Christ. 1 Cor 11:1 This evening’s lesson will be a “flyover”, big picture summary of the Great Awakening which was the greatest movement on American soil ever within the body of Christ. This movement can only be understood as the result of powerful prayer and preaching and the work of God in sovereign mercy. The Great Awakening led to the moral foundation for the birth of our country.
2. **WHAT IS AN AWAKENING?:** It implies the church is sleeping/sluggish toward the things of God, and therefore is in need of revival. In a revival, the veil is pulled back, and, through the Word of God, the preaching, and the knowledge of the holiness of God, suddenly awakening is restored in the church. God raises up preachers who preach the holiness of God and the church which has been asleep is awakened. And as they are awakened, there is a new understanding of the purity and transcendence of the perfection of God. The church suddenly becomes aware of their own sin. That they are spiritually apathetic - that they are spiritually lukewarm. Hearts are broken and crushed because they’re aware that they’ve been wasting their spiritual life. God’s children call upon the name of the Lord, and turn to God with a sense of brokenness, and with a sense of desperation. With deep earnestness of soul, they humble themselves under the Lord, and they rekindle within their own soul a new passion for God. A new excitement for God, for the Lord. That should’ve been there all along. Now they are awake to the beauty of God’s holiness. A new pursuit of holiness. They are awakened to the encumbrances of the world. Now they desire to forsake those things which had sapped their spiritual strength and energy. They now redouble their commitment to the Lord. And suddenly they become excited about church, and the things of the Lord. The Word of God is that for which they now.

It doesn’t stop there. It spills over out of the church and into the world. Because there is such a difference now between the church and the world, the world is drawn toward the church. They hear the preaching of the Word of God, and God gives success to the preaching of the Word of God in ways that were formally blocked off. Hard heartedness is rendered contrite. They call upon the name of the Lord and there is such a power in the ministry of the Holy Spirit that unbelievers now come under a deep awareness of their separation from God. They are aware that they are under the wrath of God. They are desperate to be made right with God, and to escape the coming Day of Judgment. They become aware of eternal things. See the limits of viewing things only through this world. They are elevated and they’re thinking about spiritual things. They have an eternal perspective. They call upon the name of the Lord. They enter in through the narrow gate.

Revival can happen in one person’s life. It can happen within a church. It can happen within several churches. It could happen within a city. It could happen within a region. It can have an even larger impact. The fruit of an awakening is such that missionaries are raised up by the droves and sent out to the four corners of the Earth. And the church is now alert, and sharp in her vision as she now sees as God sees, a heart and a passion to reach the world with the gospel. It becomes a harvest time. A time in which unbelievers are swept into the kingdom of God. Not just one at a time, but a large number are harvested and brought into the kingdom of God. This is what needs to happen in America right now, and in the churches of America. It wasn’t just an awakening; it was The Great Awakening. And we have not seen the likes of such since.

1. **TREMENDOUS NEED FOR REVIVAL PRIOR TO THE GREAT AWAKENING**:

