

IN THE DAY OF THY POWER
The Scriptural Principles of Revival
By Arthur Wallis

FOREWORD

It is with very real pleasure that I accede to the request of my friend, Arthur Wallis, to write a foreword to his book "In the Day of Thy Power". I first met the author on the Island of Lewis in the autumn of 1951. The fellowship of that hour and the impression made linger with me as a most fragrant memory.

Mr. Wallis's book is a powerful plea for the recognition of the supernatural in the realm of revival. While recognizing man's responsibility as the human agent, attention has been called again and again to the utter futility of human effort apart from the mighty manifestation of divine power.

How many today are really prepared to face the stark fact that we have been out-manoeuvred by the strategy of hell, because we have tried to meet the enemy on human levels by human strategy? In this we may have succeeded in making people church-conscious, mission-conscious, or even crusade-conscious, without making them God-conscious. This book will, I trust, act as a corrective to help to bring the church back to a true recognition of the basic fact that revival must ever be related to righteousness, and that the way to a revived church is still the way of repentance and true holiness.

What I saw of the movings of God in the Hebrides during the past few years is in keeping with the revival called for in this book, and that is why I consider its publication now to be most timely.

Readers will do well to ponder the contents of Chapter Two, "A Sign Spoken Against". Here Mr. Wallis cuts right across the popular approach and appeal. How arresting are his words: "If we find a revival that is not spoken against, we had better look again to ensure that it is a revival."

The effect upon the world of the divine operation in the regeneration of the soul is still the same, "To the Jews a stumbling block, and to the Greeks foolishness"; but the divine appeal does not change, "If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me."

There is no other way, and that is the truth this book proclaims, and my prayer is that God may use it to speed the day for which we long, when "the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose".

DUNCAN CAMPBELL

PREFACE

The church has been blessed with many volumes on the subject of revival. Most of these are historical accounts of the revivals of the past. They rehearse the righteous acts of the Lord, and are precious documents to all who long to see a movement in our day. Those that unfold the spiritual principles are few by comparison, and are mostly written from the historical standpoint: that is, they expound the laws of revival from the histories and illustrate from Scripture.

The design of this book has been to expound the principles of revival from Scripture and illustrate from the histories. For the sake of accuracy the numerous Scripture quotations are taken from the English Revised Version. I readily acknowledge the debt I owe to those other works on the subject and I have quoted freely from them.

That four chapters in a work of this nature should be devoted to the subject of prevailing prayer will be no surprise to those who have learned from Scripture and history what is the road to every true revival. The Ulster Awakening of 1859 may be traced back, so far as such things can be traced on the human side, to the reading by a young man of George Muller's Narrative. Faith was quickened in his heart, and when news reached him of the great American Awakening (1858) he said to himself: "Why may we not have such a blessed work here, seeing God did such things for Mr. Muller simply in answer to prayer?" Thus began the revival prayer-meeting at Kells where the movement commenced.

Similarly, one of the springs of the 1904 Awakening in Wales may be traced to the reading of Andrew Murray's book, *With Christ in the School of Prayer* by a hungry minister, and the subsequent transformation of his spiritual life. It would be impossible to estimate the influence exerted on revival movements all over the world during the past hundred years by Charles Finney's lectures on prayer in his *Revivals of Religion*.

At the heart of every revival is the spirit of prayer.

I am most grateful to Mr. Duncan Campbell, whose name will always be associated with the recent Lewis Awakening, for consenting to write the Foreword. He is one of the very few in these Islands who have laboured in the midst of a general outpouring of the Spirit. I must also record my thanks to Miss L. Rutty and Mrs. G. Roberts for their labour of love in the typing of the MSS, to Mr. Geoffrey Williams of the Evangelical Library, London, for every facility and encouragement in the work of research, and to those friends who read the MSS and offered valuable suggestions. Conscious of its limitations, I commend the book to God, Who has ever chosen the weak things to be the instruments of His power.

If, according to His abundant mercy, He should deign to use its message in any measure to awaken the church to the need and possibilities of this hour, to Him shall be all the glory for ever and ever.

Amen.

ARTHUR W ALLIS

Talaton, Devon.

April 1956

INTRODUCTION

And it shall be in the last days, saith God, I will pour forth of My Spirit. . . and your young men shall see visions (Acts 2:7).

Write the vision, and make it plain upon tables, that he may run that readeth it" (Hab. 2:2).

It was springtime in the year 1938. A boy in middle teens stood in the little schoolroom adjoining Moriah Chapel, in the small Welsh mining town of Loughor, Glamorganshire. A strange feeling of awe and wonder filled his heart, for this was the very room that witnessed the beginnings of that great outpouring of the Spirit, the Welsh Revival of 1904. He listened to his host and guide, himself a convert of the revival, speak of those memorable days when the hardest heart were melted by the presence of the Lord, and when the hills and valleys rang again with the songs of Zion. It was almost too wonderful to be true, but it created questions deep down in his heart for which he could find no answer.

If God can achieve such mighty things in times of revival, and if the spiritual labours of fifty years can be surpassed in so many days when the Spirit is poured out, why, he wondered, is the church today so satisfied with the results of normal evangelism? Why are we not more concerned that there should be another great revival? Why do we not pray for it day and night?

The boy returned to his home in England. The questions that had puzzled him were temporarily forgotten, crowded out by many other youthful interests, but an indelible impression had been made upon his soul. The fires of that 1904 Awakening, burning still in many a Welsh breast, had lit a flame in his young heart. In that corner of South Wales which had been the heart of the Welsh Revival a strange longing had filled his soul: "O God, wilt Thou not do it again?"

It was autumn in the year 1951. In the largest Island of the Outer Hebrides, Lewis and Harris, a young man was travelling along the narrow, winding road leading to the village of Barvas. The surrounding countryside was bare and bleak, strewn with rocks and boulders, and marked here and there with the familiar peat-banks. At length the village itself came into view, with its irregular clusters of crofters' cottages and bungalows.

With intense interest he gazed at the plain, stone-built kirk standing alone just beyond the edge of the village. He felt again something of the awe and wonder he had experienced as a boy in the little school-room at Loughor. It was here that God had come down in power in December 1949. This parish church had witnessed the beginning of the Lewis Awakening.

True, there had not been the wide-spread, sweeping movement of the Welsh Revival. In scope it had been a local movement, confined to scattered villages of Lewis and Harris and some of the adjoining islands. But the marks of heaven-sent, Spirit-wrought revival were all there. God had done it again. Thoughts flooded into the visitor's mind. If God had sent revival to Lewis was He unwilling to do it elsewhere? Was God using these favoured isles as a sort of spiritual arena in which to demonstrate in miniature that He could and would "do it again"?

Was this awakening, away in the Western Isles, the harbinger of a modern era of spiritual revival? The visitor seemed to find an answer in his heart to these questions as quickly as they came to him, nor had he to wait long for some confirmation of his inner convictions.

Later he enjoyed the warmth of true Scottish hospitality in the homely manse at Barvas. The following morning, while alone upon his knees, the Lord spake to him. It was as though he was looking across a vast open prairie to where, on the far horizon, a small fire was burning. It seemed to be coming slowly, very slowly nearer. The scene faded from view. Again he saw the prairie, but now the fire was very much nearer, and stretching like a continuous wall right across the prairie as far as the eye could see. Slowly, inexorably, the wall of flame and smoke moved forward till again the picture faded from view.

Then it seemed as though a vast and endless desert stretched away to the horizon. There in the far distance some small dazzling object lay on the sand, shining like a star. As he watched, it grew larger and larger, filling out with blue as it did so, till even the shining framework was eclipsed by the blue, and there in the midst of the desert was a lake of water. Almost at once there came back to his mind a rendering of Isaiah 35 verse 7 he had heard quoted only the previous day. "And the mirage shall become a pool, and the thirsty ground springs of water" (R. V. margin).

When he rose from his knees he opened his Bible and commenced to read Isaiah 43. The word of the Lord seemed to fall upon him with greater authority and power than anything God had said to him before. Like a great rain from heaven the word seemed to descend upon his thirsty soul: "I, even I, am the Lord; and beside Me there is no Saviour. . . I will work, and who shall let it? . . . Thus saith the Lord, which maketh a way in the sea, and a path in the mighty waters; . . . Remember ye not the former things, neither consider the things of old. Behold, I will do a new thing; now shall it spring forth; shall ye not know it? I will even make a way in the wilderness, and rivers in the desert."

Perhaps the reader will forgive the recounting of these personal reminiscences, since they present the background for the writing of the book, and provide some explanation for its appearance. The message of the following pages has flowed out of God's personal dealings with the writer in regard to revival. The vision and the burden have been the mainspring of the book. Throughout its preparation there has been a sense of the quiet compelling of the Spirit, and it is this that has brought it through many hindrances and delays to see the light of day.

Behind the message that follows is the solemn conviction that grows ever clearer with the passing of the days, that we are surely moving towards a day of God's power. "His going forth is as certain as the dawn; and He shall come unto us as the rain, as the latter rain that watereth the earth" (Hos. 6:3). How soon this may be we cannot say, "For the vision is yet for the appointed time, and it hasteth toward the end, and shall not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not delay" (Hab. 2:3).

Our concern is to see that we are a people willing in the day of His power.

CHAPTER ONE

WHAT IS REVIVAL?

“God came. . . His glory covered the heavens, and the earth was full of His praise. . . He stood, and measured the earth; He beheld, and drove asunder the nations: And the eternal mountains were scattered, the everlasting hills did bow; His goings were as of old” (Hab. 3:3).

There was never a day in which the term “revival” needed to be more carefully defined. It has come to be used in relation to spiritual things so widely and so loosely that many are perplexed to know what it does mean. To some prejudiced or misinformed people the term is synonymous with excessive emotionalism and mass hysteria. It is to be hoped that the following pages will be a sufficient answer to such a slander on the work of the Holy Spirit. Others use the word to describe a successful evangelistic mission. When they tell us that their church is “having a revival”, we understand them to mean that a gospel campaign is being conducted there. This use is possibly a relic of days when the Spirit was working widely, and one had only to arrange such a mission to witness a quickening amongst the believers and an ingathering of the lost. Today it is otherwise, but in any case to use the term thus is misleading.

Some, adhering closely to the etymology of the word, use it to describe a personal reviving of the believer by the Holy Spirit. If an individual or group is quickened in holiness and brought into a place of blessing, that is what they call “revival”, even if there is little extension of the work. Similarly others, whose emphasis is more on a definite experience of the Spirit, will claim that when an individual or group has been filled with the Spirit they have “got revival”, regardless of whether there are any repercussions outside their circle. In so far as revival always involves the reviving of individual believers these views are true, but as definitions of revival they are inadequate.

We cannot go to the Bible to see how the word “revival” is used, for it is not found there, although it contains many examples and types of revival, and unfolds all its principles. The nearest Scriptural equivalents are “revive” (or quicken), and “reviving”, but these may be applied to individual quickening, and are not always synonymous with what has come to be called, by common consent down the centuries, “religious revival”.

It might be well if those who wish to describe what is simply a quickening work amongst believers would use those Scriptural expressions, “revive” and “reviving”, and distinguish them from “revival”, which includes and yet exceeds them. Revival is more than big meetings. It is more than religious excitement. It is more than the quickening of the saints, or their being filled with the Holy Spirit. It is more than a great ingathering of souls. One may have any one of these without revival, and yet revival includes them all.

There is a wealth of difference between missions or campaigns at their best and genuine revival. In the former man takes the initiative, it may be with the prompting of the Spirit; in the latter the initiative is God’s. With the one the organization is human; with the other it is divine. There is no intention here of disparaging the work of missions, or of denying that God has owned them to the conversion of multitudes, but it must be made clear that they do not constitute revival. Missions may be a part of the continuous programme of evangelism which is the task of the church, but revival is a thing of special times and seasons. Revival may of course break out during a mission, but when it does so certain features will appear which are peculiar to revival, and certain features will disappear which are characteristic of missions.

However, while revival tarries, the normal evangelism of the church must continue, but let us keep the distinction clear.

The meaning of any word is determined by its usage. For a definition of revival we must therefore appeal to the people of God of bygone years, who have used the word with consistency of meaning down the centuries, until it began to be used in a lesser and more limited sense in modern times. Numerous writings on the subject that have been preserved to us will confirm that revival is divine intervention in the normal course of spiritual things. It is God revealing Himself to man in awful holiness and irresistible power. It is such a manifest working of God that human personalities are overshadowed, and human programmes abandoned. It is man retiring into the background because God has taken the field. It is the Lord making bare His holy arm, and working in extraordinary power on saint and sinner.

The God of the Old Testament saints and prophets was the God of revival. In chapter 63 of his prophecy, Isaiah, recalling how God's people had rebelled and grieved His Holy Spirit (verse 10), longs for a manifestation of His zeal and mighty acts (verse 15). He looks upon the downtrodden sanctuary and cries out, "Oh that Thou wouldest rend the heavens, that Thou wouldest come down, that the mountains might bow down at Thy presence. . . to make Thy name known to Thine adversaries, that the nations may tremble at Thy presence! When Thou didst terrible things which we looked not for, Thou camest down. . ." (Isa. 64:1-3). Habakkuk also, living in a day when God's judgments were already being poured out upon His people for their sin, pleads for revival, "O Lord, revive Thy work in the midst of the years, in the midst of the years make it known; in wrath remember mercy"(3:2). Then in vision he perceives the answer to his prayer; he sees God on the move (verse 3), manifesting His power and glory (verses 3-6). He sees the tents of Cushan in affliction, and even nature itself moved at the divine presence (verses 7, 10, 11) as the Lord marches through the land in indignation, going forth for the salvation of His people (verses 12, 13).

At the end of the Old Testament story we find God still pleading with the remnant through His servant Malachi, and promising revival at this eleventh hour if His people would pay the price: "Bring ye the whole tithe into the storehouse. . . and prove Me now herewith, saith the Lord of Hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it" (3:10).

One might refer to Zechariah, to Joel, and to many another prophet, who brought to dark days a ray of hope in the promise of revival. How many saints in that bygone age could have testified to the value of this great expectation that filled their lives, in the words of David: "I had fainted, unless I had believed to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living" (Ps. 27:13).

In the New Testament the true motive-force of revival is seen in clearer light as we find it associated with the pouring out of the Spirit. In its historic setting as the birthday of the church, Pentecost was unique, and there were factors in that remarkable event that have never been repeated. But as a specimen outpouring of the Spirit, Pentecost was unique only in being the first.

Peter declared on that memorable day, "This is that which hath been spoken by the prophet Joel; And it shall be in the last days, saith God, I will pour forth of my Spirit upon all flesh" (Acts 2:16). It is to be noted that Peter, speaking under inspiration, was led to alter the Joel prophecy (2:28) from "it shall come to pass afterward" to "it shall be in the last days". This wonderful promise relates then to a period of time, "in the last days", not just to a moment of

time, such as the day of Pentecost. It is equally clear from the words that Peter quotes that the prophecy had but a partial fulfilment on that day. There was evidently more to come. All the years of the church's history have been "in the last days", and thus it has pleased the Lord down those years at special seasons to fulfil this prophecy.

There is further evidence in the New Testament that God never intended to confine the outpouring of the Spirit to one historic day. In Acts 10 verse 45 the remarkable event at Caesarea is described by Luke as an outpouring of the gift of the Holy Spirit. Paul writing to Titus uses the same word as did Peter when quoting Joel: "the Holy Spirit, which He poured out upon us richly" (Titus 3:5, 6).

True revivals have ever been marked by powerful and often widespread outpourings of the Spirit. Many many times the preaching had to cease because the hearers were prostrate, or because the voice of the preacher was drowned by cries for mercy. Who will deny that these were outpourings of the Spirit? Who could find a more appropriate description of such scenes than the words of Luke: "The Holy Spirit fell on all them which heard the Word"? (Acts 10:44).

David Brainerd recorded the beginning of the wonderful movement among the American Indians in 1745 thus: "The power of God seemed to descend upon the assembly 'like a rushing mighty wind' and with an astonishing energy bore down all before it. I stood amazed at the influence that seized the audience almost universally, and could compare it to nothing more aptly than the irresistible force of a mighty torrent. . . Almost all persons of all ages were bowed down with concern together, and scarce one was able to withstand the shock of this surprising operation."

Revival can never be explained in terms of activity, organization, meetings, personalities, preachings. These may or may not be involved in the work, but they do not and cannot account for the effects produced. Revival is essentially a manifestation of God; it has the stamp of Deity upon it, which even the unregenerate and uninitiated are quick to recognize. Revival must of necessity make an impact upon the community, and this is one means by which we may distinguish it from the more usual operations of the Holy Spirit. The marks of revival will be considered more fully in a later chapter.

CHAPTER TWO

A SIGN SPOKEN AGAINST

"Behold, this Child is set for the falling and rising up of many in Israel; and for a sign which is spoken against. . . that thoughts out of many hearts may be revealed" (Luke 2:34).

Thus spoke the aged Simeon as he held the long-promised Saviour in his arms. Thirty years elapsed and then the prophecy was fulfilled as Christ stood in manhood in the synagogue at Nazareth with the roll of the book in His hand. "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me," He read, "because He anointed Me to preach the gospel. . ." (Luke 4:18). Then He began to preach, applying the word in the power of the Spirit to the consciences of His hearers. Soon their wonder gave place to wrath, and they "cast Him forth out of the city, and led Him unto the brow of the hill. . . that they might throw Him down head-long" (verse 29). Thus from the time that He commenced to preach and work in the power of the Spirit, He became "a sign spoken against. . . that thoughts out of many hearts might be revealed".

It has been thus with every servant of God whose ministry was endued with power. It has been thus with every movement of God by which the church has progressed since its inception at Pentecost. It has been thus with every genuine revival - a sign spoken against . . . that thoughts out of many hearts may be revealed". The mighty operation of the Spirit will always uncover and draw forth into the open the antagonism of the natural or carnal mind which is "enmity against God".

He whom God chooses to be an instrument in revival may expect to be a continual target for the malice of Satan, who never seems to lack willing hands or lips to do his work, in the church as well as out of it. Many know of the contribution of Jonathan Edwards to the New England Revival in the seventeen hundreds; few know that he was ultimately compelled to resign from the church so signally blessed through his labours. Many know of William Burns, under whose ministry revival broke out in R. M. McCheyne's church in Dundee, and elsewhere; few know of the gruelling he received in defending that work before a committee of his fellow ministers. So it was with Finney and many others. If we find a revival that is not spoken against, we had better look again to ensure that it is a revival.

We must pause a moment and answer some of the objections that are always brought against revival. When God pours out the Spirit these arguments are sure to occur again, and there will be no time to deal with them then. There is little that can be said to those who wilfully blind their eyes to the facts, and whose antagonism to the work of the Spirit would seem to derive more from the enmity of the heart than the reasonings of the head. Some, however, speak against revival out of ignorance. They have never experienced it, do not know what it is, and are prejudiced against it from the outset. Influenced by enemies of the work, their opinions are based on hearsay. The effective cure for such, if they are willing, is to go and see for themselves.

Others object to revival because they consider that it is always accompanied by excesses and other undesirable features. That there is a tendency for such to occur where care is not exercised, and that at times excesses have occurred, cannot be denied. No one would pretend to claim that every revival burns with a smokeless flame. But let us test the depth of the argument.

Would these critics suggest that the early church ought never to have sold their possessions that distribution might be made to those in need, because this was abused by Ananias and Sapphira? Should the young churches have refrained from eating the Lord's supper, because in some places, e.g., Corinth, the ordinance had been abused? Ought there to have been no Reformation because occasionally Protestants gave way to excessive zeal and wrongs were perpetrated?

The picture must be seen in perspective, and the evils must be weighed against the overall good. "After drought, the copious rains often deluge the land and sweep away bridges, and otherwise do very much harm. But no one is so alarmed by the evils of rain, as to desire a continuation of the drought" (Wm. Patton, D.D.).

There are always some who are desirous of revival until it comes, and then they bitterly oppose it, because it has not come in the way they anticipated. The instrument that God used, or the channel through which the blessing flowed, was not what their convictions had led them to expect. They looked to see an Eliab or an Abinadab chosen for this great work, but the Lord, who "looketh on the heart", chose a David. They thought that their own local church, their own fellowship which was so scriptural and right, would see the beginning of the work, but God chose to work elsewhere, and this became to them a stumbling-block. To

all who handle the work of revival, this should be a solemn warning of the great danger of yielding to jealousy and prejudice, which blind the eyes, harden the heart, and hinder the Spirit.

Then the manner of the Spirit's working or the manifestations through which God chose to exhibit His power may have been contrary to their expectations or foreign to their experience. They brought the glorious work of the Spirit to the bar of their own judgment, and there condemned and denied it. As the Jews rejected their Messiah because He did not fit in with their plans, or fulfil their preconceived ideas, so these also reject the manifestation of God in revival.

Thus it becomes, as in the case of the Lord, "a sign spoken against", and those who thus speak inevitably reveal, by their opposition to the work of the Spirit, the thoughts of their hearts. Let all beware of an attitude which presumes to dictate to the Almighty how He shall conduct His work. This must be considered further when discussing supernatural manifestations in revival.

To be distinguished from the objectors just considered, there is another class, with many good, earnest people among them, who do not speak against revival itself, but against the expectation of it. They readily acknowledge the need of it, and that should it come it would do much good, but deny that God is ready to meet that need and do that good. Some take this view because they do not see any evidence in the church or the world to encourage the hope. Others do not see any evidence in Scripture, but rather that the very reverse of revival is to be expected in these last days.

We would ask the former what evidence do they look for among believers and unbelievers to indicate a coming movement? What are the outward signs of the advent of revival for which they look in vain? It is a crucial question, and a later chapter (XIV, The Sound of Marching) must be devoted to answering it.

Those who argue from Scripture say, "Are we not approaching the end of the age? And do not the Scriptures teach that in the last days perilous times shall come, and that things in the world are to wax worse and worse? How, then, can we look for revival, and a great ingathering of the lost, when God has predicted the very opposite?" It is to be noted here that this argument, which was so prevalent among believers a few years ago, is not being vented so much of late, because facts too big to ignore are disproving the theory.

Great evangelistic drives, which we must be careful to distinguish from revival, but for which we must thank God, are reaping in a manner that has not been witnessed since the beginning of the century. Let those who yearn for that deeper and greater work of revival be careful not to criticize what God is pleased to bless. While God is smiling, who are we to frown? It is not a question of whether we approve of every method being used, but whether we have hearts as large as Paul's, who could say, "In every way. . . Christ is proclaimed; and therein I rejoice, yea, and will rejoice" (Phil. 1:18). If the apostle could do this even when motives were doubtful (verses 17, 18), how much more should we when it is merely a question of what we judge to be doubtful methods.

But let us return to this objection. It is based on 2 Timothy 3 and other like passages, where we are told that "in the last days grievous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of self", etc. and that "evil men and impostors shall wax worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived".

The passage teaches, what is affirmed elsewhere in Scripture, that moral conditions in the world are to deteriorate in the end times, that men will be lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God, cloaking their sin with a form of godliness that denies the power.

But why should this forbid revival? Was it not in grievous and perilous times that the church was born? God found it needful then to demonstrate His power and pour out His Spirit. If the gathering out of the church is to be consummated in a greater time of world turmoil, how much more needful that God should again act in power to safeguard His rights, complete His church, and vindicate His Name.

History abounds with instances of where the desperate plight of man has called forth all the mightier working on the part of God. Again and again the history of revival has been the history of God's intervention to retrieve what was hopeless. Furthermore, the prophetic word warns us that Satanic agents are going to deceive by signs and wonders (Matt. 24:24). Is the Lord then to withhold His power, and so give the Devil the monopoly in the realm of the supernatural? Are the Moses and Aarons of these last days to hold their rods while "the magicians of Egypt" cast down theirs and turn them into serpents?

Should we not expect the servants of God to do as much, and more - that their rods should swallow up those of "the magicians" as they did of old, according to the promise, "Greater is He that is in you than he that is in the world"? (1 John 4:4). The same Book that warns us that "iniquity shall abound", also reminds us that "where sin abounded, grace did abound more exceedingly" (Rom. 5:20).

Man's extremity is God's opportunity. Is there widespread rejection of God's law? Then "it is time for the Lord to work, for they have made void Thy law" (Ps. 119:126).

Others who oppose any expectation of revival argue in this manner: "Revival must begin in the church, but the Scriptures foretell that in the church there is to be the falling away prior to the return of Christ, the love of the many is to wax cold, and the Laodicean spirit will prevail. We see these things already being fulfilled; how then can we expect revival?" The first two predictions we cannot deny, and must be careful not to overlook; but the third is based on the assumption that the letter to the Church in Laodicea (Rev. 3:14) describes the state of the church in these end times. It is doubtful whether this can be proved, though it may be true. However, let us take the objection as it stands. It involves the question as to what is the divine purpose in these recorded predictions of departure and decline. For example, is the picture we have of the lukewarm church of Laodicea presented to us as an example to follow or a state to condone? Did God intend that we should argue in favour of the Laodicean spirit, or resign ourselves fatalistically to it, because we believe we are in the end times?

It must be remembered that predictions as to departure are accompanied by predictions as to judgment which is the consequence of departure. Christ says to the lukewarm Laodiceans, "I am about to spue thee out of my mouth" (Darby). But again and again we find that prophecies of coming judgment were uttered that they might so move the hearers as to make it possible for the judgment to be averted, or at least deferred. There is such a thing as God repenting Him of the evil He thought to do, and doing it not, as in the case of Nineveh (Jonah 3:10), when God revoked the prophecy of Jonah concerning its overthrow.

When Daniel interpreted the vision of Nebuchadnezzar, which was a prediction of God's judgment upon him, he did not counsel the king solemnly to await his punishment, but to take action which might avert it. "Wherefore, O king, let my counsel be acceptable unto thee, and break off thy sins by righteousness, and thine iniquities by shewing mercy to the poor; if there may be a lengthening of thy tranquillity" (Dan. 4:27).

If God has foreseen and predicted a tendency on the part of the church in the latter days to decline in faith and devotion, He has not forewarned us of it that we may apathetically await its fulfilment, but that we may be forearmed and strive together to avert it. There is no more

effective way of achieving this than by preparing our hearts and pleading with God for genuine revival. There is nothing more calculated to arrest the downward spiritual trend, and set a lukewarm church on fire than a mighty awakening of the Holy Spirit.

God's dealings with Israel, "written for our admonition" (1 Cor. 10:11), both illustrate and confirm the argument. When spiritual decay set in with the death of Solomon and the division of the kingdom, God constantly warned His people of the consequences of departure, and predicted coming judgment which was ultimately fulfilled. We find nevertheless that the history of decline is punctuated by some outstanding spiritual revivals through godly kings and fearless prophets who turned the people back to God.

These men did not argue, as some Christians do today, that departure and judgment were prophesied and could not be averted, therefore a widespread turning to God was not to be contemplated. God had not revoked His promises. He was still the God of revival, if they would fulfil the conditions. "If My people, which are called by My Name, shall humble themselves, pray, and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear. . . forgive . . . and heal" (2 Chron. 7:14)

This promise had actually been given for a time of judgment (verse 13). They took God at His word, sought earnestly His face, and in their day saw the turn of the tide.

Towards the close of Judah's history as an independent kingdom there came to the throne the boy, Josiah. The temporary eclipse of the nation in captivity for its sin was not to be deferred much longer, and in fact began in the reign of his son, Jehoahaz. Nevertheless through the obedience to God of this young king there took place a powerful revival which pulsed through every vein of the nation.

The word of the Lord ran and was glorified. Sin and idolatry were purged from the land (2 Kings 23:4-20). The passover was kept as it had never been kept since the time of Samuel (2 Chron. 35:18), and all the days of Josiah the people departed not from following the Lord (2 Chron. 34:33). Josiah had fulfilled the conditions and God had kept His promise: "Because thine heart was tender, and thou didst humble thyself before God, when thou heardest His words against this place. . . and hast rent thy clothes, and wept before Me, I also have heard thee, saith the Lord" (2 Chron. 34:27). It was the prophecy of coming judgment that produced in Josiah's heart a desire for revival, not a dumb resignation to fate.

Those who long for a movement in these last days need not hide away these divine predictions, as though they constituted an embarrassing contradiction to the promise of revival. Let us rather bring them out into the open and make them, for ourselves and for others, both a powerful warning and an incentive, as did Josiah. For these very prophecies that are often used as objections to revival should drive us to our knees in humble earnest prayer, that God may pour out His Spirit, revive His Church, and save the lost. "Many there be that say, who will show us any good? Lord, lift Thou up the light of Thy countenance upon us" (Ps 4:6).

Finally, there are those who object to the expectation of revival because, they assert: "The church should not be looking for revival, but for the return of Christ". Of course the church should be looking for the return of Christ, but is it? Dare we begin to claim that the people of God are ready and waiting for their returning Lord? How can they be when, in the main, they are carnal, sleepy, worldly, lukewarm? "He that hath this hope set on Him purifieth himself, even as He is pure" (1 John 3:3). And it is certain that the church is largely in this state, not because it is preparing and pleading for revival, but because it is not doing so. In revival the church is awakened, carnality and worldliness are slain, the lukewarm are made hot, and the

people of God begin to purify themselves. There is nothing calculated to incite preparation for and expectation of the return of Christ so much as revival.

The re-emphasis throughout Wales of the blessed truth of Christ's return was one of the direct results of the 1904 Awakening. One who was himself prominent in the movement wrote: "In the whole of the Welsh pulpit, anterior to 1904, one knew of but two ministers who held and taught the truth of the pre-millennial, personal advent of our Lord. . . . But mark the divine miracle. The revival came. And with it, a great light. . . .

The writer's own testimony is but an instance of that of thousands. Never can he forget the occasion, the place, nor the day when, alone with God, the truth flashed into his heart. He had heard no preaching, nor had he read any book on the subject. . . . At that moment, however, a conviction was wrought in his heart that the Lord was coming; that He was coming quickly; that indeed He must come, and that apart from His coming, there seemed no hope for the world" (Rent Heavens by R. B. Jones).

The hope of revival is not a substitute but a supplement to the hope of His coming. The prospect of His appearing unto them that look for Him makes revival imperative.

There are some, alas, who do not wish to be acquainted with the facts; who have only eyes to see and ears to hear what goes on in their own circle or within their own fellowship of believers. Nevertheless, let those who know the facts publish them abroad without fear, for there is nothing more calculated to create expectancy for revival than the news of it.

"They shall speak of the glory of Thy kingdom, and talk of Thy power; to make known to the sons of men His mighty acts" (Ps. 145:11). "The works of the Lord are great, sought out of all them that have pleasure therein" (Ps. 111:2).

But those who do not appear to find any pleasure in them, would do well to heed the apostolic warning: "Beware therefore, lest that come upon you, which is spoken in the prophets; Behold, ye despisers, and wonder, and perish; for I work a work in your days, a work which ye shall in no wise believe, if one declare it unto you" (Acts 13:40). From this negative aspect, the objections to revival, let us move on to the positive side, the promise of revival.

CHAPTER THREE

THE LATTER RAIN OF PROMISE

"And I will cause the shower to come down in its season; there shall be showers of blessing" (Ezek. 34:26).

"What are the prospects of revival?" asked the writer of an aged servant of God.

"They are as bright as the promises of God," was the swift reply.

No truer answer could have been given. We know that there are to be those in the last days who shall say of the hope of Christ's coming, "Where is the promise?" (2 Pet. 3:4). Even so there are those today who question the expectancy of revival, because they cannot see in God's Word any ground for such a hope. "Where", they would ask us, "is the promise of revival?"

If, however, they are right in implying that there is no promise, then they must be asked to explain why, down the centuries of the church's history, God's people have been led and moved to plead with Him to do what He has never promised to do, and why He has done it again and again in answer to their burdened prayers. But is there no promise?

Already some of the great revival promises of the Old Testament have been quoted. They could be easily multiplied. Let us take the familiar chapter 35 of Isaiah as an example: “The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad; and the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose. It shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice even with joy and singing; the glory of Lebanon shall be given unto it, the excellency of Carmel and Sharon: they shall see the glory of the Lord, the excellency of our God.

Strengthen ye the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees. Say to them that are of a fearful heart, Be strong, fear not: behold, your God will come with vengeance, with the recompence of God; He will come and save you. Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb shall sing: for in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert. And the glowing sand shall become a pool, and the thirsty ground springs of water” (verses 1-7).

It may be objected, however, that these Old Testament prophecies refer to national Israel, and find their fulfilment in a dispensation other than this age of the church. It is not disputed that this may be the primary application of many such passages, but we surely make a great mistake when we confine such glorious promises to their immediate and literal fulfilment. God never intended that we should limit His word in this way, by restricting His precious promises to dispensational pigeon-holes, for He has not done so Himself, as we shall see when dealing presently with the Joel prophecy.

When the Spirit of God causes these Old Testament promises to come alive in the hearts of His children, and gives them faith to appropriate them in prayer and plead them before His face, until He answers from heaven in revival, who are we to suggest that this is a misapplication of God’s promises to Israel? The outcome is conclusive evidence that God does not think so. “I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground” (Isa. 44:3) was one of the promises constantly pleaded in the recent Lewis Awakening, and God responded to such pleading. It has been so with almost every revival.

The promise of revival, however, is not confined to the Old Testament. The verse just quoted, “I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground”, has its New Testament counterpart: “If any man thirst, let him come unto Me and drink . . . as the [O. T.] Scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water” (John 7:37, 38). The teaching in both passages is the same, and it is the whole principle of revival: the personal thirst – assuaged by the water of the Spirit – resulting in an overflow of blessing.

Next in order there is the statement of Peter on the day of Pentecost referred to in the opening chapter: “In the last days, saith God, I will pour forth of My Spirit upon all flesh” (Acts 2:17), where he relates the Joel prophecy to the age of the church. This must be considered more fully in a moment.

There are the further words of Peter in his address in the porch of the Temple: “Repent ye therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out, that so there may come seasons of refreshing from the presence of the Lord; and that He may send the Christ” (Acts 3:19, 20). The order set forth here is important. Firstly, repentance and turning to God; secondly, seasons of refreshing from His presence; thirdly, the return of Christ. Here is the promise of revival, “seasons of refreshing”, before the return of Christ, and as definite as the promise of the return itself.

The latter half of Joel 2, from which Peter quoted on the day of Pentecost, applies primarily to the time of Israel’s national restoration. It relates to a day when Israel has responded to the call of the Lord (verses 12-17) and her people have turned to Him with all their heart. He will

then have pity upon them, and cause that they should be no more a reproach among the nations (verses 18, 19).

After He had driven away from them “the northern army” (verse 20), He would bless their land by restoring the former rain and the latter rain that “the floors shall be full of wheat, and the fats shall overflow with wine and oil” (verses 23, 24), and they would know that the Lord was in the midst of them (verse 27). After this, the Lord promised to pour out His Spirit on all flesh, in the familiar prophecy, quoted by Peter at Pentecost (verses 28-32).

These prophecies of the restoration of the rain and of the out-pouring of the Spirit which was to follow come within the space of six verses. They must both be taken literally or both figuratively. We cannot take one literally and spiritualize the other without doing violence to the passage. Plainly, the promise of the outpouring of the Spirit can only be literal, therefore the promise of the former and latter rain must be also taken literally to mean that those special seasons of rain in Palestine to which the Jewish farmer looked in order to obtain maximum fertility from the soil, are to be restored in full measure, as in the beginning, and that this is to take place at the time of Israel’s national restoration.

But “afterward”, as Joel says, these natural and temporal blessings were to be followed by their spiritual counterpart – there was to be an outpouring of the Spirit, not upon selected ones here and there, as in Old Testament days, but upon all flesh. This was to be accompanied by wonders in the heavens and in the earth, and was to precede “the great and terrible day of the Lord” (verses 30, 31). There would be a calling on the name of the Lord for deliverance (verse 32), and all this was to be when God should bring again the captivity of Judah and Jerusalem (3:1) as promised.

It is evident from consideration of these factors that the prophecy, as we find it here in Joel, has not been fulfilled, and must await that day when world-wide blessing shall come through national Israel turning to God, when “all Israel shall be saved” (Rom. 11:26) and “a land shall be born in one day”, and “a nation be brought forth at once” (Isa. 66:8).

Paul expressed it thus: “If the casting away of them [the nation of Israel] is the reconciling of the world, what shall the receiving of them be, but life from the dead?” (Rom. 11:15).

However, the wonderful fact is that Peter declared on the day of Pentecost, “This is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel”, and then changing the word “afterward”, he continued, “In the last days. . . I will pour forth of My Spirit”. The inspired Apostle thus revealed that Joel’s prophecy had an earlier application to the age of the church, “the last days”, which began with Pentecost.

It is a feature of Old Testament prophecy, that there is very often a secondary fulfilment as well as the primary and literal one. The primary fulfilment is of necessity an exact fulfilment of the prophecy in every detail. The secondary fulfilment which usually precedes and anticipates the primary, will be but a partial fulfilment. Failure to recognize or acknowledge this duality in prophecy has led to much confusion.

Joel thus predicts for Israel, at the time of her national restoration, the return of the former and latter rain in Palestine, bringing abundant temporal blessing, to be followed by a glorious “latter rain” of the Spirit. Peter reveals by inspiration what could not otherwise have been known from the passage in Joel, that the promised “latter rain” of the Spirit was also to apply to the age of the church; that hidden away in that Old Testament prophecy was a secret purpose of God, to pour out His Spirit during this age and before the time of Israel’s national restoration, and that this began with the outpouring at Pentecost. “Upon all flesh” indicates that the outpouring was to be unrestricted – as to sex, “sons and daughters” (Acts 2:17); as to

age, “young men and old men” (2:17); as to race, “to you and to your children [Jews], and to all that are afar off [Gentiles]” (2:39).

It hardly needs to be asserted that the history of Israel in the Old Testament has a spiritual application to the church. Who has not seen that the redemption from Egypt, the wanderings in the wilderness, the entering of the Promised Land have a fulfilment in Christian experience? The New Testament confirms this again and again, for it is packed with Old Testament allusions to illustrate and enforce New Testament truths (viz. 1 Cor. 10). It now remains to show that the promised outpouring of the Spirit referred to by Peter at Pentecost was prefigured by the rain that God promised He would pour out upon the land in response to the obedience of His people.

When the nation was about to enter Canaan, God said through Moses, “The land, whither ye go over to possess it, is a land of hills and valleys, and drinketh water of the rain of heaven. . . . And it shall come to pass, if ye shall hearken diligently unto My commandments which I command you this day, to love the Lord your God, and to serve Him with all your heart and with all your soul, that I will give the rain of your land in its season, the former rain and the latter rain, that thou mayest gather in thy corn, and thy wine, and thine oil” (Deut. 11:11-14). It is clear from this passage that the harvest was dependent upon the rain, and that the rain was promised by God, contingent upon their obedience.

There are many references in Scripture to the long “dry season” in Palestine which commences in April and lasts until October, leaving the ground parched and the cisterns almost empty. Only those who have experienced this “dry season” in the East can appreciate the great longing which fills the hearts of all for the coming rain. How graphic are David’s words in this connection: “My soul thirsteth for Thee, my flesh longeth for Thee, in a dry and weary land, where no water is” (Ps. 63:1; cf. Isa. 32:2; 35:7).

The rainy season usually commences about the end of October with light showers that soften the ground (Ps. 65:10), and then continues with heavy intermittent falls of ten lasting for two or three days, throughout November and December. These heavy falls were called in Scripture “the former [or early] rain” (Heb. yoreh or moreh). The farmer depends upon the former rain to render the rocklike soil suitable for ploughing and sowing.

A native of Palestine has written in this connection, “When the rains have come in sufficient quantities, he must begin to plough. He may have to plough in the face of hail and snow, storm and tempest, but plough he must, for if he does not plough and sow with the early rains, he will not reap after the latter rains” (Prov. 20:4; Eccles. 11: 4) (Samuel Schor).

When these heavy falls are over, lesser showers still continue intermittently. “At no period during the winter do they entirely cease” (Smith’s Dictionary). With the approach of the harvest, however, the heavy rain would return to swell the grain and fruit in preparation for the time of reaping. This was known as “the latter rain”, meaning the rain of ingathering, which was very similar in character to the “former rain”, for both are described by the word “geshem”, meaning gushing rain. “Let us now fear the Lord our God, that giveth rain [geshem], both the former and the latter, in its season; that reserveth unto us the appointed weeks of the harvest” (Jer. 5:24; cf. Joel 2: 23, 24, Hos. 6:3).

We see from this that the former and latter rains are distinguished from various other kinds of rain spoken of in Scripture (in all ten different Hebrew words are used) by their own distinctive names, and by the description “geshem” or “gushing rain”, that pours down in copious falls. It is also clear that the former and latter rains could not be expected at any time,

for they had their appointed seasons. Finally, both were related to the long-looked-for harvest, for without them there would be neither sowing nor reaping.

On the face of it, the similarity between this rainy season of Canaan and the age of the church is striking. Just as that season was heralded by preliminary showers that soon gave way to the copious falls of the former rain, so in the ministries of John the Baptist (when there “went out unto him Jerusalem, and all Judaea, and all the region round about Jordan” Matt. 3:5), and of Christ, (when “there followed Him great multitudes from Galilee and Decapolis and Jerusalem and Judaea and from beyond Jordan” Matt. 4:25), we see distinct movements of the Spirit which told all those looking for the consolation of Israel that the season of drought was over, and that a new and glorious season of rain had come.

At the outset of His ministry the Lord said, “Thou shalt see greater things than these” (John 1:50), and at its conclusion, “Greater works than these shall [ye] do” (John 14:12). The former rain was at hand, and Pentecost marked its commencement. “In the last days, saith God, I will pour forth of My Spirit.” The outpourings continued throughout that first century, gradually decreasing in power and frequency as time elapsed and faith and spirituality decline.

However, all through the ensuing centuries of the dark middle ages, the showers continued here and there, now and again. Such histories as Broadbent’s Pilgrim Church make it clear that at no point, not even in the darkest days, did the rain of blessing entirely cease, though the heavier outpourings of revival were few and far between. Since the Reformation there have been outpourings more distinct and frequent.

The latter rain is in preparation for the day of harvest; it is the last epoch of the rainy season prior to the final ingathering. But when and what is the harvest? In the parable of the tares the Lord explained that “the harvest is the end of the age” when “the Son of man shall send forth His angels, and they shall gather out of His kingdom all things that cause stumbling, and them that do iniquity” (Matt. 13:39, 41). It will be the time when the word shall come to the one “like unto a son of man” sitting upon the white cloud, “Send forth Thy sickle, and reap: for the hour to reap is come”. He will then “cast His sickle (viz. angels; Matt. 13:39, 41) upon the earth”, and the earth shall be reaped (Rev. 14:14-16). The harvest is clearly associated in Scripture with the coming of Christ at the end of the age.

It has been shown that this age of the church is the time of rain. We may look upon Pentecost as the commencement of the former rain, for it was during those first and powerful effusions of the Spirit that the gospel was spread throughout the civilized world, and the ground prepared for the final harvest. Before the age concludes with the personal return of Christ at harvest time we must expect the latter rain of promise, or the rain of ingathering.

How can the day of reaping come before this final season of the outpouring of the Spirit, so vital for the final maturing of the spiritual harvest? Just as the rainy season of Canaan concluded with the same kind of rain as it began, the “geshem” or heavy rain, so should we expect before the coming of Christ a season of mighty outpourings, eclipsing all that the church has experienced since the Reformation, and only comparable in character and in power with the former rain of the early church.

James puts the matter beyond doubt when he says, “Be patient therefore, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient over it, until it receive the early and latter rain. Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord is at hand” (Jas. 5:7, 8).

Do we long for the day of harvest? Do we grow impatient for the coming of the Lord? It is as though the apostle would curb our restless spirits, and enjoin us to be patient by reminding us

that the heavenly Husbandman has been waiting all through the long seasons, waiting for the fulfilment of His purposes, waiting for the precious fruit of the earth at the time of harvest. We must be imitators of “the God of patience”, who has been waiting so much longer than we have. The Husbandman knows, and those also who labour as His servants should know, that before the final harvest day can dawn at the coming of the Lord the fruit of the earth must receive the early and the latter rain.

If we in this day can look backward to the former rain, we have still to look forward to the latter rain, the final epoch of the age, prior to the day of harvest.