* This should encourage us. Awakenings always come when the church is most asleep - when she is at her weakest.  The period before The Great Awakening was a time of spiritual decline. Two thousand of the greatest preachers had been ejected from their pulpits. Perhaps the greatest generation of preachers on the whole. With those who filled their pulpits, the emphasis was on oratory and routine. Church was sinking into a quagmire. The pulpits were places of spiritual dryness. When the light is held by the body of Christ under a bushel, the world around rapidly decays spiritually.  This is what happened in England. The early Puritans who came to this country were so singular in their vision. But with each successive generation, there was a downward spiral, until by the time of the end of the 1600s, the Colonies here in the United States were lacking the passion of their forefathers. The population of the Colonies was increasing, but those who were converted, who genuinely knew the Lord, were decreasing. Proportional decrease. Lawson talks about the aberrant doctrines that were prevalent during the day. He also mentions Deism. There were now baptized infants in churches, and those churches lacked emphasis on conversion. No talk of being born again, & having a personal encounter with a living, risen Christ. Churches were filled with religious people who did not know the Lord.
* **“The Halfway Covenant”**: This allowed people to become members in the church if they were not an embarrassment to the church. As they were taken into membership, they then baptized their children. The parents were lost. The children were lost. It wasn’t long before there were as many unconverted people in church as there were converted. In many places there were more unconverted present in the churches than saved members.
* **Solomon Stoddard**: the grandfather of Jonathan Edwards. He had a design that he would use the Lord’s table as a converting means. He would invite unbelievers to come to the Lords table as members of the church in the hope that they would be converted by taking the Lord’s supper. Other than this “fly in his appointment”, Stoddard was a very strong spiritual leader. He was the pastor of the North Hampton church that Jonathan Edwards himself would pastor later. Stoddard was the pastor there for 60 long years. He was known as the pope of the Connecticut River Valley. Stoddard cast a shadow over that entire area. He will be a very strong force in the subject of revival.
* The first school to be established in the Colonies was Harvard in 1620. Established so that there will be reformed, Calvinistic ministers of the Word of God. Those with a high view of the sovereignty of God. But Harvard was on the downward spiral. Despite Harvard’s beginnings, this school had become a polluted location spiritually.
* Stoddard was a counter force, raised up by God, against the decline of the church. He believed that awakening was desperately needed. A revival. Stoddard made it his business to gain souls to Christ. Church would be the first mission field for this outreach. He believed that powerful preaching was the means that God would use to draw sinners to Christ. He warned of the threat of damnation. He was a hellfire and brimstone kind of preacher; in other words he was a Bible preacher. He believed that the dread of hell was the most effective means in his mind to awaken the slumbering church members out of their stupor. They will be shaken to the foundation of the very soul. He then offered the grace of God and salvation to rescue sinners from eternal ruin. He insisted that the Spirit of the Lord must be poured out upon the people because otherwise religion will not revive. He desired to see a season of revival where the Spirit of God would work powerfully to accompany the preaching of the Word of God. Stoddard believed that the church should expect seasons of revival in the hearts of God’s people as well as to awaken those who are unconverted.
* He believed that only God could bring such a revival. It can’t be manipulated. It can’t be conjured up by man. He believed that there were two prerequisites for a spiritual awakening. 1) The intense prayers of God‘s people that God would come and visit His people with purifying power and that God would raise up preachers to herald the message of the grace of God. These would be the means by which God would work to usher in the revival. 2) Yet, secondly, it would be a sovereign choice by God to respond. We should beg of God that religion would revive in the land.
* Another, Cotton Mather, was a very influential preacher in this day. He was a colonial minister. He believed the church should pray that there may be a plentiful effusion of the Holy Spirit upon the world. Then converting work will go forward among the nations. A revival that would have an effect upon the entire world as a result of having an effect upon the body of Christ. O that the Jewish nation were converted, O that the fullness of the Gentiles will arrive, and that the Lord Jesus Christ would come taking possession of the world for Himself. The pastors began to gather/band together in prayer and Timothy Edwards, Jonathan Edward’s father, was one of those pastors who banned together with others in the Connecticut River Valley. With intense prayer, they called upon the Lord - that the church in Connecticut would be revived and have an ultimate impact on the nation has a consequence.

1. **FIRST EVIDENCES OF AN AWAKENING**:

* Outside of this Connecticut River Valley, down in New Jersey, came a Dutch reformed pastor named Theodore Frelinghuysen. You cannot be more Reformed than a Dutch reformer. He was sent from Holland to come to the rural area of New Jersey to minister to Dutch speaking people. He came in 1720 and discovered in the Dutch congregations that these are unregenerate people. They are just going through the empty motions of religiosity. Playing church, but they do not know the Lord. Nice and hard-working, but they do not have the presence of the Lord in their lives. He set about to preach what had not been preached - that except you be born again you will not enter the kingdom of God. He preached for personal conversion that there must come a time when the Spirit of God pierces your heart, you come under the heavy weight of your sin, that you repent of your sins, and with deep brokenness, you call upon the name of the Lord, for whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord, shall be saved. He pressed hard on this. Those who professed Christ had to demonstrate this by a changed life/spiritual fruit flowing from their lives.
* These congregations were so upset about this that they sent message all the way back to the Netherlands, to Amsterdam, to remove Frelinghuysen. That is usually the outcome of a minister who preaches such messages like this. Their efforts to have him removed failed. He continued to preach for genuine conversions, and in due season, God began to visit these congregations. Those members who had long been spiritually asleep suddenly awakened under the powerful preaching of Frelinghuysen. There was a division within the churches between those who are genuinely converted and those who are religious but unconverted. Revival stirs things up bringing them to the surface, and those unconverted do not want the status quo to change. The fact is that Jesus Christ was now “coming to church” so to speak, through this regenerated membership.
* Frelinghuysen influenced a man named Gilbert Tennent, a Presbyterian, who lived in Pennsylvania. He came under the influence of Frelinghuysen‘s emphasis that you must be born again. Tennent brought together a young man who aspired for the ministry and built a one room building called “The Log College”. Tennent has four sons in this college. They were about 10 or 11 other young ministers. The Log College ultimately became Princeton University. The first Presbyterian training school of ministers. He began to pour his life into these 15 young men, and they would become fiery preachers during The Great Awakening. They would become “sons of thunder” as they preached all of the Word of God. They became ministers for the Scotch/Irish immigrants who were flooding into Pennsylvania, New York, and New Jersey.
* There arose a conflict within the Presbyterian churches at the time. These churches did not want preachers shaking things up. They didn’t want to have to self-examine their lives. They didn’t want to think – “what is my testimony?” They liked just coming to church and continuing to go through the motions. Church was a social club rather than what it should be, the body of Christ. This forced a split in the Presbyterians. Those ministers who were part of the “Log Cabin College,” were forced out of the Synod of Pennsylvania. A new Synod was started In New Brunswick, New Jersey in a place near where Princeton University would be established. It was joined by the Synod of New York, where Presbyterian ministers remained committed to the preaching of the Word of God. They began to focus on the “New Birth”. The requirement of New Birth became hotly contested at the time of The Great Awakening.
* In this context, God raised up a man named Jonathan Edwards who will become the key figure in this first stage of the Great Awakening. Jonathan Edwards attended Yale. Harvard was too liberal for his father. It was a new school, The College of Connecticut, started in New Haven, Connecticut, that would later be renamed Yale University. Edwards was a brilliant young man who was homeschooled by his father. Edwards had 10 sisters. He was from a very prominent family, and all were sent off to finishing school in Boston. They were polished in their social graces and in their manners. Edwards would not be converted until he was 17 years of old. His life was dramatically changed. He graduates from the Yale Master’s program, and he becomes the assistant minister of Solomon Stoddard who was the most influential minister in the area. Stoddard was 83 years old.
* Edwards was to succeed Stoddard who passes away very soon thereafter. At age 26, Jonathan Edwards assumed the pastorate, and took the pulpit which was one of the most important, influential pulpits of all the New England. Jonathan Edwards will become the initial driving force for The Great Awakening. In 1733, Jonathan Edwards preaches two sermons on justification by faith alone, pressing for personal conversion. Because of these two sermons, people in the church began to receive Christ. He preached many other sermons. In North Hampton, in a relatively short period of time, there were 300 conversions in a town of 1100 people. An extraordinary movement of the Spirit of God. Edwards writes a letter to give an account of what is going on, a letter which is expanded and mailed across the Atlantic to Isaac Watts, the great hymn writer. Watts read this and rejoiced. He and another minister write a preface to Edwards’ account, and it suddenly spreads around England. There is a renewed interest in England for an awakening, a spiritual revival.
* Edwards would write other books and preach other sermons not the least of which is Sinners In The Hands Of An Angry God. Suddenly the Word of God is running swiftly throughout the Colonies, and people are becoming very zealous. There is a young man named James Davenport, a fiery preacher who goes too far. He indicates that all ministers who oppose the revival are wolves in sheep’s clothing, and unconverted themselves. This creates an even greater wedge between those who are for the revival and those who are against the revival. Those who are for the revival are for the preaching of the Word of God to urge their audience to have a personal experience with the Lord Jesus Christ . Those who are against the revival are those who think that just because you’re in the church, and have been baptized or sprinkled as a baby, you now are in a state of acceptance with a holy God.
* It becomes a hot issue at Yale. The faculty are against the revival. And the student body is for the revival because they’re being converted. A Board of Trustees meeting takes place and Jonathan Edwards is present. He addresses the entire student body the next day. He brings one of the most riveting sermons that he would ever preach in his life, The Distinguishing Marks Of A Work Of God’s Spirit. From 1 Jn 1:4–6, Edwards distinguishes five marks of a true revival, of a true spirituality and authentic conversion. This would eventually be expanded and put into print. Jonathan Edwards was God’s tool to first light a fuse for The Great Awakening, but it is still regionalized somewhat.
* Enter, a George Whitfield toward end of 1739. Throughout 1740, George Whitfield will go from Maine throughout Georgia, Philadelphia, New York City, Boston, Savannah, Charleston, every major city in the Colonies. He will be a powerful force for God. He will preach the Word of God with such power that when he goes to Philadelphia, he will preach to more than twice the population of Philadelphia [12,000 people at the time]. He goes to New York City, and this becomes the largest gathering to take place ever in the history of the Colonies. And Whitfield will be the man with the torch of truth in his hand. This will be the greatest preaching tour of any preacher in the history of the church since the missionary journeys of the apostle Paul. It was Edwards who lit the fuse, & it was Whitfield who blows it into a furnace.
* Whitfield lit up the eastern seacoast with the preaching of the Word of God. As George Whitfield preaches, 80% of all the Colonies would hear him preach. More people saw George Whitfield than ever came close to seeing George Washington. He was the unifying force of the early Colonies, and some historians call George Whitfield the true founding father of America. It is estimated that one out of every 10 Colonists was brought to a saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. He did this without any altar calls, and without any decision cards. He simply preached the Word of God and left people to deal with God within their souls. The accounts of people who were converted are absolutely amazing.
* Whitfield would cross the Atlantic 13 times. He would come to the Colonies seven times. He would spend three years of his life crossing the Atlantic on ship. The quickest trip was two months, and the longest four months. He would spend a major part of his time on ship writing his letters, fine-tuning his sermons, and preaching to everyone who is on the ships. He would be prayed up and rested when the ship made land fall, Whitfield was ready to preach the Word of God. Baptist churches would begin and Presbyterian churches spread in the South as the result of the Great Awakening. And during this time there would be 300 new Bible believing evangelical churches spontaneously birthed because of the preaching of the Great Awakening. 150 congregational churches were birthed.