Leaving aside for a moment the testimony of Scripture on this point, one has only to survey with unprejudiced eye the harvest-fields of God’s kingdom, one has only to examine the spiritual condition of that which is growing up unto the harvest to be convinced of the absolute necessity of the latter rain of the Spirit before the fruit of the earth can be mature for harvesting.

If it has been shown that there is in the word of God a promise of revival for us today, if there is any evidence that we are, in the purpose of God, moving into the era of the latter rain, then let us heed the word of God to Israel, let us do what they shall do in a coming day: “Ask ye of the Lord rain in the time of the latter rain, even of the Lord that maketh lightnings; and He shall give them [geshem] showers of rain” (Zech. 10:1).

Pour down Thy Spirit once again, dear Lord;
Our cry goes up to Thee for “latter rain”;
Unite Thy people as the “heart of one”,
And Pentecostal days shall come again!

E. M. GRIMES.

CHAPTER FOUR

THIS IS THE PURPOSE

“This is the purpose that is purposed upon the whole earth: and this is the hand that is stretched out upon all the nations. For the Lord of Hosts hath purposed, and who shall disannul it?” (Isa. 14:26).

God has always worked by means of revivals. Since the dawn of human history His purposes have progressed by sudden and mighty movements of the Spirit.

“The world of mankind has not advanced by evolution but by revolution; that is, by violent upheavals of society. Many changes have taken place rapidly, changes that make the ordinary events of history appear commonplace by contrast. Eden, the Flood, the Exodus period and the Captivity era are Old Testament illustrations of these revolutionary epochs, while Pentecost is the conspicuous New Testament example. Our Christian era is marked by many such times of religious transformation. The Renaissance and Protestant Reformation in the fifteenth century changed the whole thought and life of Europe. Modern history dates from them” (P. V. Jenness).

While all must acknowledge this principle in the workings of God, some may ask, “Why has God chosen to work in this way? Would it not be more satisfactory for the work of God to progress quietly and steadily, without the stimulus of such excitement and upheaval as are produced in seasons of revival?” It should not be necessary to justify the ways of God before

His people; nevertheless, in doing so, the underlying reasons for revival may perhaps be more clearly set forth.

Revival as a method of God's working may be justified from the standpoint of divine strategy, first to counteract spiritual decline, and then to create spiritual momentum. Then revival may be justified from its results, by examining its effects in relation to the saints, the sinners and the Godhead. Firstly, let us see its place in divine strategy.

Counteracting Spiritual Decline

If the work of God could have been maintained and extended down the centuries in steady spiritual power, revivals would have been unnecessary as a counteracting agent, but this, as we know, has been far from the case. "A revival of religion presupposes a declension" (Finney).

Decline and decay are inherent in fallen nature and are not confined simply to the physical and moral realm, but invade and influence even the spiritual. This is writ large not only in the history of Israel, but also across the pages of the New Testament and the subsequent history of the church. It has pleased God to counteract this deadly tendency to departure by working at special seasons and places in extraordinary power.

It is a well-established fact that when the Spirit of God is working powerfully the spiritual results are usually deep and abiding. Souls saved or blessed in powerful revivals are, on the whole, more likely to continue steadfastly than is the case at other times. There is more connection between the manifestation of God's power and spiritual steadfastness than some have realized. The history of Israel in the time of the Judges illustrates this very vividly. "And the people served the Lord all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders that outlived Joshua, who had seen all the great work of the Lord, that He had wrought for Israel. . . and there arose another generation after them, which knew not the Lord, nor yet the work which He had wrought for Israel. And the children of Israel did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord, and served the Baalim" (Judges 2:7, 10, 11).

It would not be good for these displays of God's power to be other than occasional. It would not make for spiritual health that the Lord's people should live on them. Nevertheless, in times of spiritual declension there is perhaps nothing more calculated to stay the rot, wean the heart from earth and attract it to heaven, and produce spiritual steadfastness than to experience such a mighty work of God. Again and again spiritual situations and conditions that seemed beyond recovery have been transformed by such a working of the Spirit. One recalls the pithy definition of revival as "the inrush of the Spirit into a body that threatens to become a corpse"! (D. M. Panton). If "counteracting spiritual decline" was the only purpose achieved by God in such seasons, His method would be abundantly justified. It is after all but the sound military principle that the best method of defence is attack.

Creating Spiritual Momentum

There is another well-known military principle known as concentration of force, according to which a commander will husband his reserves, concentrate them at a strategic point, for a vital blow at the crucial moment. He will thus hope to break through the enemy defences and so produce momentum or advance where all was static. A powerful thrust of this sort may well achieve what routine patrolling, skirmishing, or harassing tactics could never effect. It is thus with revival: it is designed to achieve what the quieter workings of the Spirit do not.

There was once an ancient reservoir in the hills that supplied a village community with water. It was fed by a mountain stream, and the overflow from the reservoir continued down the

stream-bed to the valley below. There was nothing at all remarkable about this stream. It flowed on its quiet way without even disturbing the boulders that lay in its path or the foot-bridges that crossed it at various points. It seldom overflowed its steep banks, or gave the villagers any trouble.

One day, however, some large cracks appeared in one of the walls of the old reservoir, and soon afterwards the wall collapsed, and the waters burst forth down the hillside. They rooted up great trees; they carried along boulders like playthings; they destroyed houses and bridges and all that lay in their path. The stream-bed could not now contain the volume of water, which therefore flowed over the country-side, even inundating distant dwellings. What had before been ignored or taken for granted now became an object of awe and wonder and fear. From far and near people who in the usual way never went near the stream, hastened to see this great sight.

In picture language this is revival; in fact it is the sort of picture language that Scripture uses to convey the irresistible power of God. Often in the period just preceding the movement, the stream of power and blessing has been unusually low. The people of God and the work of God have been "in great affliction and reproach", despised or ignored by those around them. In response, however, to the prayers of a burdened remnant God has been quietly hearing the flood. The watchful eye has seen "a cloud as small as a man's hand". The listening ear has caught "the sound of abundance of rain". Then suddenly, when the majority had no expectation of it, God opened the windows of heaven and poured out the blessing so that in the channels of organized Christianity there was not room enough to receive it.

Like the river that issued from the sanctuary in the vision of Ezekiel (chap. 47), the waters that were at first to the ankles are before long, in the full tide of revival, "waters to swim in". The flood of life and blessing has now become an object of awe and wonder. Works of darkness and strongholds of Satan that have long resisted the normal influences of the Spirit are swept away. Stubborn wills that have long withstood the overtures of the gospel, the pleadings and the prayers of love d ones, now bend and break before the irresistible flow of the Spirit, to be engulfed themselves and borne along in the stream of blessing.

What God has said of a coming time of judgment and revival for Israel and the earth, is in measure true of all such displays of God's power: "So shall they fear the name of the Lord from the west, and His glory from the rising of the sun: for He shall come as a rushing stream, which the breath of the Lord driveth" (Isa. 59:19). Thus does God see fit to use revival to create spiritual momentum, to accomplish in days what could never otherwise be achieved in years of normal Christian activity.

We must not, however, in our zeal for revival disparage what is achieved in the quieter seasons, for God has His purposes in these times also. The patrolling and the harassing and the limited advances are all essential to the big offensive. "The day of small things" (Zech. 4:10) is preparatory and supplementary to "the day of [God's] power" (Ps. 110:3), and we must not despise it.

We should not be surprised to discover that it has been in times of spiritual revival that most of the forward movements of the church have been born. The great missionary advance of the last century derived its momentum from the widespread revivals that blessed America and Britain during those years. Ever since the light was almost eclipsed in medieval times, God has been working to recover the situation, and to restore to the church the light, the purity, and the power which are her birthright, and which characterized her in the first century. The affairs of God's house must be re-established as He instituted them at the beginning. The

ways of apostolic Christianity must be recovered, or the church of the latter days will never ride the storms that already threaten to engulf her. God has used revivals to this end.

During such times new light has broken from the sacred page, and out of such times new expressions of the church have evolved, recovering in most cases something more of the mind of God. Only when the new truth became central, and the work was built around it, instead of around Christ; only when the believers became more diligent in holding fast the new truth than in “holding fast the Head”, did the movement become denominational and sectarian. Although the revivals of the future will surely reveal that there is yet more land to be possessed in this respect, let us never forget what we owe to the spiritual momentum derived from the movements of the past, and let us be ready to walk in whatever new light may break forth when once again God is pleased to manifest His power and glory. It must now be shown that the ways of God in revival are yet further vindicated by the effects produced.

The Saints

Clearly it is the saints, not the sinners, that are primarily involved in revival. The quickening of the saints is the root, while the saving of the sinners is the fruit. Therefore, to see the primary effects of revival we must look at the church. Isaiah sounded a reveille call to the people of God in the familiar words, “Awake, awake, put on thy strength, O Zion; put on thy beautiful garments, O Jerusalem, the holy city” (52:1).

Revival marks the awakening of the church; indeed such a time is commonly termed “an awakening”. When asleep one is out of touch with the world of reality. The church asleep is out of touch with the world of spiritual reality, and needs to be awakened.

The argument in favour of an awakening grows stronger as the end of the age approaches, for Paul himself said, “knowing the season, that now it is high time for you to awake out of sleep: for now is salvation nearer to us than when we first believed. The night is far spent, and the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light” (Rom. 13:11). Here is the primary effect of revival – the church awakes, casts off the works of darkness that have blanketed her in her slumber, and puts on the armour of light. The assertion that we cannot have an awakening in these days is but the Devil’s lullaby to hush the church to sleep.

“Awake, awake, put on thy strength, O Zion.” Asleep, the church of Christ is impotent; awakened, she clothes herself with spiritual strength. The power that began to flow at Pentecost is inexhaustible, and is as much available now as then, but only an awakened church can claim her birthright and go forth “clothed with power from on high” (Luke 24:49). No one can deny that the people of God today are largely denuded of this power. It is a characteristic effect of revival that Zion puts on her strength. It is doubtful if the power is ever renewed in a widespread manner save in times of revival.

“Awake, awake. . . put on thy beautiful garments, O Jerusalem, the holy city.” The church asleep is not only denuded of power but also of holiness. Only when the people of God are awakened are they clothed with the beautiful garments of practical righteousness. Is there not a need of holiness today? Is there not a downward tendency on the part of individual believers seen in lukewarmness toward the Lord, compromise with the world, and complacency as to themselves? Then there is an undoubted need of an awakening. Holiness is not optional but obligatory. God demands it. Without it no man shall see the Lord (Matt. 5:8; Heb. 12:14). But revival is a time when God comes and rains righteousness upon us (Hos. 10:12). If there is no revival of righteousness, there is no revival at all.

It is characteristic of revivals that they have been seasons when sins that have long hindered blessing are exposed, confessed, and forgiven. Relationships, wrecked by pride, envy, and evil-speaking are wonderfully restored when the hearts of the saints melt in the fires of revival. As Jonathan Edwards wrote of the 18th-century New England Awakening, "Abundance has been lately done at making up differences, and confessing faults one to another, and making restitution; probably more within these two years, than was done in thirty years before."

It is at such times that Zion awakes and puts on her beautiful garments, displaying to a wondering world "the excellencies of Him Who called [her] out of darkness into His marvellous light" (1 Pet. 2:9). Revival issues in an awakened church clothed with the power and holiness of her risen Head. The church dormant becomes the church militant. Then indeed may her Beloved declare, "Thou art beautiful, O my love, as Tirzah, comely as Jerusalem, terrible as an army with banners" (Song 6:4). Is not this effect on the church sufficient justification for revival? Does it not provide ample reason why we should all be thirsting for revival?

The Sinners

When God finds His people willing, when they have been forged into an instrument He can use, He will begin to work in power upon the consciences of sinners. Revival involves two awakening cries: God crying to man, "Awake, awake . . . O Zion" (Isa. 52:1), and man crying to God, "Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the Lord; awake, as in the days of old" (Isa. 51:9). When the voice of the Lord has awakened the church, the voice of the church will awaken the Lord, and the power of God will be manifested in the saving of sinners. "Then the Lord awaked as one out of sleep, like a mighty man that shouteth by reason of wine. And He smote His adversaries backward" (Ps. 78:65).

When it has seemed that for a long time the Almighty has slumbered, the cry of the church pierces the heavens, "Let God arise, let His enemies be scattered; let them also that hate Him flee before Him" (Ps. 68:1). Then does the Lord go forth to war, and His "arrows are sharp . . . in the heart of the King's enemies" (Ps. 45:5). There is deep and widespread conviction amongst the lost. "The sinners in Zion are afraid; trembling hath surprised the godless ones. Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? Who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?" (Isa. 33:14).

Out of this deep conviction multitudes are born into the kingdom. Wherever there comes this awful sense of God's presence stealing over the hearts of men, the fountains of the great deep are broken up. Gone is the voice of the sinner who inwardly debates whether or not he will patronize the Son of God: "Christ is knocking at my sad heart, shall I let Him in? . . . Shall I bid Him for ever depart, – or shall I let Him in?" Instead we hear the heart-wrung sob: "Depth of mercy! can there be mercy still reserved for me? Can my God His wrath forbear? Me, the chief of sinners, spare?" Conversions take place without any appeals, and tend to be clear cut and decisive. As in the early church, many born again in revival are at once filled with the Spirit and became effective for God. Whether in meetings or out of them, whether through personal dealing or without it, men and women, broken over their sin, find their way to Christ.

When God thus moves in power He wrests the initiative from Satan. Sin no longer stalks the land in triumph but hides its head in shame. It is not unusual for social evils to be swept away and industrial problems solved overnight. Drink saloons, places of amusement, and dens of iniquity have often had to close through lack of patronage. Magistrates have been known to

take a holiday, and the jails to be nearly empty. Everywhere there seems to be one topic of conversation, the things of eternity. On the faces of the people there is a spirit of inquiry or of concern. They are asking, "What meaneth this?" or, "What shall we do?" Every stratum of society has been affected, and the widespread indifference of the masses is a thing of the past. Such are the effects upon sinners, and are they not sufficient justification for revival? Do they not provide a powerful reason, if we have any concern for the souls of men, why we should all be thirsting for revival?

The Godhead

Finally, there is the fruit of revival as it affects the Godhead. Important as were the other two, here is an effect which exceeds in importance the other two combined, for in a sense it includes them. In a day when the power of God is in great measure restrained, and when it would seem that the Lord hides His face, it is nothing strange to most believers that men should live in rebellion against Him; they come to expect it. It is the usual thing that men of the world should treat their Creator with indifference or contempt. The prevalent attitude towards God, unexpressed perhaps yet real, amounts to this, "Depart from us; for we desire not the knowledge of Thy ways. What is the Almighty, that we should serve Him? And what profit should we have, if we pray unto Him?" (Job 21:15). While repudiating this attitude for oneself, one may unconsciously become accustomed to it in others, and think of it as inevitable.

Thank God indeed for the thousands who have not bowed the knee to Baal, but where are the Elijahs who have been "very jealous for the Lord God of Hosts" because the people have forsaken His covenant, thrown down His altars, and – if words have power to kill – slain His prophets with the sword? Where are "the priests, the ministers of the Lord [who] weep between the porch and the altar"? (Joel 2:17). Where are those who yearn to see the God of heaven, so long robbed of His crown rights, manifesting His power and glory, and vindicating His Name? To those who feel for God, it is intolerable that men should continue to treat Him thus.

Yet saints their watch are keeping,
Their cry goes up, "How long?"
And soon the night of weeping
Shall be the morn of song.

S. J. STONE.

It is of course true that the full answer to this longing, wrought in the heart by the Spirit, must await that day when every knee shall bow to Christ, and every tongue confess that He is Lord (Phil. 2:10), and the pierced hand shall hold the sceptre of the universe and the government shall be upon His shoulder. Revivals, however, have always been times when God has vindicated His honour before the eyes of men in an extraordinary degree. They are seasons when men are made to know, though they be as proud and as powerful as Nebuchadnezzar, "That the Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever He will . . . and all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and He doeth according to His will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay His hand, or say unto Him, What doest Thou?" (Dan. 4:32, 35).

As with God, so with Christ. Everywhere we see evidence of the bitter enmity which Satan bears to the Son, who gave His blood for the life of the world. This age, blinded by its god, has not revoked the tragic decree, "We will not that this Man reign over us" (Luke 19:14); nor

has it ceased to ask, whether in fear or in scorn, the question, “What have we to do with Thee, Thou Jesus of Nazareth?” (Mark 1:24).

Our Lord is now rejected,
And by the world disowned,
By the many still neglected,
And by the few enthroned.

EL NATHAN.

Nevertheless the promise still stands – “He shall see of the travail of His soul, and shall be satisfied” (Isa. 53:11). In that word “satisfied” there are depths eternal, and consolations that outweigh even the agonies of Gethsemane and Golgotha. This was “the joy that was set before Him” when He “endured the cross, despising shame” (Heb. 12:2).

Nearly two millennia have passed and still He waits. Is it not strange that many who profess so much seem to care so little? Where are those with Paul’s passion for the glory of Christ, who can say with that apostle, “I hold not my life of any account, as dear unto myself, so that I may accomplish my course, . . . to testify the gospel of the grace of God”? (Acts 20:24). Or again, “I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die. . . for the name of the Lord Jesus”? (Acts 21:13).

Where are those with an intense longing that the Saviour may be satisfied with the fruit of His suffering? You may expect to find them praying for revival, for that is a time when multitudes bow the knee before Him, and clamour to confess Him Lord. It is then that they will joy before Him “according to the joy in harvest, as men rejoice when they divide the spoil” (Isa. 9:3). For Him it is a precious foretaste of that final harvest when “a great multitude, which no man could number” shall stand before the throne (Rev. 7:9).

As for the Comforter, who is the Holy Spirit, men’s attitude to Him is no less grievous. Cults abound that deny both His deity and His personality. How true was the word of Christ to the apostles concerning this one, whose presence was to mean more to them than His own, “the world. . . beholdeth Him not, neither knoweth Him” (John 14:17), and we might add, “and many believers know Him not either”. If we asked some who have truly believed, “Did ye receive the Holy Spirit when ye believed?” (Acts 19:2) they would have to confess, “We don’t know about the Holy Spirit”, or “We thought that He was the same as Christ”.

How seldom is that gracious unseen Presence truly recognized, relied upon, or given His rightful place in the church which He established. How often is He grieved and hindered because the people of God prefer human organization and the methods of the world, to that which costs more than money to secure – His own gracious presence and power. But revival ever brings a fresh emphasis upon the person and work of the Holy Spirit. It is a time when believers thirst and are filled, and when the Spirit Himself reasserts His rights, and is given the reins in the worship and service of the church.

So revival has its repercussions even in the realm of the Triune God. It is a time when the rights of humanity give way to the rights of Deity. “God is not only the source of revival – ‘Wilt Thou not revive us again?’ – but He is also the end of revival – ‘that Thy people may rejoice in Thee’ (Ps. 85:6). Revival comes from God and leads to God, that He may be ‘all in all’, and that man may learn that of himself he is nothing” (Philip Hughes).

Here is the transcendent effect of all revival, and the fulfilment of its highest purpose: “The loftiness of man shall be bowed down, and the haughtiness of men shall be brought low: and THE LORD ALONE SHALL BE EXALTED IN THAT DAY” (Isa. 2:17).

If we have a jealous desire for the glory of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, should we not all be thirsting for revival?

CHAPTER FIVE

DISTINCTIVE FEATURES (1)

“This is that which hath been spoken by the prophet Joel;
And it shall be in the last days, saith God, I will pour forth of My Spirit upon all flesh.”
(Acts 2:16)

There are certain characteristics that mark this divine activity we call “revival”, and distinguish it from other and more normal operations of the Spirit. Some have already been mentioned, but it will now be necessary to set them forth in order, and consider them in their relation to the whole. As Pentecost was the first distinctive outpouring of the Spirit, a careful examination of that great event will reveal the distinctive features of every subsequent outpouring. Let Acts 2 be the text-book.

Divine Sovereignty

This first mark is implicit in the statement, “When the day of Pentecost was now come”.

Every genuine revival is clearly stamped with the hallmark of divine sovereignty, and in no way is this more clearly seen than in the time factor. The moment for that first outpouring of the Spirit was not determined by the believers in the upper room but by God, who had foreshadowed it centuries before in those wonderful types of the Old Testament.

“The slaying of the paschal lamb told to generation after generation, though they knew it not, the day of the year and week on which Christ our Passover should be sacrificed for us. The presentation of the wave sheaf before the Lord ‘on the morrow after the sabbath’ (Lev. 23:11-16) had for long centuries fixed the time of our Lord’s resurrection on the first day of the week. And the command to ‘count from the morrow after the sabbath, from the day that ye brought the sheaf of the wave offering, seven sabbaths’, determined the day of Pentecost as the time of the descent of the Spirit. . . They tarried in prayer for ten days, simply because after the forty days of the Lord’s sojourn on earth subsequent to His resurrection, ten days remained of the ‘seven sabbaths’ period” (A. J. Gordon).

But there was something more than the fulfilling of prophecy in the choice of the day of Pentecost for the great outpouring. It was a strategic moment which God had foreseen would give to the event of that day the maximum possible effect. God saw to it that this mighty outpouring of the Spirit was felt throughout the world of that day, for the feast had brought to Jerusalem “Jews, devout men, from every nation under heaven” (Acts 2:5).

Not only the day, however, but the time of day had been appointed by God, that the mocking charge, “they are filled with new wine” (verse 13) might be easily rebutted, seeing it was but “the third hour of the day” [9 a.m.] (verse 15).

Similarly God has His time for every subsequent outpouring, a time that must surely be related to a thousand other plans He has on foot, and therefore a time that He alone can determine. It has already been mentioned that God promised His people Israel, if they were obedient, the rain of their land, but only “in its season” (Deut. 11:13-17; Ezek. 34:26).

It would not help the spiritual harvest that God desires if we could have the outpouring of the Spirit any time or all the time; any more than it would have helped their harvest if the Israelites could have had the former and latter rain at any time or all the time. “Ask ye of the

Lord rain.” When? – “In the time of the latter rain” (Zech. 10:1). A sober view of the sovereignty of God will not lessen a God-given burden, or discourage fervent praying in the Spirit, but it may deliver us from extravagance in which some have erred, or despondence in which some have failed, in their quest for revival.

It may seem strange to go to Charles Finney for an example of the sovereignty of God in revival, as that great revivalist tended to overlook this aspect in battling against the hyper-Calvinism of his day. However, he once recounted: “While I was in Boston on one occasion, a gentleman stated that he had come from the capital of Nebraska, and he had found prayer meetings established throughout all the vast extent of country over which he had travelled. Think of that – a region of 2,000 miles, along which the hands of the people were lifted up to God in prayer! From north “to south, till you come within the slave territory, a great and mighty cry went up to God that He would come down and take the people in hand and convert souls; and He heard, and everybody stood astounded.”

Such a vast, unorganized, and yet co-ordinated prayer movement cannot be explained except that God in His sovereignty had taken the initiative. What is true of the promise of future blessing for Israel, is true also of the promise of revival, “I the Lord will hasten it in its time” (Isa. 60:22).

It has been said of the Welsh Revival, “The outpouring of the Spirit came dramatically with precision, in the second week in November, 1904, on the same day – both in the north and in the south.” Undoubtedly there were those in both regions who had met the conditions and were ready for God to work, but we can not account for this strange co-ordination apart from that divine strategy which lies behind the sovereign ways of God.

In the 1859 Revival that spread to many parts of the British Isles, there was an immediate movement in some places when Christians met to pray and fulfil God’s conditions. In other parts, however, although it would appear that the preparation of heart and burden of prayer were quite as real, the believers were kept waiting for one or even two years.

It is significant that when revival came after a longer waiting period, the work was often deeper and more widespread. “Behold, He withholdeth the waters, and they dry up; again, He sendeth them out, and they overrun the earth” (Job 12:15). The same principle is seen in the great variety of manifestations that have accompanied different movements. God is sovereign, and His sovereignty is revealed not only in the timing of every revival movement, but in the manner and measure of the Spirit’s working.

Where believers have been encouraged by God to expect revival, and where they have with all their hearts sought to prepare themselves and pray through, but the blessing has been delayed, there is a danger of giving way to despondence, or undue introspection. Let such remember that if He has promised, then “God is not a man, that He should lie; neither the son of man, that He should repent: hath He said, and shall He not do it? Or hath He spoken, and shall He not make it good?” (Num. 23:19).

Let such be emboldened to “hold on” by a sober view of the sovereignty of God, and the immutability of His purposes. “The Lord of Hosts hath sworn, saying, Surely as I have thought, so shall it come to pass; and as I have purposed, so shall it stand. . . For the Lord of Hosts hath purposed, and who shall disannul it? and His hand is stretched out, and who shall turn it back?” (Isa. 14:4, 27). Let them wait on the Lord, and wait for the Lord, and they shall not be ashamed (Isa. 49:23).

Spiritual Preparation

This feature was also in evidence, for “they were all together in one place” (verse 1). How these believers in the upper room had reached this state of preparedness is shown in Chapter 1, where we find that they “all with one accord continued steadfastly in prayer” (verse 14). The word of God presents to us side by side the two foundation stones of every revival – the sovereignty of God and the preparedness of man. Because we cannot understand how they harmonize is no reason for emphasizing one at the expense of the other.

There is an extreme view of the sovereignty of God that argues, “If God wills to send revival it will come. Nothing that we do can effect this, so why need we be concerned?” The word of God and history teach us that such an attitude of indifference and fatalism must be abandoned before revival can be expected. If the blessing comes then we may be sure that somewhere someone has met the conditions and paid the price. Such a view of divine sovereignty ignores the conditions of spiritual preparedness.

There is also an extreme emphasis on spiritual preparedness that ignores the fact of divine sovereignty; it suggests that God is at our beck and call, and that we can have revival any day we care to pay the price, much as we can have electric light the moment we care to turn the switch. The word of God gives us the proper balance by presenting, as here in the first verse of Acts 2, the two aspects side by side. Similarly David declared, “Thy people offer themselves willingly in the day of Thy power” (Ps. 110:3). The day of His power is determined by God alone, and emphasizes His sovereignty; but in that day His people have met the conditions by being ready and willing, which reveals the fact of spiritual preparation. God reminds us of His sovereignty when He declares, “I will cause the cities to be inhabited, and the waste places shall be builded. . . I the Lord have spoken it, and I will do it”; but He adds, “For this moreover will I be inquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them”, reminding us of the conditions that must be fulfilled (Ezek. 36:33-37).

War is not all attack, but there is a strategic moment for offensive action. The place, the time, and the manner of any attack are of crucial importance in the interests of the campaign as a whole; therefore such matters are not left to the soldier in the fighting line, but are determined beforehand by the supreme commander in the conference room. He alone can see the whole picture and keep his hand upon the whole situation. If, however, the plans made at the highest level are to be carried through successfully, the soldier in the line must be fully prepared for all that is involved.

Revival, as we have seen in the previous chapter, is a strategic attack by God upon the strongholds of Satan. The place, the time, and the manner of working are in the sovereign hands of the Lord the Spirit; but His subordinates, through whom He works, must be spiritually prepared when God’s zero hour strikes.

How clearly these two important factors are set forth in the promised rain of Canaan. Divine sovereignty was seen in that the rain was confined to its God-appointed “season”, but it was also strictly conditioned by the obedience of the people. “If ye shall hearken diligently unto My commandments which I command you this day, to love the Lord your God, and to serve Him with all your heart and with all your soul, that I will give the rain of your land in its season” (Deut. 11:13).

God declared with equal emphasis and on the same occasion, that if on the other hand they turned aside and served other gods and worshipped them, He would “shut up the heaven, that there be no rain, and that the land yield not her fruit” (verses 16, 17).

How spiritual preparedness, or the absence of it, may influence God’s working is vividly illustrated by the visit of the Saviour to Nazareth. “He could there do no mighty work. . . and

He marvelled because of their unbelief” (Mark 6:5, 6). What this spiritual preparation involves, and how it may be effected, is a subject so large and so important that it must be considered separately.

Suddenness

Here is the third feature, “And suddenly there came. . .” (verse 2). Since revival may be likened to a strategic attack, it is plain that, as in the realm of human conflict, so in the spiritual, the effect of every attack is heightened by the surprise factor. In revival God works suddenly and unexpectedly. Often even the mass of believers are taken unawares, while wonder and astonishment grip the hearts of unbelievers. It was so at Pentecost where we read of those who came together, “They were all amazed and marvelled” (verse 7), and again, “They were all amazed, and were perplexed” (verse 12).

As to Christians being taken by surprise, Charles Finney often noticed it and remarked, “They would wake up all of a sudden, like a man, just rubbing his eyes open, and running round the room pushing things over, and wondering where all this excitement came from. But though few knew it, you may be sure there had been somebody on the watch-tower, constant in prayer till the blessing came.”

How vital it is for the ears of the saints to be open to the voice of God in these days, for He speaks first to those whose ears are attuned to Him, and then He acts suddenly. “Surely the Lord God will do nothing, but He revealeth His secret unto His servants the prophets” (Amos 3:7). God’s methods have not changed down the centuries: it may be the sound of marching in the tops of the mulberry trees, it may be a tiny cloud arising out of the sea; such insignificant tokens are all that is needed for the listening ear or the watchful eye. “I have declared the former things from of old; yea, they went forth out of My mouth, and I shewed them: suddenly I did them, and they came to pass” (Isa. 48:3); “Behold, the former things are come to pass, and new things do I declare: before they spring forth I tell you of them” (Isa. 42:9).

In 2 Chronicles 29 there is a detailed account of the revival that took place under Hezekiah. The house of the Lord was cleansed and the people were moved to offer sacrifices and thank-offerings in such abundance that the few priests who had sanctified themselves could not handle them, and they had to be assisted by the Levites. Scripture records, “Hezekiah rejoiced, and all the people, because of that which God had prepared for the people: for the thing was done suddenly” (verse 36). Who knows all that God is preparing for His people in these days? May we not be found unsanctified, and so unfitted for the work, when the day of God’s power shall dawn.

The effect of the sudden working of the Spirit in revival is very striking in the conviction of sinners. Often without any preparatory concern or even thought for spiritual things, a sinner will be suddenly seized with overwhelming conviction of sin. “But God shall shoot at them; with an arrow suddenly shall they be wounded. . . and all men shall fear; and they shall declare the work of God, and shall wisely consider of His doing” (Ps. 64:7, 9).

Describing the course of the Ulster ‘59 Revival at Ballymena and elsewhere, John Shearer writes of some who “were suddenly pierced as by a sharp sword, and their agonized cry for help was heard in the streets and in the fields. Here, for example, is a farmer returning from market in Ballymena. His mind is wholly intent upon the day’s bargain. He pauses, takes out some money, and begins to count it. Suddenly an awful Presence envelops him. In a moment his only thought is that he is a sinner standing on the brink of hell. His silver is scattered, and he falls upon the dust of the highway, crying out for mercy” (Old Time Revivals).

Spontaneous Working

With the brevity and simplicity characteristic of Scripture we are shown in four words the source of the outpouring, “there came from heaven” (verse 2). This provides the fourth feature of revival; it is spontaneous because it is “not forced or suggested or caused by outside agency” (Oxf. Dict.). It is the result of a divine and not a human impulse. In language plain to all, it cannot be “worked up”. It is true that spiritual conditions must be met before revival can be expected, but fulfilled conditions do not provide the motive force of revival.

At Pentecost it was “the windows of heaven”, not the windows of the upper room, that were opened. The source of the blessing was the heart of God, not the heart of man. It cannot be too strongly emphasized that such “seasons of refreshing” have always come “from the presence of the Lord” (Acts 3:20). We may believe that during those ten days of waiting there were revived hearts in that upper room, but there was no revival; there were empty vessels, but no outpouring. When it came, it came direct from heaven and found in that waiting band a channel through which to flow.

A missionary, recounting what he had seen of the 1860 Revival in South India, wrote, “Man seems to have little part in it, the Spirit’s work is all predominant, fulfilling that blessed promise, ‘I will work’.” Another who wrote of the 1904 Revival stated, “The hidden springs of the Awakening in Wales lay deep in the heart of God”, and this is where we may find the springs of every awakening. The origin of all revival must be traced back, further than human factors and fulfilled conditions, to the heart of the Eternal that yearns to bless, and to bless superabundantly. “God so loved. . . that He gave” and “He that spared not His own Son. . . shall He not also with Him freely give us all things?”

Once again the rain of Canaan, with the remarkable accuracy of Scripture types, aptly illustrates this very feature of revival. Contrasting Egypt, which typifies the world, with Canaan, which speaks of that which is heavenly, God said: “For the land, whither thou goest in to possess it, is not as the land of Egypt, from whence ye came out, where thou sowedst thy seed, and wateredst it with thy foot, as a garden of herbs; but the land, whither ye go over to possess it, is a land of hills and valleys, and drinketh water of the rain of heaven” (Deut. 11:10, 11).

Egypt was stamped with the workmanship of the creature; it was “as a garden of herbs”, carefully laid out, planned and arranged. Canaan, on the other hand, was stamped with the workmanship of the Creator; for everywhere the eye was refreshed and delighted with the unorganized order of creation, it was “a land of hills and valleys”.

Egypt’s fertility, as dependent upon water as was Canaan’s, was watered with the foot. In other words, a simple device worked by the foot, which can still be seen in Egypt today, pumped water from the Nile, and conveyed it by a system of irrigation channels to where it was required. Thus the supply of water was dependent upon human energy and ingenuity, and a dirty supply it was when men had finished manipulating it, and it had reached the thirsty soil. But the heavenly country – oh, how different – “a land that drinketh water of the rain of heaven”. Canaan was made fruitful by that which came down in all its freshness and purity from above. God had designed that it should be dependent upon the heavens for water, and if these were shut up, the spiritual reason must be sought out and the matter rectified; there was no suggestion of devising any artificial substitute.

It was said of redeemed Israel that they “turned back in their hearts unto Egypt” (Acts 7:39). Someone has put it thus: “It was one thing to get the people out of Egypt, but quite another to

get Egypt out of the people.” Said the prophet, “Woe to them that go down to Egypt for help. . . but they look not unto the Holy One of Israel, neither seek the Lord” (Isa. 31:1).

This tendency of going back for assistance into the land whence we have come out, of borrowing from the world and its ways, is as evident today as ever. There are still too many who have more confidence in the working of the foot to produce results, than in the bowing of the knee. This spontaneous feature of revival, however, cuts right across this human tendency. There is no mightier corrective to worldly methods in Christian service than a heaven-sent revival. Who would want to continue to work the pump when the heavens are pouring down a copious rain?

A movement bears this mark of spontaneity when men cannot account for what has taken place in terms of personalities, organization, meetings, preaching, or any other consecrated activity; and when the work continues unabated without any human control. As soon as a movement becomes controlled or organized, it has ceased to be spontaneous – it is no longer revival.

The course of the 1904 Welsh Revival has been outlined thus: “God began to work; and then the Devil began to work in opposition; and then God began to work all the harder; and then man began to work, and the revival came to an end.” It is most needful in times of revival that a careful watch should be kept so that nothing should gain a foothold which is not of the Spirit, but great care must be taken not to interfere with what is evidently the work of God. When God is working let man keep his hands off. Many a revival has ended through human interference.

God-Consciousness

Here is another conspicuous feature that characterizes revival. “There came. . . a sound as of the rushing of a mighty wind. . . there appeared unto them tongues. . . like as of fire” (verses 2, 3). Wherever the Spirit of God is poured out saints and sinners alike are made acutely aware of the presence of the Almighty. The spirit of revival is the consciousness of God. Just as the “light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun” struck down the zealous Pharisee, Saul of Tarsus, and brought him to his knees, convicted and repentant (Acts 26), so does the Eternal Light, in days of revival, burst upon the slumbering consciousness of men with much the same result. On the day of Pentecost God manifested His presence first to those in the upper room, and then to the multitude who had gathered outside, who were soon “pricked in their heart” (Acts 2:37), until that strange, mysterious influence from heaven had spread over the whole city, “and fear came upon every soul” (verse 43).

The effects of such manifestations of God are twofold: men are made aware both of His power and of His holiness. What awe must have come to the hearts of that waiting band, as they listened to that “sound as of the rushing of a mighty wind” – what a sense of the irresistible power of God! But there was also the appearance of “tongues parting asunder, like as of fire”. Fire typifies the activity of God’s holiness in relation to sin; fire consumes and fire purifies.

When the Spirit came upon Christ it was not as the fire, but “as a dove”, for there was no sin in Him, as the Father then declared, “Thou art My beloved Son; in Thee I am well pleased” (Luke 3:22). But here the tongues like as of fire sat upon each of them, bringing not only a sense of the infinite holiness of God, but of the activity of that holiness in dealing with all that was unholy in themselves.

This manifestation of God in power and holiness was intensely personal. The sound of the wind appeared to bear down upon them until it filled the very house where they were sitting.

The tongues of fire parted asunder and sat upon each one of them. It was God moving in power and holiness, and moving toward them; they themselves were the objects of God's activity. Here is an outstanding feature of revival, and it is not difficult to see why it results in overwhelming conviction both among the saved and the lost, whenever there is unjudged sin.

Those waiting hearts in the upper room were doubtless cleansed and prepared for the coming of the Spirit, consequently there is no evidence of conviction, though no doubt there was a deeper work of purging accomplished by the fire of the Spirit. Usually, however, it is otherwise. At such times man is not only made conscious that God is there; but that He is there, as it seems, to deal with him alone, until he is oblivious of all but his own soul in the agonizing grip of a holy God.

If these facts are borne in mind the extraordinary effects of past revivals will not seem incredible. The ruthless logic of Jonathan Edwards' famous discourse, *Sinners in the hands of an angry God* (from Deut. 32:25), preached in his usual plain and undemonstrative manner, at Enfield, New England, in 1741, could never have produced the effect it did had not God been in the midst.

"When they went into the meeting-house the appearance of the assembly was thoughtless and vain; the people scarcely conducted themselves with common decency", recorded Trumbull, but he goes on to describe the effect of the sermon: "the assembly appeared bowed with an awful conviction of their sin and danger. There was such a breathing of distress and weeping, that the preacher was obliged to speak to the people and desire silence that he might be heard." Conant says, "Many of the hearers were seen unconsciously holding themselves up against the pillars, and the sides of the pews, as though they already felt themselves sliding into the pit."

Similar is the scene described by Charles Finney when he preached in the village school-house near Antwerp, N. Y. "An awful solemnity seemed to settle upon the people; the congregation began to fall from their seats in every direction and cry for mercy. If I had had a sword in each hand, I could not have cut them down as fast as they fell. I was obliged to stop preaching."

Of course the measure of conviction is not often so overwhelming as this, and varies even with different individuals affected on the same occasion, but the explanation is always the same, the manifestation of God in holiness and power.

This strange sense of God may pervade a building, a community, or a district, and those who come within its spell will be affected. At the beginning of the 1904 Awakening near the town of Gorseinon a revival meeting was in progress throughout the night. A miner, a somewhat hardened notorious case, returning from his shift about 4 a.m. saw the light in the chapel and decided to investigate. As soon as he opened the chapel door he was overwhelmed by a sense of God's presence, and exclaimed, "Oh, God is here!" He was afraid either to enter or depart, and there on the threshold of the chapel a saving work began in his soul.

No town in Ulster was more deeply stirred during the 1859 Revival than Coleraine. It was there that a boy was so troubled about his soul that the schoolmaster sent him home. An older boy, a Christian, accompanied him, and before they had gone far led him to Christ. Returning at once to the school, this latest convert testified to the master, "Oh, I am so happy! I have the Lord Jesus in my heart."

The effect of these artless words was very great. Boy after boy rose and silently left the room. On investigation the master found these boys ranged alongside the wall of the playground, everyone apart and on his knees! Very soon their silent prayer became a bitter cry. It was

heard by those within and pierced their hearts. They cast themselves upon their knees, and their cry for mercy was heard in the girls' schoolroom above.

In a few moments the whole school was upon its knees, and its wail of distress was heard in the street outside. Neighbours and passers-by came flocking in, and all, as they crossed the threshold, came under the same convicting power. Every room was filled with men, women, and children seeking God.

Similar stories could be told of the 1858 American Revival. Ships as they drew near the American ports came within a definite zone of heavenly influence. Ship after ship arrived with the same tale of sudden conviction and conversion. In one ship a captain and the entire crew of thirty men found Christ out at sea and entered the harbour rejoicing.

Revival broke out on the battleship "North Carolina" through four Christian men who had been meeting in the bowels of the ship for prayer. One evening they were filled with the Spirit and burst into song. Ungodly shipmates who came down to mock were gripped by the power of God, and the laugh of the scornful was soon changed into the cry of the penitent. Many were smitten down, and a gracious work broke out that continued night after night, till they had to send ashore for ministers to help, and the battleship became a Bethel.

This overwhelming sense of God, bringing deep conviction of sin, is perhaps the outstanding feature of true revival. The manifestation of it is not always the same. Sometimes it is predominantly the unconverted who are convicted, as in the cases quoted. At other times it is Christians or professing Christians, as in the revivals in Manchuria and China (1906-9) under Jonathan Goforth; or the recent awakening in the Belgian Congo (1953). But the explanation is always the same.

Of the revival in Northampton, Mass., Jonathan Edwards wrote: "In the spring and summer, A.D. 1735, the town seemed to be full of the presence of God. It never was so full of love, nor so full of joy, and yet so full of distress, as it was then." To cleansed hearts it is heaven, to convicted hearts it is hell, when God is in the midst.

Anointed Vessels

Here is a further vital feature – "they were all filled with the Holy Spirit". In times preceding revival it is common to find among believers of various persuasions a fresh emphasis on the person and work of the Holy Spirit. Many have been lost in a maze of theological controversy. Others have moved for years in the rut of traditional interpretation, concerned with an explanation rather than an experience, a definition instead of a dynamic.

But with those stirrings of the Spirit that are the precursor of revival, there is born in many such hearts a wholesome dissatisfaction with that vague and mystic view of being filled with the Spirit that leaves one in the dark as to what it is, how it comes, and whether or not one has received it.

There is not scope here to deal with this important subject as it needs to be dealt with, but let us briefly mention three important facts regarding the anointing of the believer with the Holy Spirit that emerge from this and other parallel cases in the New Testament.

Firstly, the anointing was a definite experience. It had to be, for the risen Christ had left the believers of the upper room with a promise and a command: the promise was that of the Spirit coming upon them, "Ye shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days hence" (1:5); and the command was that they were to "wait for the promise" (1:4) to be fulfilled, "tarry ye . . . until" (Luke 24:49). Apart from the expectation of a definite experience they could not have obeyed the command to "tarry. . . until". However, they took their Lord at His word, they waited, and in due time the promise was fulfilled. They knew that they had received the

promised Holy Spirit, and very soon others knew also that something remarkable had taken place.

These who but a few days before had slunk into the upper room and bolted the door for fear of the men who had murdered their Master, are now standing in the open and alleging that this Jesus is alive, and accusing their hearers of His murder. Peter, who a month and a half before had denied his Lord at the jibe of a servant-girl, now stands before the multitudes in the very city where He was crucified, and asserts that God had made this Jesus “both Lord and Christ”. Certainly something very definite has happened to these believers. Every other instance in the New Testament of individuals being filled with the Spirit confirms that it is a definite experience. There may or may not be emotional accompaniments. There may or may not be striking manifestations, but it is the birthright of every child of God to receive that anointing, and to know that he (or she) has received it.

Secondly, the anointing was a dynamic experience. It was not given that they might enjoy a spiritual uplift. It was not given primarily that they might be more holy. It was given to make them powerful and effective for God. Through it they would be “clothed with power from on high” (Luke 24:49). “Ye shall receive power, when the Holy Spirit is come upon you: and ye shall be My witnesses,” said the Saviour (Acts 1:8). As the Father had sent Him, so was He sending them (John 20:21), and it was in view of this commission that He breathed on them as a symbolic act, and commanded them to receive the Holy Spirit, which they did on the day of Pentecost. Thenceforth they were to be like their Lord, “anointed. . . with the Holy Spirit and power” (Acts 10:38).

Being filled or anointed with the Spirit is always related to spiritual service. This alone can make the fearful believer a courageous and effective witness for Christ. It does not result in all becoming evangelists or great soul-winners. The gifts bestowed may vary with each individual (1 Cor. 12), and this is in the hands of the same Spirit “dividing to each one severally even as He will” (1 Cor. 12:11). But with each there is an imparting of power, and an equipping to function for God in whatever way He may choose.