1. **THE BIRTH OF THE MODERN MISSIONS MOVEMENT**: It will begin with William Carey. It will include David Brainerd. David Brainerd dies in the home of Jonathan Edwards at the age of 29. Edwards publishes Brainard’s diary. William Carey, Adeniran Judson, and Henry Martin read it. The diary will be the octane in their tank that will propel them into world missions. It will be the most published work that Edwards would ever write, and he didn’t even write it. He simply took the diary and had it published after Brainard died in his home. This diary along with a biography that Edwards will write of David Brainerd, will become the missionary classic that missionaries in future generations will read. It will propel them to the mission field. It will also be out of The Great Awakening that the Ivy League schools will start. Harvard was already going. Yale was raised up before The Great Awakening. Princeton will come to fruition. The University of Pennsylvania will meet in the very building that Benjamin Franklin had built for Whitfield but Whitfield never got the opportunity to preach in it. Due to David Brainard‘s ministry to the Indians, Dartmouth College was started to give education to Indians. The Baptists started Brown University. The Dutch Reformers started Rutgers University. Each of these Ivy League schools were raised up because of The Great Awakening and O how they have fallen since their glorious beginnings.
2. Judgment always begins with the house of God, and an awakening must begin with the people of God. May God do this great awakening yet again in our day. We need to call upon the name of God to open the heavens and come down again in the power of the Holy Spirit so that He would arouse the body of Christ.