Finally, it was a desired experience, intensely desired. It was then, and still is, born out of soul thirst. It is the experience of the one who cannot do without it. “If any man thirst, let him come unto Me, and drink” (John 7:37). “I will pour water upon him that is thirsty” (Isa. 44:3). Thirst is a more intense desire than hunger, and in the realm of the Spirit “thirst” is the word that God has used to illustrate the desire that should characterize His people. How ready the Lord is to satisfy the longing soul, and to lead His people to the “fountains of living water”. Child of God, are you thirsty to be filled with the Spirit?

Characteristically revival is a time when large numbers of believers are filled with the Spirit. Such an event, as here at Pentecost, may set off a revival. Charles Finney received a mighty anointing of the Spirit on the evening of the day of his conversion. As a result a revival broke out the following day in Adams, N. Y., the town where he lived. When the waiting vessel cannot contain the abundance of the heavenly anointing, there must of necessity be floods upon the dry ground, and such are often the beginning of revival.

Said Finney, “Many times great numbers of persons in a community will be clothed with this power, when the very atmosphere of the whole place seems to be charged with the life of God. Strangers coming into it and passing through the place will be instantly smitten with conviction of sin, and in many instances converted to Christ.”

God has not only said, “I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and streams upon the dry ground”, but also “I will pour My Spirit upon thy seed, and My blessing upon thine offspring” (Isa. 44:3). Both are blessedly true of revival, for it is then that God not only pours out His Spirit upon the church, but also upon the seed and offspring of the church, so that new-born souls are at once filled with the Spirit and become effective for God. A revival will often increase in power and influence in this way.

CHAPTER SIX

DISTINCTIVE FEATURES (2)

“The tree is known by its fruit” (Matt. 12:33).

There are yet further features of this Pentecostal outpouring which may help us to recognize outpourings of the Spirit today.

Supernatural Manifestation

This mark of revival is suggested by the phrase, “they began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance” (Acts 2:4). Of course, strictly speaking all the operations of the Spirit are supernatural. The most ordinary conversion of a sinner is a supernatural work, but it may not be manifestly so. Here is meant that which is in the eyes of men manifestly supernatural, and which can be accounted for in no other way. It is that which produces in the hearts and minds of onlookers the reaction described here, “they were all amazed, and were perplexed, saying one to another, What meaneth this?” (verse 12).

In considering this particular manifestation of speaking with tongues it is needful to avoid unhealthy extremes. Some who expound the giving of the Spirit at Pentecost are careful to avoid any mention of this strange phenomenon, as though it had no real significance. Others, however, can see nothing else in the chapter; to them it is the be-all and the end-all. Some insist that this gift of tongues is now extinct, others that it is the indispensable proof of the filling of the Spirit.

Neither view is supported by Scripture or by history. It was not the only proof of the filling of the Spirit in apostolic times (Acts 8:14-17; 9:17-19; 1 Cor. 12:30); it is not the only proof today. At the same time God has never withdrawn this or any other gift. It is true that tongues with prophecies and knowledge are to cease, but not till “that which is perfect is come” (1 Cor. 13:8-10).

Revival always seems to bring with it a temporary return to apostolic Christianity. Never is the church nearer to the spirit and power of the first century than in times of revival. An eyewitness described the New England Revival of the 18th century thus:

“The apostolical times seem to have returned upon us.” Thus we must not be surprised to discover that God uses such times to restore spiritual gifts which many have thought were confined to the days of primitive Christianity. Such a conservative work as the Devotional Commentary contains this note on the verse “Quench not the Spirit” (1 Thess. 5:19): “In the early church the influence of the Holy Spirit in the utterances of individual believers was fully recognized. He is set before believers as the source of various gifts (1 Cor. 12), and conspicuously of gifts of utterance (Acts 2:4).

In times of spiritual blessing these gifts are more especially manifest. It has been so in every great revival from the days of Wesley and Whitefield to the days of Evan Roberts. Such gifts,

coming indeed from the Spirit, are not to be quenched, put out, like a lamp no longer needed or a fire that meant danger. Nor must such utterances - 'prophesyings', not necessarily predictive, but claiming to be of divine impulse - be despised. They are, indeed, commended by St. Paul (1 Cor. 14:1, 39). They are to be received with respect and yet with intelligent discrimination."

It is not suggested that the exercise of such supernatural gifts is confined to times of revival; nor is it maintained that God only bestows them during such seasons, for the facts are otherwise. It is only asserted, as a fact beyond dispute to those who accept the testimony of history, that the renewal of such gifts, together with various other signs and wonders, are a prominent feature of revival. God is sovereign in all these things. Let the creature beware of imputing folly to the Creator, or of dictating to Him how He shall conduct His work. If God-sent revival is characterized by elements altogether new to our experience and which we can not understand, if there are dreams and visions, tongues and interpretations, revelations, prophesyings and healings, let us remember that God said that "signs" would accompany the outpouring of the Spirit (Acts 2:17-19), and that it has almost always been so.

God uses such signs as a divine authentication of the truth of the gospel, even as Nicodemus said to Jesus, "We know that Thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these signs that Thou doest except God be with him" (John 3:2). Thus it was with His disciples who "went forth, and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word by the signs that followed" (Mark 16:20). "God also bearing witness with them, both by signs and wonders, and by manifold powers, and by gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will" (Heb. 2:4).

We would do well to ponder that last phrase, for it emphasizes that such matters rest solely in the hands of God. Nevertheless the fact remains that during those early days it pleased God to employ signs and wonders in nearly every great ingathering of souls to bring the people together and prepare their hearts for the truth. The first recorded prayer of the church was that "signs and wonders may be done" (Acts 4:30). This was an invincible weapon against persecution. It may be that God will consummate this age as He commenced it.

Perhaps the most common sign in times of revival has been the prostration of convicted souls. It was common in the Wesley-Whitefield Revivals. Lady Huntingdon wrote to Whitefield regarding the cases of crying out and falling down at the meetings, and advised him not to remove them, as had been done, for it seemed to bring a damper on the meeting. She wrote: "You are making a mistake. Don't be wiser than God. Let them cry out; it will do a great deal more good than your preaching."

Wesley in his journals dated July 7th, 1739, recorded a conversation with Whitefield on this subject, whose objections were evidently founded on misrepresentations of fact. "But the next day he [Whitefield] had an opportunity of informing himself better: for no sooner had he begun. . . to invite all sinners to believe in Christ, than four persons sunk down close to him, almost in the same moment. One of them lay without either sense or motion. A second trembled exceedingly. The third had strong convulsions all over his body, but made no noise, unless by groans. The fourth, equally convulsed, called upon God, with strong cries and tears. From this time, I trust, we shall all suffer God to carry on His own work in the way that pleaseth Him."

In the 1860 Revival in Tinevelly, South India, the main instrument God used was a native evangelist called Aroolappen, a disciple of A. N. Groves. The movement began in the Brethren assemblies in which he had laboured, later spreading to other communities.

Aroolappen wrote of the beginning of the movement as follows: "From the 4th May to the 7th the Holy Spirit was poured out openly and wonderfully. Some prophesied and rebuked the people: some beat themselves on their breasts severely, and trembled and fell down through the shaking of their bodies and souls. . . . They saw some signs in the air. They were much pleased to praise God. Some ignorant [uninstructed] people gave out some songs and hymns that we never heard before. . . . All the heathen marvelled, and came and saw and heard us with fearful minds."

This man of God wrote again later, "In the month of June some of our people praised the Lord by unknown tongues, with their interpretations. In the month of July the Spirit was poured out upon our congregation at Oleikollam, and above 25 persons were baptized. They are steadfast in prayers. . . . Some missionaries admit the truth of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. The Lord meets everywhere one after another, though some tried to quench the Spirit."

Henry Groves, son of A. N. Groves, writing in the Indian Watchman for July, 1860, gives a fuller account of this movement, and of how two poor native women received visions which led to days of deep conviction of sin, after which they found peace. The husband of one of them bitterly attacked his wife while she was under conviction, and accused her of being demon-possessed. Soon after he himself fell into a trance while out in the fields in which someone appeared to him and told him to read Revelation 1 and to tell others "I am coming quickly". He returned to the house weeping and under deep conviction, soon afterwards finding peace. These converts went forth to tell their neighbouring heathen what God had done for their souls.

Henry Groves continues his account: "The day following when Aroolappen was engaged in prayer, he says, the spirit of prophecy was given to some there, and a little boy said that in a certain village, which he named, about a mile distant, the Spirit of God had been poured out. Within a quarter of an hour, some men and women came from that village, beating their breasts in great fear and alarm of conscience. They fell down and rolled on the ground. This continued a short time; they all asked to have prayer made for them, after which they said with great joy, 'The Lord Jesus has forgiven our sins', and clapping their hands together, in the fulness of their hearts' gladness, they embraced and kissed one another.

For nearly three days this ecstatic joy appears to have lasted. They ate nothing, except a little food taken in the evening, and passing sleepless nights, they continued the whole time in reading of the word, in prayer and in singing praises to the Lord. Of some it is said, 'they lifted up their eyes to heaven and saw blood and fire and pillars of smoke, and, speaking aloud, they told what they had seen.'

Several missionaries, at first sceptical or even opposed to the movement, were won over when they saw the fruit of it, and were compelled to acknowledge that the work was of God, though some remained dubious of the revival phenomena. One declared, "I do not know that there has been one single case, where one, whom my dear native brethren and myself have considered really influenced, has fallen back." Another wrote, "What God is now doing in the midst of us was altogether beyond the expectations of missionaries and other Christians: who can say what manifestations the Spirit of God will or will not make of His power?"

It is strange, yet all too often true, that when the Spirit of God is working in supernatural power in revival, unbelievers will often be more quickly convinced that this work is wrought of God, than some believers. No doubt there always have been and always will be the prejudiced and sceptical among the people of God, who in unbelief would limit the Holy One of Israel; who cannot bear to think of the Almighty working outside the range of their own

finite understanding, or beyond the bounds of their own limited experience. They would have revival, but only if it comes along the quiet orderly lines of their own preconceived ideas. Where it is otherwise they will attribute the work to the flesh, or where this does not provide adequate explanation, to the Devil. Of course there is always the possibility of satanic intrusion, or of the admixture of the flesh in such times of blessing, but this calls for a spirit of discernment, not a spirit of prejudice; the ability to “prove the spirits, whether they are of God” (1 John 4:1), not the wholesale, out-of-hand condemnation of them, which must often result in quenching the Spirit (1 Thess. 5:19). There is a general tendency to err on the side of prejudice, suspicion and unbelief; and this attitude is nowhere countenanced in the New Testament. Where there is doubt, let there be a patient waiting upon God until the true character of the work is manifest, for the tree will be known by its fruit. Let all take heed. If we indulge in hasty criticism we may be speaking against the Holy Spirit; if we oppose we may “be found even to be fighting against God”.

Finally, let us ponder these words from the Church Missionary Intelligencer (1860) on the Tinevelly Revival, written after the work had revealed its true character: “We believe that an unreadiness to recognize the extraordinary operations by which the Holy Spirit is now revealing Himself here and there, is too much a characteristic of the church generally. There are thousands in the ministry of the Church of England, there are multitudes in other denominations, whose conceptions of the work of the Holy Spirit are greatly narrowed, in consequence of their not having given due attention to the admirable accounts on record of the various revivals enjoyed, since the days of the Reformation, in Europe and America. A very peculiar responsibility is resting upon all at this day, in consequence of the many proofs afforded of the readiness of the Holy Spirit to do things transcending the narrow limits of our ordinary experience. When the Son of Man cometh shall He find faith on the earth? When He is prepared to bless the church with unwonted tokens of His nearness, with new discoveries of His majesty and grace, will He be met by a proportionate faith?...

“Let us not put our views of decorum and of order above the mighty operations of the Spirit. When He comes forth in His glory, it is as it were a judgment day; there is an overwhelming revelation of sin and of danger; and we can no more expect men to act under such circumstances in accordance with ordinary rules of decorum, than we could expect men aroused from their beds by an earthquake to avoid every demonstration of a noisy or alarming character. Perhaps it behoves us all to surrender our very imperfect views of the power and majesty of the Holy Spirit, and prepare for something grander, more awful and more revolutionary than we have yet witnessed.”

Divine Magnetism

“And when this sound was heard, the multitude came together” (verse 6). In chapter 37 of his prophecy, Ezekiel records his vision of the valley of dry bones, over which he was commanded by God to prophesy; he says, “I prophesied as I was commanded: and as I prophesied, there was a noise. . . and the bones came together. . .” (verse 7). Similarly at Pentecost there was a divine magnetism at work, and the “dry bones” were drawn irresistibly together to where God was working in power. On this occasion God used the supernatural manifestation as the magnetic agent, “when this sound was heard”, and this is very often the case in seasons of revival. Sometimes, however, this strange drawing is apparent even where there is no outward manifestation. This would seem to have been the case when Paul and Barnabas visited Antioch-in-Pisidia, when “almost the whole city was gathered together to hear the word of God” (Acts 13:44).

During the early days of the recent Lewis Awakening, there was a remarkable movement in the village of Amol. There had been no response during the first few meetings, and a time of prayer was convened in a house at the close of an evening meeting. As one man was praying all present became aware that prayer had been heard, and that the Spirit of God was being poured out upon the village. They left the house to discover that the villagers also were leaving their cottages and making their way, as though drawn by some unseen force, to one point in the village. There they congregated and waited, and when Mr. Duncan Campbell commenced to preach, the word took immediate effect. In a few days that small community had been swept by the Spirit of God, and many souls had been truly converted to God.

It is constantly the complaint of the evangelist that the unconverted, pleasure-loving masses will not come to hear the gospel. Although there have been exceptions, it is still true that many city-wide campaigns attract but a small proportion of those they are designed to reach, and though one rejoices that some do come and that some are saved, the needs of the masses remain largely untouched. The majority of those converted in such meetings are those with church connections or who have been interested by Christian friends.

One must admire the energy and thoroughness with which attempts are made to alter this situation. Large sums are spent on advertising and publicity of every kind. Witness marches are conducted through the streets. The meetings themselves are not lacking in varied items and features calculated to appeal. If all this did not reach the godless masses the time before, then it is only ground for trying again with greater thoroughness or more imagination. If it is found that the proportion of spurious decisions is high, then it must be reduced by more careful training of the inquiry room workers, and by greater diligence in following up each case.

There is no intention here of destructively criticizing such evangelistic drives. Rather let us thank God for all that they achieve in making Christ known and leading souls to repentance. Though God blesses and uses them according to the proportion that faith and prayer are exercised, it is important to realize their limitations. As we survey the situation, we may well inquire with Gideon, "And where be all His wondrous works which our fathers told us of?" (Judges 6:13). Is this all that God can do in the face of the appalling need on every hand? Are we for ever shut up to the obvious limitations of modern evangelism? Must we never hope to see that mightier working that truly touches the masses at every level and compels them to face the implications of the gospel? Shall there never be a day of God's power, when our organization, and publicity, and inquiry room technique shall be superseded by the resistless power and faultless control of the Holy Spirit?

Of course God expects us to do our part in drawing souls under the sound of the gospel. It required no outpouring of the Spirit to bring Simon Peter to Jesus, it needed only the invitation of Andrew, his brother (John 1:41, 42). But where the normal means are failing to achieve the necessary end, it is of no avail to adopt the extra special means. If the natural means do not succeed we must look to the supernatural.

On Carmel Elijah's fervent pleading left the people unmoved. "How long halt ye between two opinions?" was his challenge; but "the people answered him not a word" (1 Kings 18:21). But when God answered by fire instantly the people were on their faces. What the strivings of man cannot achieve is but the work of a moment to the outpoured Spirit. We may be sure that when God begins to work the people will be there, drawn not by invitation or persuasion, but by that divine magnetism that operates in revival.

It may be necessary for us to cease from our own endeavours in order to enlist the mighty intervention of God. It is possible to be so busy with what we are doing, that we are oblivious of that mightier work that God is waiting to do, if we will but give Him the opportunity. When we are brought to seek His face, and acknowledge, as did Jehoshaphat, "We have no might against this great company. . . neither know we what to do: but our eyes are upon Thee", then we may expect Him to answer us likewise, "the battle is not yours, but God's. . . Ye shall not need to fight in this battle: set yourselves, stand ye still, and see the salvation of the Lord with you" (2 Chron. 20:12-17).

Apostolic Preaching

"But Peter. . . lifted up his voice, and spake forth unto them" (verse 14). When we speak of "apostolic preaching" we do not mean that of apostles only, but the kind of preaching that was characteristic of that first century, and of revivals down the years. Although many souls are saved in revival apart from preaching, such times have nearly always been characterized by the powerful proclamation of the truth. Sometimes the outpouring has come through such preaching; at other times, as here, the preaching has come through the outpouring. There is a rugged grandeur about the apostolic preacher which recalls the fearless prophet of Old Testament days. They were clothed with the same power and impelled by the same boldness, for their torches were lit from the same holy fire. Neither was popular, but both were mighty to the pulling down of strongholds.

"When a prophet is accepted and deified, his message is lost. The prophet is only t useful so long as he is stoned as a public nuisance calling us to repentance, disturbing our comfortable routines, breaking our respectable idols, shattering our sacred conventions" (A. G. Gardiner).

Of such a character was the apostolic preacher. Peter's address on this occasion reveals all the main features of apostolic gospel preaching.

The primary design was to lead souls to repentance. A glance at the message of the New Testament preachers, John the Baptist, the Lord Himself, and the Apostles, will confirm that "repent" was one of the great words in their gospel vocabulary. They were not out merely to obtain many decisions" but rather to "turn... many to righteousness" (Dan. 12:3). The difference in emphasis is important. The true index of their success was not in the counting of heads or hands, but in the revolutionizing of lives and even communities, men and women turned "from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God" (Acts 26:18). Since repentance was to them the fundamental condition of conversion, they did not set out at once to "get results" but to produce conviction of sin, without which there could be no solid foundation for a soul-saving work.

Under the ministry of these early preachers people did not decide to become Christians simply because this was a desirable or respectable thing to do, or because Christianity appeared more attractive, and to offer better dividends than living for the world. There was no suggestion that salvation was just a course of expediency, an insurance policy for eternity, or a good bargain that any sensible man ought to make with his God. No, indeed; they were led to repent because they saw their desperate plight. They were convicted of their shameful rebellion against God, Whose laws they had broken and Whose Son they had crucified. They were indeed "weighed in the balances and found wanting". They were lost and undone and more than ready, when a loving Saviour was presented to them, to flee to Him for refuge against the wrath of a holy God.

There is so much emphasis today on believing, receiving, deciding, and so little on the vital step of repenting. We need to beware of reducing conversion to a technique, for a person can

be persuaded to go through the motions of accepting Christ while the conscience remains unawakened, the will unmoved, and so the heart unchanged. If the soil is shallow the seed may germinate, but it will be without root, and so “he endureth for a while; and when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, straightway he stumbleth” (Matt. 13:21). The apostles felt that their labour was in vain if their converts did not stand fast (1 Thess. 3:5-8).

How was it that this apostolic preaching produced such deep and abiding results? Because these men dealt faithfully with the question of sin, that the conscience might be aroused (Acts 2:23, 36). Because they urged upon their hearers the imperative necessity of immediate repentance to God (verse 38). Because they preached baptism in accordance with their commission from Christ (Matt. 28:19; Mark 16:16), as that which was to accompany and seal that act of repentance (verse 38). And because they demanded that all this should be followed by “doing works worthy of repentance” (Acts 26:20). With the exception of the controversial question of baptism, these features have always characterized revival preaching.

”It was, I believe, a precept of John Wesley’s to his evangelists, in unfolding their message, to speak first in general of the love of God to man; then, with all possible energy, and so as to search conscience to its depths, to preach the law of holiness; and then, and not till then, to uplift the glories of the gospel of pardon and of life. Intentionally or not, his directions follow the lines of the epistle to the Romans” (Moule on Romans).

It was said that Charles Finney in dealing with souls had a fixed principle never to tell a man how to get right with God until he could no longer look him in the face. Only when his conscience had been so thoroughly awakened that he hung his head in shame over his sin, did he consider that he was ripe to be told the way of salvation. We may say that Finney went too far, but do we go far enough?

It is vain to urge men to go to the Physician so long as they remain unconvinced that they are dangerously ill. A Puritan writer, Thomas Goodwin, remarked in this connection, ”Traitors must be convicted and condemned ere they are capable of a legal pardon; as sentence must be pronounced before a legal appeal can be made.” When we try to foist a pardon on the rebel who has not been apprehended or convicted, we invite him to trample it underfoot.

Bearing in mind this design, to produce conviction with a view to repentance, let us notice four characteristics of apostolic preaching revealed in Peter’s address.

It was spontaneous preaching, as spontaneous as the outpouring that produced it. Christ had promised, when they should have to stand before governors and kings, ”It shall be given you in that hour what ye shall speak. For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father that speaketh in you” (Matt. 10:19, 20).

This word seemed to have a fulfilment in the seizing of many other unexpected opportunities of preaching Christ. It is remarkable that this masterly address of Peter that led to the conversion of three thousand souls, should have been impromptu. No one would deny that there is a place for the prepared and deliberate presentation of the gospel, but too many have lost sight of that unpremeditated, inspirational preaching which is so characteristic when the Spirit of God is working in power.

Charles Finney wrote in his autobiography: ”For some twelve years of my earliest ministry, I wrote not a word; and was commonly obliged to preach without any preparation whatever, except what I got in prayer. Oftentimes I went into the pulpit without knowing upon what text I should speak, or a word that I should say. I depended on the occasion and the Holy Spirit to suggest the text, and to open up the whole subject to my mind; and certainly in no part of my

ministry have I preached with greater success and power. If I did not preach from inspiration I don't know how I did preach. It was a common experience with me. . . that the subject would open up to my mind in a manner that was surprising to myself. It seemed that I could see with intuitive clearness just what I ought to say; and whole platoons of thoughts, words, and illustrations came to me as fast as I could deliver them." Recounting the revival at Evan Mills, Finney wrote: "I had not taken a thought with regard to what I should preach. The Holy Spirit was upon me, and I felt confident that when the time came for action I should know. As soon as I found the house packed I arose and, without any formal introduction of singing, opened upon them with these words: 'Say ye to the righteous that it shall be well with him; for they shall eat the fruit of their doings. Woe to the wicked! it shall be ill with him; for the reward of his hands shall be given him.' The Spirit of God came upon me with such power, that it was like opening a battery upon them.

For more than an hour the word of God came through me to them in a manner that I could see was carrying all before it. It was a fire and a hammer breaking the rock, and as the sword that was piercing to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit. I saw that a general conviction was spreading over the whole congregation."

Although God has His times for this mightier work of the Spirit, as Matt. 10:19 suggests, the vision of it needs to be recaptured. The gift of spontaneous preaching enables the evangelist to seize unexpected opportunities, as did Peter here at Pentecost and at the Temple Gate (Acts 3:12); also Paul on Mars Hill (Acts 17) and on the steps of the castle in Jerusalem (Acts 22); and it gives maximum scope to the Spirit of God to produce conviction and lead to repentance. Far from encouraging laziness, such a manner of preaching demands incessant prayerfulness and constant meditation and feeding upon the word. Clearly, it is only possible "in the Spirit", and this anticipates our next feature of this apostolic preaching.

It was anointed preaching. Peter was "filled with the Spirit"; there was the explanation of his power. This feature has already been considered, and we need only touch on it now in its relation to public preaching. Christ had promised His followers that through the coming of the Spirit they would receive power to be His witnesses (Acts 1:8), and that the Spirit would work through them to convict the world of sin and of righteousness and of judgment. It is strange, in view of the explicit promise of Christ, that many busily engaged in the preaching of the gospel seem to have no concern that they do not see that power operating in their ministry, nor any desire to seek and obtain it.

Apostolic preaching is not marked by its beautiful diction, or literary polish, or cleverness of expression. It has laid aside "excellency of speech or of wisdom"; it has no confidence in "persuasive words of wisdom" but operates "in demonstration of the Spirit and of power", so that the faith that it kindles in the heart does "not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God" (1Cor. 2:1-5). It was said of Savonarola, the great Italian Reformer, that "nature had withheld from him almost all the gifts of the orator", and yet he was mighty through the power of the Spirit. Said A. J. Gordon of him: "When we read of his intense and enrapt communion with God, his unconquerable persistence in seeking the power of the Highest, till 'his thoughts and affections were so absorbed in God by the presence of the Holy Spirit, that they who looked into his cell saw his upturned face as it had been the face of an angel', we are not amazed at the character and effects of his preaching – so pathetic, so melting, so resistless that the reporter lays down his pen with this apology written under the last line – 'Such sorrow and weeping came upon me that I could go no further.'"

There can be no substitute whatever for the anointing of the Spirit; it is the one indispensable factor for the effective proclamation of God's message. The apostolic preacher is first and foremost the man who can say with his Master, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He hath anointed Me to preach the gospel" (Luke 4:18).

It was also fearless preaching. This feature is directly related to that which we have just considered. "They were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spake the word of God with boldness" (Acts 4:31). These first Christians had been wonderfully liberated from "the fear of man that bringeth a snare". They gave their hearers the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.

There was no watering down the stern demands of divine holiness, no modifying the eternal severities to appeal to the natural man. The apostolic preacher was like Noah "a preacher of righteousness". He did not shun to set forth the changeless laws of a holy God, because he knew that "by the law cometh the knowledge of sin" (Rom. 3:19, 20), and that this is the instrument that the Spirit of God uses to reveal that "all have sinned and come short of the glory of God" (verse 23).

Whitefield said of Griffith Jones, a Welsh evangelist of his day, that his preaching possessed "a grasp on the conscience". Such a ministry requires a proclamation of the holiness of God and the sinfulness of sin, and such a fearless application of the divine law as probes the conscience and leaves the hearer standing guilty before God. Such preaching does not generalize about sin and sinners, but focuses on the individual conscience and fearlessly declares, "Thou art the man". It was said of Gilbert Tennent, a contemporary of Jonathan Edwards, and mightily used in the New England Revival, "He seemed to have no regard to please the eyes of his hearers with agreeable gesture, nor their ears with delivery, nor their fancy with language; but to aim directly at their hearts and consciences, to lay open their ruinous delusions, show them their numerous, secret, hypocritical shifts in religion, and drive them out of every deceitful refuge wherein they made themselves easy, with the form of godliness without the power.

. . . His preaching was frequently both terrible and searching"
(Prince's Christian History).

Here Peter charged his hearers with the crime of crucifying their Messiah. They may not have been personally present, but they were personally responsible, for they had consented to His death. Emphatically he spoke of "This Jesus Whom YE crucified" (verse 36). Little wonder that we then read, "Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart." Fearless preaching like this was calculated to produce conviction, or to stir up the bitterest animosity. It usually did both. Many preachers today are so tactful, so careful lest they should offend, that they achieve little or nothing. How different were the "shock tactics" of the apostolic preacher, as we listen to his burning words in temple court (Acts 3:13-15) or Jewish Council (Acts 4:8-11; 7:51-53); well might he say, "I truly am full of power by the Spirit of the Lord, and of judgment, and of might, to declare unto Jacob his transgression, and to Israel his sin" (Mic. 3:8). Such preaching, by making indifference impossible, sets the hearers in on of two camps. It is calculated to produce a revival or a riot.

Finally, it was Christ-centred preaching. Having explained to the astonished multitudes that this which they saw and heard was the outpouring of the Spirit promised in Joel, Peter took them at once to "Jesus of Nazareth". He did not at once assert His deity, but found a common basis in what they already knew and believed concerning Him, in facts which were beyond contradiction – "a man approved of God unto you by mighty works and wonders and signs."

It was a principle of these apostolic preachers to find common ground with their hearers and to work from that. They commenced with what was assuredly believed and accepted, and from that basis they argued their case, point by point, persuading the multitudes that this Jesus was the Christ.

In the story of the Ethiopian eunuch we read that Philip "preached unto him Jesus" (Acts 8:35) He did not preach about Jesus, he preached Jesus; his message was a proclamation, a setting forth of the person of Jesus the suffering Messiah, yet Son of God. Paul's determination was ever to know nothing among men "save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified" (1 Cor. 2:2), and so vividly had he set Him forth to the Galatian churches that he could remind them – "before your very eyes, Jesus Christ has been portrayed, crucified" (Gal. 3:1, Darby). The risen Lord had explained to His disciples before He ascended into heaven why it behoved "the Christ to suffer these things, and to enter into His glory" (Luke 24:26). He had opened their minds to the full significance of the cross and the resurrection in the plan of redemption, "that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His Name unto all the nations" (Luke 24:45-47), and so in these aspects they set forth Christ in their preaching.

The very corner stone of apostolic preaching, however, was the witness to the resurrection. Everything hinged on the fact that the Crucified One was alive. If He had indeed risen all His claims to be the "Sent One" of God, the long-promised Messiah, were authenticated and beyond dispute, and men found themselves under a cloud of divine wrath, guilty of the greatest crime of all time. "Ye denied the Holy and Righteous One, and asked for a murderer to be granted unto you, and killed the Prince of Life" (Acts 3:14). "The Righteous One; of whom ye have now become betrayers and murderers" (Acts 7:52). It was the light from the empty tomb that explained the enigma of the Cross; it was this that transformed apparent defeat into actual victory, and tragedy into triumph. The resurrection was God's masterstroke to prove beyond all doubt and for all time the deity of Jesus, for He was "declared to be the Son of God with power. . . by the resurrection of the dead" (Rom. 1:4).

Apostolic preaching cannot of course be limited to the ministry of the evangelist, separated for this special work. In revival it is common to witness widespread evangelism through numbers of believers possessed with the spirit of the first Christians, who when "scattered abroad went about preaching the Word" (Acts 8:4). Paul wrote similarly to the believers of the Thessalonian church, "From you hath sounded forth the word of the Lord, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but in every place your faith to God-ward is gone forth; so that we need not to speak anything" (1 Thess. 1:8). This explains the rapid and prodigious progress of Christianity in the first century; and the same thing in lesser degree has accompanied and followed almost every great movement of the Spirit.

It is said of the Moravian Revival, that in the thirty years following the outpouring of the Spirit on the congregation at Herrnhut (1727), the Moravian evangelists, aflame for God, had carried the gospel not only to nearly every country in Europe, but also to many pagan races in North and South America, Asia, and Africa. Dr. Warneck, German historian of Protestant Missions, wrote, "This small church in twenty years called into being more missions than the whole evangelical church has done in two centuries." More than one hundred missionaries went forth from this village community in twenty-five years.

Of the 1860 Revival in South India, the Indian Watchman observed: "As in Ireland [Ulster Revival – 1859], so here, the recent converts, seized with irresistible spirit of evangelization, were the means of carrying the wondrous influence from one place to another." A missionary wrote, "There were indisputable marks of a revival among the people, brought about by the

influence of five men who had come voluntarily to preach the gospel to heathen and Christians. . . . The effect of their proceeding hitherto has been extraordinary. The heathen listen to them attentively. Their doctrine is sound and pertinent, exhibiting a right practical understanding both of law and gospel.” Another says, “It is indeed a new era in Indian Missions, that of lay converts going forth without purse or scrip to preach the gospel of Christ to their fellow-countrymen, and that with a zeal and life we had hardly thought them capable of.”

It will be seen that these features constantly emphasize what has already been remarked, that revival does not lead us forward to fresh stunts or unexplored methods to make the gospel more attractive and acceptable, but back to the old and often disused paths of apostolic evangelism. Would we be ready for revival? – then let us “ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein” Jer. 6:16). Where the Spirit of God in complete control there is an inevitable return to the simple methods of the first century, and great is the surprise of many to discover that they not only still work, but that they still work the best. They are in fact the only channels capable of carrying the mighty rivers of blessing let loose in revival. We shall now see how great those rivers can be.

Superabundant Blessing

“And there were added unto them in that day about three thousand souls” (verse 41). “And the Lord added to them day by day those that were being saved” (verse 47). “But many of them that heard the word believed; and the number of the men came to be about five thousand” (4:4). “And believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women” (5:14). “And the number of the disciples multiplied. . . exceedingly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith” (6:7).

So reads the record of Pentecost and the days that followed. Here then is a further distinctive feature of revival, super-abundant blessing. God had indeed fulfilled the promise of Malachi 3:10; He had opened the windows of heaven and poured out such a blessing that there was not room enough to receive it.

If these recorded results of that outpouring of Pentecost were not part of inspired Scripture, we might have wondered whether the accounts were not exaggerated. Down the years, however, there have been seasons of revival when the blessing was, numerically at least, comparable with Pentecost. One wrote out the midst of the New England Revival (eighteenth century),

“The dispensation of grace we are now under is. . . in some circumstances so wonderful, that I believe there has not been the like since the extraordinary pouring out of the Spirit immediately after our Lord’s ascension.” Space does not permit giving here statistics of the great revivals of the church, even if accurate information were available. However, a few figures will be quoted, remembering that they are only estimates, but made when modesty and reserve in these matters were much more prominent than they are today.

It is estimated that 30 000 souls were converted through Whitefield’s revivals in America. Of the revival in the same country in 1830 Dr. Henry Ward Beecher remarked to Charles Finney, “This is the greatest revival of religion that has been since the world began.” It is computed that 100 000 were converted that year in the United States. In the great 1858 revival, conversions numbered 50 000 per week, and over the whole of the United States there could not have been less than 500 000 conversions, according to Finney’s estimate in 1859, when the revival was still spreading. “In the year 1859 a similar movement began in the United Kingdom, affecting every county in Ulster, Scotland, Wales, and England, adding a million accession to the evangelical churches” (J. Edwin Orr).

Far more significant to thoughtful minds than massive statistics is the estimate of what proportion of a community or district is savingly affected in these extraordinary seasons of blessing. Of the New England Revival (eighteenth century) Conant wrote: "It cannot be doubted that at least 50 000 souls were added to the churches of New England out of a population of about 250 000. A fact sufficient to revolutionize, as indeed it did, the religious and moral character, and to determine the destinies of the country."

In Acts 9:34, 35 there is the account of the healing of a palsied man which resulted in the wholesale turning to the Lord of a town, Lydda, and a populous district, the Sharon. Many similar instances could be given of communities swept by powerful revivals when it was most difficult, if not impossible, to find a single unconverted soul.

Of the revival in Northampton, Mass. (1735) Jonathan Edwards wrote: "There was scarcely a single person in the town, either old or young, that was left unconcerned about the great things of the eternal world. Those that were wont to be the vainest and loosest, and those that had been the most disposed to think and speak slightly of vital and experimental religion, were now generally subject to great awakenings. And the work of conversion was carried on in a most astonishing manner, and increased more and more; souls did, as it were, come by flocks to Jesus Christ."

Similarly Finney wrote of the revival in Rome, N. Y.: "As the work proceeded, it gathered in nearly the whole population." Of the 1858 Revival in Sweden, an English minister resident in Stockholm reported, "I should be disposed to consider that at least 200 000 persons have been awakened out of a population not exceeding 3 millions." This would mean one out of every fifteen people. Another wrote of the same revival: "The awakening is so extensive that there is scarcely a town, a village, or a hamlet, where there is not a little company of believers united together, and edifying one another in love." Revival commonly leaves behind such groups, meeting on the simple ground of oneness in Christ, as did the early church. This leads us to the last feature of the outpouring of Pentecost.

Divine Simplicity

"And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread and the prayers. . . And all that believed were together, and had all things common; and they sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all, according as any man had need. And day by day, continuing steadfastly with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread at home, they did take their food with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God, and having favour with all the people" (verses 42-47). In those early days, the manner of life of the believers, their church order and fellowship were marked by divine simplicity and spiritual power. As faith and spirituality waned the power of the Spirit was gradually withdrawn. Soon it became necessary to substitute human arrangements, which could be worked without the Spirit's power, for the divine arrangements, which were dependent on that power. Thus by degrees the simple apostolic pattern ordained by the Spirit was abandoned in favour of the complex ways of man, and those concerned with the building up of the churches forgot the exhortation of God to Moses concerning His house, "See that thou make all things according to the pattern." Some asserted that God had revealed no pattern; others that the pattern did not matter, that every man could do that which was right in his own eyes. Since revivals bring a renewal of the power of the Spirit, they are commonly accompanied by a return to the simple apostolic pattern.

It is significant that many of the revivals of Old Testament days were characterized by a return to the divinely ordained worship of the house of the Lord. Asa, for example, "renewed

the altar of the Lord", and "brought into the house of God the things that his father had dedicated" (2 Chron. 15:8, 18). Similarly Josiah sent men "to repair the house of the Lord" (2 Chron. 34:8). Hezekiah also "in the first year of his reign. . . opened the doors of the house of the Lord, and repaired them" (2 Chron. 29:3). He then ordered the Levites to "carry forth the filthiness out of the holy place" (verse 5), which was of course essential to any further progress; but this was not all, for the rest of the chapter describes how "the service of the house of the Lord was set in order" (verse 35). It is needful, if the blessings of revival are to be preserved and maintained, that the cleansing of the house from sin, worldliness, and unbelief, be followed by the re-establishing of its order in divine simplicity. This passage in Acts 2 reveals that the outpouring of the Spirit was followed by steadfast continuance on the part of the believers in the four matters essential to their corporate life.

Firstly, there was the apostles' teaching. All the great movements of the Spirit that have affected the course of history have been accompanied and consolidated by spiritual teaching. Where this is not the case it is possible for a good movement to go off into error, peter out, or be dissipated in extravagance and fanaticism. The outpouring of the Spirit was never intended to be a substitute for such teaching, but rather to stimulate it. The one provides the dynamic and impetus; the other ensures that the power released continues to flow along the right channel. A missionary wrote of the converts of the 1860 Revival in South India, "One thing is very marked, their intense reverence for the word of God, and desire to be conformed to it in all particulars." What can do more to produce a hunger for God's word, foster a love for "sound doctrine", and check heresy of various forms than a mighty outpouring of the Spirit? Said R. A. Torrey, "A genuine, wide-sweeping revival would do more to turn things upside down and thus get them right side up than all the heresy trials ever instituted."

Secondly, there was the apostles' fellowship, in which they continued steadfastly. Not until the Holy Spirit was given at Pentecost, and these believers were fused into one body, the church, do we have this first mention of "fellowship", a sharing together; for though our fellowship is with the Father and Son, it is ever "the fellowship of the Holy Spirit", affected and maintained by Him. This fellowship of the early church was not only related to their spiritual experiences, but also to their material possessions, for they "had all things common" (verse 44).

In this connection the following report from the 1860 Revival in South India is significant: "There are now in Christian Pettah alone, about one hundred who are bound together in the ties of Christian fellowship, and in the district of Arulappatoor there is about the same number, and very many more scattered about elsewhere. Sunday they make a day of special fasting and prayer, abstaining often from food till after the partaking of the Lord's Supper, which is partaken of every Sunday evening at 8. They appear to be living in much real simplicity, having all that they have in common, and working together for the common support" (Henry Groves).

Steadfast continuance in fellowship involves the diligent cultivation of the corporate life, in which there is no provision for the freelance or the "lone wolf". Here everything is sacrificed for the common good, and the unity of the Spirit is diligently preserved. Here the believers "consider one another to provoke unto love and good works" (Heb. 10:24). Such a fellowship can only be maintained at the price of ceaseless vigilance, but it is characteristic of times of revival.

Thirdly, there was the breaking of bread in which they also continued steadfastly. The Lord's Supper was prefigured in Old Testament times by the Feast of the Passover, and it is significant that three outstanding revivals in the history of Israel were marked by a

widespread return to the keeping of the Passover, under Hezekiah (2 Chron. 30), Josiah (2 Chron. 35), and Ezra (Ezra 6: 19). It is therefore not surprising to discover that revivals have ever quickened the desire of the church to obey the Saviour's command, "This do in remembrance of Me." Many a time the outpouring of the Spirit has coincided with the gathering of the saints to keep this simple ordinance. The glorious revival at Cambuslang, near Glasgow (1742) under the minister, William M'Culloch, culminated in two great communion seasons. Under the preaching of Whitefield, supported by that of this parish minister, the word was attended with remarkable results. Tens of thousands gathered on the hillside to hear the word of God, many being smitten down and carried into the surrounding houses. Thousands came to the communion tables, "sitting down by companies upon the green grass, as in Galilee of old". On both occasions the voice of prayer and praise could be heard throughout the night, mingling with the mourning of stricken hearts.

We read of the first communities touched by the Revival in South India, "They were very anxious to enjoy the Lord's Supper – every day if they could have it." Thus it was immediately after Pentecost, when the Lord's Supper was taken in the believers houses in conjunction with the daily food: "breaking bread at home, they did take their food with gladness" (Acts 2:46). It was in this manner that the Lord had inaugurated this simple ordinance in the upper room, and revival ever tends to bring us back to the apostolic pattern, divesting these things of the cloak of ecclesiasticism, and delivering us from the twin perils of ritualism and tradition. A modern writer has done well to remind us, "It is possible to reject traditions a thousand years old, and yet be slaves to traditions of scarcely fifty years standing" (W. W. Fereday).

Finally, there was steadfast continuance in prayers. As revivals are born out of prayer, so are they maintained by prayer; without it they cannot continue in purity and power. Soon after the outpouring at Herrnhut (1727) that commenced the Moravian Revival, it was determined that the voice of prayer should never be silent, neither by day nor by night, just as of old the fire was ever to be kept burning upon the altar. Twenty-four brethren and the same number of sisters divided the twenty-four hours between them into prayer watches. The number of intercessors increased, a spirit of prayer being poured out even upon the children. That prayer meeting went on without intermission, day and night, for 100 years, and was the source of power of the Moravian Missions.

When the revival in Adams, N. Y., that commenced with his own conversion, began to decline, Charles Finney read an article entitled, A Revival Revived. "The substance was, that in a certain place there had been a revival during the winter; that in the spring it declined; and that upon earnest prayer being offered for the continued outpouring of the Spirit, the revival was powerfully revived." He suggested to the young people that they should each pray in their rooms at sunrise, at noon, and at sunset for one week. Before the week was out a marvellous spirit of prayer was poured out on them, some lying prostrate on the floor during these seasons, praying for the outpouring of the Spirit. "The Spirit was poured out, and before the week ended all the meetings were thronged."

Prior to Pentecost it is recorded that the believers "continued steadfastly in prayer" (Acts 1:14); after Pentecost the young church "continued steadfastly. . . in prayers" (Acts 2:42); and when the rivers of blessing were flowing far and wide, and the work was so extensive that the apostles could no longer cope with it, we hear their solemn resolve, "We will continue steadfastly in prayer" (Acts 6:4). Let it be burned upon our hearts by the Spirit of God that this mighty movement that turned the world upside down was not only born out of prayer, but

that it brought forth prayer, and was maintained by prayer. Such praying, costly but indispensable, has ever characterized the great revivals of the past.

How simple were the channels along which the rivers of that first outpouring flowed. The corporate life of the first church maintained by no methods or devices more complex than teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread, and prayers. These means were simple, but they were sufficient. When the Spirit of God is poured out again it will be seen that nothing more is needed. Other expedients are only called for when the power of the Spirit begins to wane. The local church is the only visible society that can adequately meet the varied needs of the believer, young or old. This is the design of God, though He raises up and uses other organizations when the local churches have failed. It is vital that the living stones quarried in times of revival shall not be left lying about, but shall be built into the house of God, and share the corporate life of the church. Therefore the form and condition of that local body are of great importance.

It is surely right that a soul converted in revival, when the Spirit was in complete sway, should be brought into a fellowship where, in the simplicity of apostolic church order, the Spirit continues to control and where there is scope and liberty for each member of the body to exercise his or her spiritual gifts to the blessing of all. How often the flames of revival have been extinguished by the very structure in which it broke out. After the first inrush of the Spirit, the doors and windows were shut by the iron hand of ecclesiasticism, formalism, and tradition; the flame was suffocated; the Spirit quenched.

The outgoings of revival are a key to the continuance of the work. If factory wheels are arrested by some outside agency, either the motive power is also arrested and all movement ceases, or else the link that joins the power to the wheels is broken. In a mighty movement of the Spirit sometimes the link is snapped, and the revival movement is severed from the old machinery and linked to new that is fit to receive and use the fresh output of power. It is the old principle of new wine causing the old wine-skin to burst so that the wine is spilled (Matt. 9:17). New wine requires new wine-skins, and if the old are not prepared to be renewed and remodelled by the Spirit of God to meet the new situation, God has no alternative but to reject them.

A movement of the Spirit can only be contained by the organization of the Spirit, and that organization is characterized by simplicity. As we scan that distant horizon, and watch the sun rising over that first church as it moved forward in the power of the Spirit, we are compelled to exclaim with Cowper,

”Oh, how unlike the complex works of man
Heaven’s easy, artless, unencumbered plan!
. . . . Majestic in its own simplicity.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE PREPARED HEART

“Break up your fallow ground: for it is time to seek the Lord, till He come and rain righteousness upon you” (Hos. 10:12).

From the characteristics of revival we must now proceed to the conditions under which God is pleased to pour out this blessing. Although God is the source of all revival, there are conditions that He expects His people to fulfil before they are ready to receive the outpouring

of the Spirit. Hosea sets these before us in one of the most comprehensive statements on the way of revival to be found in Scripture. "Break up your fallow ground" - that is heart-preparation: "for it is time to seek the Lord, till . . ." - that is prevailing prayer "He come and rain righteousness upon you" - that is spiritual revival.

Here then are set before us the two all-inclusive conditions: heart-preparation and prevailing prayer. We cannot rightly separate them, for, as the verse suggests, they are intimately related. Sometimes when souls truly seek God they are shown their sin and barrenness, and heart-brokenness follows. With others, it is out of a time of heart-brokenness that they really begin to pray.

From a group of missionaries in India seeking revival in 1940 there comes this personal testimony of one of them: "While living alone I got desperate. God showed me first that my life was practically prayerless except for my anaemic morning and evening 'devotions'. I saw the need for intense and persistent intercession, so I gave myself to prayer. Then followed deep conviction of personal sin and backsliding. One thing after another had to come out, and my heart was completely broken as time after time I saw His wounds and heard His royal pardon. I marvelled at His longsuffering, and trembled in case He should ever leave me in anger at last. I felt this fear until I saw His crowning glory" (The Price They Paid).

This illustrates how these two conditions may be related in experience. This needs to be borne in mind when we separate them for the purpose of examining them in detail. In this chapter we shall consider the heart prepared for blessing, and in that which follows the heart that prevails in prayer.

Fallow Ground

"Break up your fallow ground" is the figure that the prophet uses to impress this need of heart-preparation. What is fallow ground? It is not wilderness, and therefore we cannot apply his words to the unregenerate. It is not necessarily land that has returned to the wilderness state through being wilfully abandoned, so it is not the backsliders who are primarily in view. It is simply ground which has in the past yielded fruit, but has now become largely unproductive through lack of cultivation, land that is lying idle. Seed may be sown upon it in abundance, the heavens might pour out a copious rain, but what would be the good of either so long as the ground is in this uncultivated state? As we look out upon the state of the church today, as we look within at the condition of our own hearts, we cannot but admit the accuracy of Hosea's figure. Vast tracts of fallow ground in the hearts of professing Christians surely constitute the greatest barrier to the rain of revival. The characteristics of fallow ground must now be examined more closely.

Firstly, it is hard. The soil has become tightly packed; the clods are thick and coarse; men and animals have heedlessly crossed it so that it possesses a hard and brittle crust. Here is the way God describes the hearts of believers when they have become insensitive to the sins that grieve the Holy Spirit, and unresponsive to His still small voice. Here are hearts that have grown cold towards the Lord and His people, and indifferent towards the souls of the perishing.

They are marked by formality in their fulfilment of spiritual obligations, and cold orthodoxy in their contention for the faith. This state of heart will often lead to a belligerent and graceless defence of minor points of doctrine, or to a holding fast the tradition of the elders. These are they who "strain out the gnat and swallow the camel" (Matt. 23:24); they "tithed the mint. . . and pass over judgment and the love of God" (Luke 11:42). They profess much and possess little; they have all the right expressions but few of the right experiences.

In this state believers may diligently attend the ministry of God's word, the heart may be sown continually with the incorruptible seed, but there is no fruit unto holiness, for like the way-side ground in the parable, the seed lies upon the surface, and is quickly devoured by the agents of the Evil one (Matt. 13:4).

Such are "ever learning, and never able to come to the [experimental] knowledge of the truth" (2 Tim. 3:7). Perhaps this is the main reason why there appears to be so little effectual result from so much ministry of the word. It is all too true of the church today, "Ye have sown much and bring in little."

This hardness of heart is also revealed by unbelief in the display of God's power. Mark gives four instances of this in the life and ministry of Christ (3:5; 6:52; 8:17; 16:14), and it is deeply revealing that in each of these cases, excepting the first, where there was a hardening of heart at the manifestation of Christ's power, it was amongst His own disciples. Are we who profess to be His disciples covering our unbelief about the possibility of revival by murmurings about "a day of small things", "the end times", or "the Laodicean age"? Let us search our hearts, lest He should say of us, "Ye do err. . . not knowing the power of God."

Is it not evident that this state of heart must be dealt with before there can be a manifestation of God's power in revival? With the lesson of Israel before us (Heb. 3), who entered not into the promised land because their hearts were hardened in unbelief and disobedience (verses 18, 19), we do well to heed diligently these words of the Holy Spirit, "Today if ye shall hear His voice, harden not your hearts" (verse 15).

Secondly, fallow ground is weed-covered: One of the main objects in cultivation is to eliminate weeds that would overrun the good seed or the growing plants. Thorns and thistles are part of the curse and typify sin (Gen. 3:18). Such weeds abound on fallow ground, so Jeremiah exhorts the people, "Break up your fallow ground, and sow not among thorns" (4:3). Evidently they did not heed his words, for he said later, "They have sown wheat and have reaped thorns" (12:13). Christ also described ground in the parable of the sower where thorns sprang up and choked the good seed. Where the diligent cultivation of the soul is lacking, one may be sure that thorns and thistles abound. As the gardener well knows, the weeds need not be wilfully encouraged in order to flourish; they are the product of sloth, indifference, and neglect. A greater than Solomon, even He that searcheth the hearts, might have to say of many, "I went by the field of the slothful . . . and, lo, it was all grown over with thorns" (Prov. 24:30, 31).

There is only one way we can begin to deal with all that we know is grieving to God, checking our growth, and hindering revival, and that is by breaking up the fallow ground. It is time to cease excusing our sins by calling them shortcomings, or natural weakness, or by attributing them to temperament or environment. It is time to cease justifying our carnal ways and materialistic outlook by painting to others who are the same. Those "measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves with themselves, are without understanding" (2 Cor. 10:12). We must face our sins honestly in the light of God's word, view them as He does, and deal with them as before Him. Until we do, it would be well that God should withhold the rain of revival, "for the land which hath drunk the rain that cometh of t upon it. . . if it beareth thorns and thistles, it is rejected and nigh unto a curse; whose end is to be burned" (Heb. 6:7, 8).

Thirdly, fallow ground is of necessity unfruitful. Despite abundant sowing and copious showers, the ground remains largely barren because of its condition. The fruit that God expects the believer to bring forth is not religious activity, or even zealous Christian service,

so much as Christ-like character as set forth in Galatians 5, verse 22: "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, self-control." Fruit is practical holiness in thought, word, and deed; fruit is likeness to Jesus Christ. It is possible to be zealously active in Christian service, and yet, when a hungry Saviour comes to us as to the fig tree, yearning for fruit, He finds nothing but leaves. Who can measure His intense longing for fruit from those who are "God's husbandry"?

All God's dealings with us, in mercy or in judgment, are designed to produce "fruit", "more fruit", "much fruit" (John 15:2, 5). How much does He find? How much is choked by weeds? Peter explains clearly how to avoid becoming fallow ground, by "adding on your part all diligence" to produce the fruit of righteousness, "For", says he, "if these things are yours and abound, they make you to be not idle nor unfruitful unto the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Pet. 1:5-8).

Breaking Up

If Hosea's figure of fallow ground is an accurate description of our own hearts, and if we are deeply concerned to remedy the situation, then we must face this command, "Break up your fallow ground." There is a sense in which God may break us in order to bless us, but here God places the onus upon us by commanding us to do it. It is as dangerous to expect God, by some sovereign act, to do for us what He has commanded us to do for ourselves, as it is to strive to do for ourselves what He has promised to do for us. In the path of spiritual progress there is no little emphasis in Scripture on the part the believer has to play. We read, "Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye doubleminded" (Jas. 4:8), and again, "Let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God" (2 Cor. 7:1). Thus it is with this question of heart-preparation; the responsibility is ours.

This is not only true in relation to revival, but in all Christian service and witness: "The preparations of the heart belong to man: but the answer of the tongue is from the Lord" (Prov. 16:1). So there is our part and God's part. If we make it our business to have prepared hearts, God will make it His business to fill our mouths with arguments which our adversaries shall not be able to gainsay or resist. "Sanctify in your hearts Christ as Lord," says Peter, and you will be "ready always to give answer to every man that asketh you a reason concerning the hope that is in you" (1 Pet. 3:15). God's contention with Israel was that they were "a stubborn and rebellious generation, a generation that prepared not their heart" (Ps. 78:8).

If we are to have revival it must come from heaven, it must be the result of divine intervention, but how can we expect God to rain righteousness upon us before we have broken up the fallow ground? The words of Samuel should come as a challenge to the people of God today: "Prepare your hearts unto the Lord, and serve Him only: and He will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines" (1 Sam. 7:3). Are you ready to obey?

To "break up the fallow ground" of our hearts means to bring them to a humble and contrite state before God, for this is the only state of heart that God can revive, the only state that is ready for the rain of revival. "For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, Whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones" (Isa. 57:15).

The Humble

It was in the form of pride that sin first broke into the universe through the heart of Satan, and bore fruit at once in self-will and rebellion (Isa. 14:12-14; Ezek. 28:12-17). It was through temptation to pride that Satan first seduced Eve (Gen. 3:6), and thus breathed this deadly

poison into the human race. Pride finds expression in the lifting up of self and the justifying of self before God and man. It is the subtle, evasive influence behind many of the works of the flesh. It quickly leads to disobedience to God. When thwarted or humiliated it gives way to envy and bitterness.

In order to justify itself it will not hesitate to slander, or speak evil of others. In the pursuit of its ends it may readily stoop to hypocrisy and deceit. Pride is fruitful of all manner of disorders and divisions amongst the people of God. It is perhaps the greatest enemy of revival, and the most difficult to diagnose and deal with. The most deceitful thing in the world is the heart of man, and only God can truly know it. Pride is woven into the warp and woof of it, and only the Spirit of God can expose it. We dare not try to search our own hearts, but can only cry to God with David, "Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any way of wickedness in me" (Ps. 139:23).

Many of the afflictions we are called upon to endure, whether spiritual, mental, or physical, are but the mighty hand of God upon us to bring us low before Him. "Thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God hath led thee. . . in the wilderness, that He might humble thee, to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart" (Deut. 8:2). Whether these wilderness experiences serve this divine purpose or not will depend on our attitude to the hand that afflicts us. If we can kiss that hand, and say, "In faithfulness Thou hast afflicted me", His purpose is surely being achieved. But the hand that softens one may harden another, just as the sun that melts the wax will harden the clay.

Are you resisting God's dealings with you? Remember, His powers of resistance are infinitely greater than yours. "God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble. Be subject therefore unto God" (Jas. 4:6). If you are conscious of any spirit of pride, now is the time to deal with it. Before you read another page bow your knees before the Father and confess to Him all that you know of it. "Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you" (1 Pet. 5:6).

James reminds us that there must be transparent honesty, sincerity, and openness over this step, for he says, "Humble your selves in the sight of the Lord" (Jas. 4:10). If we simply did it in the sight of men we could be secretly proud of being humble; but there can be no trifling with God, for "the Lord looketh on the heart" (1 Sam. 16:7), "and by His actions are weighed" (1 Sam. 2:3).

To humble ourselves is not to take a place lower than that which befits us, but simply to take our rightful place before God; not to think of ourselves more highly than we ought to think, but "to think soberly" (Rom. 12:3). It means that we occupy that station that becomes us as creatures before our Creator, as sinners before our Saviour-God, as children before our heavenly Father. Are we willing to take that place? This is where breaking up the fallow ground begins. This is the first step, costly but indispensable, towards revival; and those unwilling to face it may as well cease to think or talk about revival any more. Do you acknowledge the importance of the step but feel that the exhortation does not apply to you? Then you may be the very one who most needs to heed the command. "If My people, which are called by My Name, shall humble themselves. . . then will I hear. . . forgive . . . and heal" (2 Chron. 7:14).

The revival under Josiah took place when the king gave the lead in abasing himself before God: "Thus saith the Lord. . . because thine heart was tender, and thou didst humble thyself before Me. . . I also have heard thee" (2 Chron. 34:26, 27). This has ever been the pathway to blessing. When the people of God humble themselves in repentance, God will exalt them in revival.

The Contrite

God not only revives “the spirit of the humble” but also “the heart of the contrite ones”. When in humility we take our rightful place before God, He can then deal with us as He was unable to deal with us before. The heart is now ready for that breaking up out of which revival flows. To the soul humbled before God, or at least ready to be humbled, there comes a fresh revelation of the infinite holiness of God and the exceeding sinfulness of sin. Well may that one cry out:

Eternal Light! Eternal Light!
How pure the soul must be
When, placed within Thy searching sight,
It shrinks not, but with calm delight
Can live, and look on Thee.

T. BINNEY.

The light that streams from the throne illuminates the Cross. The heart is melted by that measureless love that found expression in the sacrifice of the Redeemer. The sin - one’s own sin - that nailed Him there is seen in terrible contrast.

In His spotless soul’s distress
I perceive my guiltiness;
Oh, how vile my low estate,
Since my ransom was so great!

R. CHAPMAN.

Nothing can more effectively bring a soul to that state of heart that God can revive than a vision of the Cross. It is in such an experience of God that the heart is broken over its sin, its unbelief, its coldness, and brought to repentance. The channel that God uses in revival is the channel of a broken heart.

When the armies of Judah and Israel were without water in the wilderness of Edom the word of the Lord came to them through Elisha, “Make this valley full of trenches. . . Ye shall not see wind, neither shall ye see rain, yet that valley shall be filled with water” (2 Kings 3:16). The hard crust of the soil had to be broken all over the face of the valley, that the trenches might be dug, and that the promised tide might find prepared channels. Readiness for revival involves this breaking up, this dealing with God over our sin. The Hebrew word translated “contrite” has the root meaning of “bruised” or “broken to pieces”. Job uses it when defending himself against the accusations of his friends, “How long will ye vex my soul, and break me in pieces with words?” (19:2). It would be well if the words of the Almighty would have this effect on our hearts, but this cannot be until there is a fresh dealing with God, as many instances in Scripture reveal.

The geologists tell us that our garden soil is mainly rock, pulverized by the ceaseless action of the elements throughout the millenniums of the past. Similarly the contrite heart is that in which all that is rocklike and resistant to the will of God has been reduced to powder, because submissive to the action of His word and providences. “I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh” (Ezek. 36:26).

The God of glory so appeared to Abraham in Ur of the Chaldees that he renounced the idolatry about him and “obeyed to go out. . . not knowing whither he went” (Heb. 11:8). God revealed Himself to Moses in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush and said, “Put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground” (Exod. 3:2-5). As Captain of the Lord’s Host He appeared to Joshua and brought the same message, so that

Joshua fell on his face to the earth (Joshua 5:13-15). Early in his prophetic ministry Isaiah “saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up”, and the cry was wrung from the lips of the prophet, “Woe is me, for I am undone” (Isa. 1:6). Although God boasted of Job, “There is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man”, when there came to him the revelation of God in His holiness he cried out, “I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes” (Job 42:6). Just as there is no state of soil more satisfying to the gardener than that which is mellow and friable, crumbling to pieces at his touch, so there is no heart more satisfying to God than that which breaks at His touch, that crumbles under His mighty yet tender hand. “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise” (Ps. 51:17).

Contrition involves repentance toward God, for all sin is primarily against Him (Ps. 51:4). There must be confession, without which there can be no forgiveness or cleansing (1 John 1:9), and to confess means to identify ourselves with our sin before Him, to point to it and acknowledge, “Lord, that is mine”. Often our sin has not been a private matter between God and us; others have been involved. For instance, the sin of which we are convicted may be that we have wronged another by some deceitful or unkind act. It may be that bitter, wounding words were spoken to or about another. It may be we have harshly criticized others, secretly pulled their characters to pieces, exaggerated their apparent faults, or presented them in the worst possible light. It may be we have said or done no such thing, but our sin has been in the attitude we have taken up towards another: we refuse to forgive from the heart someone who we feel has wronged us; a spirit of envy, of bitterness, or of malice has dominated our thinking in relation to that person. Where the Holy Spirit convicts us of such sins against others, confession to God alone does not and cannot meet the case.

The Lord Jesus said, “If thou art offering thy gift at the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath aught against thee, leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way, first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift” (Matt. 5:23). God cannot accept and bless our gifts of worship, of service, or of substance, nor can He bestow upon His children His fatherly pardon until first we have dealt with such wrong relationships. The terms of Christ’s command are plain: “first be reconciled” and then come to God. Full confession, and where necessary restitution must be made to the person or persons involved. Full confession, however, does not necessarily mean detailed confession. There are times when one must refrain from confessing the details of one’s sin, as when one is moved to make public confession of moral impurity, when the minds of others - especially the young - may be defiled by even the confession. “But fornication, and all uncleanness. . . let it not even be named among you, as becometh saints” (Eph. 5:3); or the details of evil-speaking which might grievously wound the one to whom confession is made.

Restitution means the restoring of that which we have wrongly obtained or retained. It means undoing, so far as possible, the result of every wrong that has affected others. Cases of evil-speaking, for example, necessitate not only confession before those about whom we have spoken, but also those to whom we have spoken, whose minds may have been wrongly influenced or even poisoned against that other through our words. We must go all lengths to put right every wrong, and the effect of every wrong, and let us remember, everything that is not dealt with now will be dealt with at the Judgment Seat of Christ to the detriment of our status in that day to come. Where a believer’s sin has been against a community, such as dishonesty over church funds, or deceit as in the case of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5), or a course of action that has brought reproach on the Christian community or hindered blessing

coming to others, then public confession must be made before the whole community thus wronged.

It matters not how long ago a sin was committed - weeks, months, or even years. If the Spirit of God convicts, then God is demanding that there be a confession, and we cannot refuse without sinning against our own soul and multiplying our guilt. "See that ye refuse not Him that speaketh. For if they escaped not, when they refused him that warned them on earth, much more shall not we escape, who turn away from Him that warneth from heaven . . . for our God is a consuming fire" (Heb. 12:25, 29).

Recently in a group seeking God for revival, a young brother restored from backsliding was convicted of a sin committed years before - that of defrauding the railway by travelling for a period with an invalid ticket. A special journey had to be made some distance to the railway junction concerned, where confession and restitution was made before the station-master and clerks. Yes, God may put tremendous pressure upon us that our lives may be adjusted to His holy will, and our willingness to go all lengths is the proof of a truly broken and contrite heart.

In the same revival prayer group a deeply devoted sister asked God to reveal anything in her life that was hindering revival. She wrote, "It was as though scales fell from my eyes, and I saw my heart as I had never yet seen it. I saw that although I had confessed all my sins to God, I had to confess something to one I had wronged years before. I wept for hours, cried to God for strength to confess, feeling that if I did not some calamity would come upon my home. After some days I confessed part, but not the whole. I had a measure of peace, but knew that God wanted absolute obedience."

At the next prayer meeting the story of Ananias and Sapphira was read, the solemn account of two who "kept back part of the price" (Acts 5). The sister was moved, but thought that God was speaking to someone else. The following night she went to bed feeling wretched. In the early hours she awoke feeling God's hand upon her, and His holy presence filled the room. She cried aloud, "O Lord, I can't bear it! What must I do?" The Lord said, "Are you prepared to pay the price of revival?" "What is the price, Lord?" "A full confession," was the answer. She cried out, "How can I pay it, Lord?" Afraid to live and afraid to die, she spent the night in agony of soul. The next day this sister made full confession with tears to the one concerned, feeling that had she not done so her life would be taken away.

It is a deeply solemn matter to seek God's face for revival, for He may deal with us as He does not deal with others. From this incident let us learn to beware of applying to someone else what God is saying to us, and of feigning to fulfil the conditions while secretly keeping back part of the price. No sacrifice made in the interests of revival can be accepted as a substitute for implicit, unquestioning, whole-hearted obedience. "Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams" (1 Sam. 15:22). Finney put his finger on the root of the matter when he described revival as "a new beginning of obedience to God". "Oh that My people would hearken unto Me, that Israel would walk in My ways! I should soon subdue their enemies, and turn M y hand against their adversaries" (Ps. 8:12).

Here then is the first great condition of revival, that brokenness of heart that is sensitive to the least touch of the Spirit, and that has only to know the will of God to do it. One may cross fallow ground and not see where the feet have trod - no impression has been made. But when the plough and the harrow have done their work, and the soil is soft and friable, then the print of the foot is clearly seen. When our hearts are sensitive, responsive, and impressionable to the movements of God across our lives, we may be sure that the fallow ground is broken. My

reader, have you come to this point? Are you willing for God to bring you there? If so, the first step is with you. There must be, in the words of saintly Robert Chapman, “a looking back, and a dealing afresh with God respecting past iniquities”. This is the way to a humble and contrite heart.

Having faced what is implied in this command to break up the fallow ground, let us nevertheless remember that ploughing is not reaping; that breaking up the fallow ground is not the coming of the showers; that repentance is not revival. The one is but the pathway to the other. The farmer has no interest in ploughing save as the indispensable means to the harvest. “Doth the plow-man plow continually to sow? Doth he continually open and break the clods of his ground? When he hath made plain the face thereof, doth he not cast abroad the fitches, and scatter the cummin, and put in the wheat in rows. . . For his God doth instruct him aright, and doth teach him” (Isa. 28:24). In other words, the ploughman is not for ever ploughing and breaking up the ground. He does so until he has “made plain the face thereof”, until the ground is smooth and soft and even, and then he moves on to the next operation, the sowing of the seed.

Brokenness is not revival; it is a vital and indispensable step towards it. To make it an end instead of a means is not only to miss that fuller end that God desires, but may also lead us into an unhealthy introspection, if not into definite bondage. But how are we to know when the breaking up has been done to God’s satisfaction? He alone can reveal this to us, as Isaiah tells us - “For his God doth instruct him aright [in his judgment – Darby], and doth teach him” (verse 26). We cannot, of course, put these different processes of preparation into watertight compartments, for they are too intimately related, and dependent the one upon the other. As the man who is sowing or reaping now, will, in a few months hence, be ploughing once again; so God has often to bring the yielded servant back from his sowing or reaping to a deeper and more thorough ploughing. But with all these divine cycles there should be progress. Revival, however, is not ploughing or sowing, but the rain of ingathering. If a movement does not lead to reaping one may question whether it is revival in the full sense of the word.

The importance of heart-preparation becomes even clearer when seen in relation to prayer, the next vital step towards revival. The prepared heart becomes the praying heart that prevails with God.

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE PRAYING HEART

“Break up your fallow ground:
for it is time to seek the Lord, till He come and rain righteousness upon you”
Hos. 10:12

The fallow ground while it is untilled seems to suggest to us a state of complacency and of permanency, as though it had always been in that barren condition and there was no likelihood of its being otherwise. But when the plough has done its work what a different aspect it presents! True, it is still barren, but instead of an air of complacency it has now an air of expectancy, of hope, of desire. Before, it held its moisture and had no need of or desire for rain, but now it has become thirsty, as though it would cry out to heaven for the showers.

Thus the connection between breaking up the ground and seeking the Lord is clear. It is only out of a heart ploughed deep that there proceeds that kind of praying that prevails with God and brings revival.

A heart, resigned, submissive, meek,
My dear Redeemer's throne;
Where only Christ is heard to speak,
Where Jesus reigns alone.

A humble, lowly, contrite heart,
Believing, true and clean,
Which neither death nor life can part
From Him that dwells within.

A heart in every thought renewed,
And filled with love divine;
Perfect and right, and pure, and good,
A copy, Lord, of Thine.
CHARLES WESLEY.

Such a heart, in full sympathy with the heart of the Eternal, beating with the pulse-beat of heaven, was that of Nehemiah. It is laid bare for us in the first chapter of his book, when news is brought to him, far away in captivity, of the desolations of Zion.

“The remnant that are left of the captivity there in the province are in great affliction and reproach: the wall of Jerusalem also is broken down, and the gates thereof are burned with fire” (verse 3).

This was the situation which drew forth such burdened praying from the heart of Nehemiah.

Vision of the Need

Essential to the mighty intercession that is answered in revival is a clear vision of the need. What was it that so deeply moved this man of God? Firstly, it was the people of God “in great affliction and reproach”, He saw “Ichabod” written across the nation, “the glory hath departed”. The people who had been so mightily liberated by the outstretched hand of God were again in bondage. They had been so glorious and powerful and free in the eyes of men in the days that were past, and now they had been brought so low; this was the reproach that Nehemiah continually faced as he set to work to restore the situation.

“They laughed us to scorn, and despised us” (2:19); “What do these feeble Jews?” (4:2).

“Hear, O our God; for we are despised: and turn back their reproach upon their own head” (4:4).

Since they were God's people and called by His Name, a reproach upon them was a reproach upon Him. The glory of God was involved. This is the situation today. God is jealous for His great Name because His church, which should be “fair as the moon, clear as the sun, terrible as an army with banners” (Song 6:10), is all too often in bondage and affliction, the scorn and laughing-stock of the world.

Secondly, Nehemiah visualized “the wall of Jerusalem broken down”. The wall was the line of demarcation, that which separated those within from those without. A city without walls was defenceless, an easy prey to every enemy marauder. In a great measure it is true today that the walls of the city have been broken down, the church has lost her mark of separation, her defences are departed from her, and she is vulnerable to every attack of Satan.

Finally, “the gates thereof are burned with fire”. The gates were the key to the control of every city. In the gates sat the rulers of the city, the elders, the nobles, and the judges (Deut. 22:15; Job 29:7-10; Prov. 31:23). When the gates were burned, authority and dominion were destroyed, and the people were subdued. In the days of the early church “the gates of the city” were intact. God’s people knew the authority which was theirs in the Name of Jesus, and in their preaching and their praying and their working they used to the full that authority. How seldom is that authority or that power wielded today. How few there are of whom it may truthfully be said: “They shall not be ashamed, when they speak with their enemies in the gate” (Ps. 127:5).

Before there can be a vision of the possibilities of the hour there must be a vision of the need of the hour. With many there is an unwillingness to face facts; the state of the church in general is so much the state of their own hearts that they are unmoved by the need of either. Such are “blind, seeing only what is near”, to whom the Lord would say, “Thou sayest I am rich, and have gotten riches, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art the wretched one and miserable and poor and blind and naked” (Rev. 3:7). The need of the hour is for men of the stamp of Nehemiah to blow the trumpet in Zion and sound an alarm in God’s holy mountain, to open our eyes that we may “see the evil case that we are in, how Jerusalem lieth waste, and the gates thereof are burned with fire”, and to bring the challenge, “Let us build up the wall of Jerusalem, that we be no more a reproach” (Neh.2:17).

Reaction to the Need

And it came to pass, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned certain days; and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven” (1:4). In the reaction to spiritual need the state of the heart is revealed. The Saviour could not look upon the multitudes going astray as sheep not having a shepherd without being moved with compassion. He could not look out over the Jerusalem that had heard His word and witnessed His power and yet rejected His message without weeping. How we need to pray, “Lord crucified, give me a heart like Thine.” Such a heart had Nehemiah. If it had been otherwise he might have quieted his conscience and soothed his feelings with the thought that Jerusalem was far away, that he was well cared for in Shushan the palace, and that the desolations of Zion were no fault of his, so why need he be concerned?

He could have argued that this situation was in consequence of the people’s sin – the other people’s; and that it was up to them, not him, to remedy it. He might have fortified himself in his indifference by asserting that the end of the dispensation was at hand, that judgment on their departure from God was predicted, and therefore there was no hope of recovery or of revival until the coming of Messiah. But how different was his attitude!

If this was a time when Jerusalem was tempted to say, “Jehovah hath forsaken me, and the Lord hath forgotten me,” then God was ready to answer with the tenderness of a nursing mother for her child, “Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of My hands; thy walls [broken down though they may be] are continually before Me” (Isa. 49:14-16). It was the man after God’s own heart who was inspired to write long before, “Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: they shall prosper that love thee” (Ps. 122:6).

Because Nehemiah’s heart was in sympathy with God he could not contemplate her afflictions without mourning, nor could he love her without weeping. Prevailing prayer requires a tender, compassionate heart, a deep solicitude for the glory of God and the good of His people. Nehemiah wept and mourned.

While our praying is cold and formal and tearless we need not expect God to work for us as He did for Nehemiah. It is he that “goeth on his way weeping” who may expect to “come again with joy, bringing his sheaves with him” (Ps. 126:6). “Blessed are they “that mourn: for they shall be comforted” (Matt. 5:4).

In the face of such a need heart-sorrow alone is not sufficient, for tears cannot remedy the situation. A godly sorrow, however, if it is created by the Spirit, will move the will to action. Said Nehemiah, “I fasted and prayed before the God of heaven.” How seldom does the church of today turn in her overwhelming need to this old-fashioned, yet scriptural remedy. Other Old Testament saints like David (Ps. 109:24) and Jehoshaphat (2 Chron. 20:3), Ezra (Ezra 8:21) and Daniel (Dan. 9:3) did not hesitate to fast in times of great pressure or when the need of the hour demanded it. Jesus not only fasted Himself (Matt. 4:2; John 4:31-34), but gave us important teaching on the subject.

It is needful to point out that the Saviour said, “When ye fast” (Matt. 6:16), not “if ye fast”. He took it for granted that there would be times when His followers would feel this need, and so He predicted, “the days will come, when the Bridegroom shall be taken away from them, and then will they fast” (Matt. 9:15).

The early church fulfilled this prophecy of Christ. It was out of a time of fasting that there proceeded those mighty church-founding tours of Paul that turned the world upside down. He and Barnabas were separated for their special ministry “as they [with the other prophets and teachers at Antioch] ministered to the Lord and fasted” (Acts 13:2). It was with further fasting and prayer that they were sent forth by the church, and by the Holy Spirit (Acts 13:3, 4). It was “in fastings often” that the apostolic group commended themselves as ministers of God that they might ; give no occasion of stumbling (2 Cor. 6:3-5; 11:27).

“Be ye imitators of me,” exhorts the apostle, “even as I also am of Christ” (1 Cor. 11:1).

Many mightily used in revival, as well as others whose names will never be known till the day of revealing, have followed the example of Christ and the apostles, and given themselves wholly to prayer in this way. No rule can be laid down since Scripture does not. Factors of health and strength and general circumstances must be taken into consideration. Each must be led in such a matter by the dictates of the Spirit. But let us remember that a desperate situation demands desperate measures. Fasting is an indication that we mean business with God. “Ye shall seek Me, and find Me, when ye shall search for Me with all your heart. . . saith the Lord” (Jer. 29:13).

Intercession for the Need

Nehemiah records the substance of the prayer he then offered, and it must surely be included amongst the greatest prayers of Scripture. Notice firstly how majestic is his conception of God. His appreciation of the greatness of Israel’s need is more than matched by his appreciation of the greatness of his God to deal with it. But for the latter, the former would have driven him to despair. Listen then to his prayer: “I beseech Thee, O Jehovah, the God of heaven, the great and terrible God, that keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love Him and keep His commandments” (verse 5). Here is a heart that is filled with reverential awe for God, even that fear of the Lord which is the beginning of wisdom (Prov. 9:10).

Nehemiah had reason indeed to number himself amongst “Thy servants who delight to fear Thy Name” (verse 11). How little is such an attitude towards God in evidence today, even amongst the saints. It is a mark of revival, however, and will be found wherever there are Christians who have paid the price for blessing; it is widespread when God comes down in

power. Such a fear of God is possible only to those who have clear views of the majesty and holiness of the Lord on the one hand, and of His love and faithfulness on the other.

To Nehemiah God was not only “glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders”, but He was also “gracious and full of compassion”, “the faithful God, which keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love Him” (Deut. 7:9). Nehemiah was able to prevail in prayer because he held God to be faithful and pleaded His promises. He reminded Him of what He had covenanted to do (verse 8) and pressed Him to fulfil it. This is a spiritual lever that never fails to move the hand that moves the world. This great principle characterized the praying of Abraham, Moses, Elijah, and Daniel. All the mighty interceding of the ages that has ever shaken the kingdom of darkness has been based upon the promises of God.

Why should we expect God to do what He has not agreed to do? Why should we expect Him to do less than what He has promised? Duncan Campbell says of those who were seeking God for revival in Lewis prior to the Awakening (1949), “They were possessed of the conviction that God, being a covenant-keeping God, must keep His covenant engagements. Had He not promised to ‘pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground’? Here was something that for them existed in the field of possibility; why were they not actually experiencing it? But they came at length to the place where, with one of old, they could cry ‘Our God. . . is able. . . and He will’” (The Lewis Awakening).

From this recorded prayer of Nehemiah two other important features emerge. Firstly, there is the earnestness and steadfastness which characterized his praying. “Hearken unto the prayer. . . which I pray before Thee at this time, day and night” (verse 6). We do not see here the passion or enthusiasm of the moment, soon to fade with the passage of time; nor yet the supplication that could be reduced to silence by reverses and disappointments. There was the will and the determination to win through, as we see by the fact that he prayed without ceasing. Here is surely an indispensable factor in prevailing prayer. Many who pray never obtain because they do not persevere. “In due season we shall reap, if we faint not” (Gal. 6:9) is certainly true of prayer.

Many, alas, faint and drop out of the battle who began so well, because the “due season” did not arrive as soon as they expected, or because the price proved to be more than they were prepared to pay. There can be no “praying through” without that strong purpose wrought in the heart by the Spirit. O, that God may grant us the steadfast continuance that marked the praying of the upper room (Acts 1:14), and of the early church (Acts 2:42; 6:4). “It is time to seek the Lord till He come and rain righteousness upon you.”

Secondly, there was the confession of Nehemiah mingling with his petitions. “I confess the sins of the children of Israel” (verses 6, 7). He did not tell God how hardly they were being treated, nor did he make mention of their affliction and reproach; instead he exposed the root of the trouble – the sin of the people, laying it open before God in confession. This was the condition for the turning again of their captivity (1 Kings 8:46-49). There could be no restoration without repentance. Nehemiah could not force others to confess, but he could confess for them.

This is an important feature in the work of intercession, identifying oneself not only with the need, but also with the sin of those for whom intercession is made. Moses did this (Exod. 32:31, 32; 34:9), and so did Daniel (Dan. 9:4-14). But Nehemiah also confessed that both he and his circle were involved; for he says, “Yea, I and my father’s house have sinned. We have dealt very corruptly against Thee.” He was ready to acknowledge that he and his family had contributed their quota to the iniquities of God’s people. Nor was he satisfied with generalizing, but stated wherein they had sinned, by uncovering the sorry tale of broken

commandments, statutes, and judgments (verse 7). In our confessions we must be as specific and definite as in our petitions.

The Divine Answer

When Nehemiah commenced to seek God he may have had little idea how his prayers were to be answered and the situation recovered. Of one thing he could be certain, God would be faithful to His promises. But as he continued to press his case in the courts of heaven there was borne in upon him by the Spirit the conviction that he himself was to be the instrument in the fulfilment of his own prayers, and that God had given him this place of influence in the Persian palace that he might use it for the good of Jerusalem. A new note comes into his praying: "Prosper, I pray Thee, Thy servant this day, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man. (Now I was cupbearer to the king)" (verse 11).

This revivalist "sought the peace of Jerusalem; prayed for it; and was willing to sacrifice wealth, ease, safety, and even life itself, if he might be the instrument of restoring the desolations of Israel" (Treasury of Scripture Knowledge). Perhaps even Nehemiah did not anticipate all the difficulties and dangers, the afflictions and sorrows that were to beset his path before the vision was fulfilled, but he was prepared to go through with God, committing the unknown to Him. "If. . . God command thee. . . thou shalt be able" (Exod. 18:23).

An intercessor cannot expect to prevail unless willing to be the instrument, if God should require it, in the fulfilment of the prayer. Moses had no doubt offered a thousand prayers for the deliverance of his people from Egyptian slavery, and how his heart must have been gladdened at the burning bush when the Lord said to him, "I am come down to deliver them" (Exod. 3:8), but what a bombshell when He added, "Come now therefore, and I will send thee unto Pharaoh, that thou mayest bring forth My people" (verse 10).

Similarly with the disciples, Jesus commanded them to pray that God would send forth labourers into the harvest, and then forthwith He sent out the twelve to become the answer to their own prayers (Matt. 9:38-10:1). Let all who would intercede for revival face up to the possible implications of their praying. Many a cherished ambition may be shattered. Many a smooth pathway of ease and safety may have to be exchanged for a thorny track, encompassed with dangers, afflictions, and reproaches. Do not pray for the outpouring of the Spirit unless, like Nehemiah, you mean to go through with God. Perhaps if some knew what was involved they would be imploring God not to send revival. "But the people that know their God [and can therefore trust Him] shall be strong, and do exploits" (Dan. 11:32).

The writer was once asked at the conclusion of a meeting, "Do you think that one person can bring revival?" "Yes," was the reply, "for God says, 'I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and streams upon the dry ground.'" This first chapter of Nehemiah shows us "him that is thirsty", and the ensuing chapters describe "the streams upon the dry ground". Nehemiah was prospered before the king, and he came to Jerusalem to survey the ruins of the city. He gathered the nobles and rulers about him, and when he had put the case before them he said, "Come and let us build up the wall of Jerusalem, that we be no more a reproach" (2:17).

The waters had begun to flow out from the thirsty soul to the dry ground with their life-giving power. "Let us rise up and build", they responded. "So they strengthened their hands for the good work" (verse 18). The trowel is prepared, the sword is furbished, and the work begins. Many willing hands are grappling now with the situation, the purposes of God are moving forward apace, but let us not forget the prayers and the tears and the anguish of that one man who prevailed with God. We do not need the gifts of Nehemiah to prepare our hearts, seek the Lord, and prevail. It is thus that revival comes.

At a school for the sons of missionaries in Ootacamund, South in India, there took place in 1930 a remarkable movement of the Spirit, notwithstanding that it was localized in its effect. R. T. Naish, the writer and speaker on prophetic subjects, was the instrument God used, although the work had begun before he arrived. Out of 130 boys in the school, 100 professed conversion, and with almost all of these there was deep conviction of sin and much brokenness. It all happened so suddenly as to take the staff completely by surprise, for they had no expectation of any such thing and were unable adequately to cope with it. One still on the staff of this school, who remembers this gracious movement of the Spirit, records that the boys seemed to sing all day, became Bible-conscious, and several were baptized. The last Sunday of the Mission eighty boys were at the Lord's table. But what was the explanation of the sudden movement? It was afterwards discovered that three boys under twelve years of age had been going out in the early morning to the edge of the jungle to pray. They had prevailed with God and He had answered by fire. "Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings hast Thou established strength, because of Thine adversaries, that Thou mightest still the enemy and the avenger" (Ps. 8:2). If they prevailed, why may not we?

One further lesson from the story of Nehemiah is that there is nothing transient about the fruit of true revival. It is typified here by the figure of building. It is the purpose of God that something solid and stable, standing the test of time and eternity, shall emerge out of the spiritual upheavals of revival. The excitement will subside, certain features of the movement may pass away, but that building which is the workmanship of the Spirit, that which is God's real objective, will abide.

In the excitement of the incidentals, it is vital to keep the divine purpose in view, and build according to the pattern. Nehemiah did not require an architect to plan where the walls should be. He had but to build upon the old foundations, and to reconstruct the walls and gates as they were of old time. So today God desires us to build according to the apostolic pattern. There are stones hidden by the accumulated rubbish of the centuries that are still waiting to be uncovered. "Will they revive the stones out of the heaps of rubbish?" asked the scornful and incredulous Sanballat (4:2). They will – they did! "So the wall was finished. . . and all the heathen that were about us feared, and were much cast down in their own eyes: for they perceived that this work was wrought of our God" (6:15, 16). Here then is the fruit of a praying heart – a work manifestly wrought of God.

The epic story of Nehemiah demonstrates what God may achieve through one man rightly related to Him. God is not looking for men; He is looking for a man. His methods have not changed since the day He said through Ezekiel, "I sought for a man among them, that should make up the fence, and stand in the gap before Me for the land" (Ezek. 22:30).

Is the reader concerned that no one else in the local church, the town, or the district seems burdened with the need of revival? Does the situation seem beyond hope? Give the Lord the channel of a thirsty soul, and there is no limit to what He may do. God is looking for a man, a woman, to stand in the gap; will you be that one?

CHAPTER NINE

LIFTING UP HOLY HANDS

"I desire therefore that the men pray in every place, lifting up holy hands without wrath and disputing" 1 Tim. 2: 8

Since revival is the product of prevailing prayer, let us first of all be quite clear as to what prevailing prayer is, and then examine the basic factors which condition our approach to God.

Prevailing Prayer

Jacob's encounter with God at Peniel is the first instance in which a man was said to prevail with God. "Let me go," said the Stranger to Jacob, "for the day breaketh. And he said, I will not let thee go, except thou bless me." Here was a man determined to be blessed, and he was blessed. "Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel: for thou has striven with God and with men, and hast prevailed. . . . And He blessed him there" (Gen. 32:24-30). Jacob prevailed with God because he obtained from God the blessing he sought.

Prayer is a comprehensive word, and we may rightly think of it in terms of communion, worship, thanksgiving, praise, confession and so forth. But here we are concerned with that aspect of prayer that Scripture calls petition, supplication, or intercession. The great prayer promises are mostly related to this aspect, and how definite they are: "It shall be done for them" (Matt. 18:19); "ye shall have" (Mark 11:24); "it shall be given you" (Luke 11:9); "that will I do" (John 14:14); "it shall be done unto you" (John 15:7); "He will give it you" (John 16:23); "ye shall receive" (John 16:24). James says, "'Ye have not because ye ask not. Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss'" (Jas. 4:2, 3).

These and many similar passages confirm that it is both the desire and intention of God that His children should not only ask, but obtain what they ask; and if they are not obtaining, the purpose of God in their asking has not been fulfilled. May this fact be as indelibly printed on every heart, as it is on the pages of His word - God desires us to prevail in prayer. "Let us therefore draw near with boldness unto the throne of grace, that we may receive. . ." (Heb. 4:16).

The expression "praying through", although not found in Scripture, is sometimes used for prevailing with God, and emphasizes an important aspect of the subject. It has been defined as "praying one's way into full faith, emerging while yet praying into the assurance that one has been accepted and heard, so that one becomes actually aware of receiving, by firmest anticipation, and in advance of the event, the thing for which one asks".

This throws light on the paradox of Mark 11:24, "All things whatsoever ye pray and ask for, believe that ye have received them, and ye shall have them." When in prayer we are brought to that point of faith where we believe that we have received, in spite of there being nothing outward to confirm it, then we have prevailed with God, or "prayed through". To continue in prayer for that object will now seem the height of folly and unbelief, since the heart is assured that the decree granting the request has gone forth from the throne, and will shortly be fulfilled.

In Hannah's prayer for a son Scripture gives us a clear example of "praying through". "She was in bitterness of soul, and prayed unto the Lord, and wept sore" (1 Sam. 1:10), but when Eli said to her, "Go in peace: and the God of Israel grant thy petition" (verse 17), she received the assurance that she had been accepted and heard. When Hannah believed that she had prevailed with God, she wiped her tears and prayed no more. "So the woman went her way, and did eat, and her countenance was no more sad. . . and the Lord remembered her. And it came to pass, when the time was come about, that Hannah conceived, and bare a son; and she called his name Samuel, saying, Because I have asked him of the Lord" (verses 18-20).

This assurance of having "prayed through" before the answer is actually given is not essential in order to prevail with God. According to our definition we prevail whenever we obtain what we ask, and in many cases there is no assurance of having been heard until our eyes see the

fulfilment of our prayers. It was thus with the release of Peter from prison, when “prayer was made earnestly of the church unto God for him” (Acts 12:5). These prayers prevailed with God, and an angel was sent to bring him out. But when Peter knocked at the house of Mary, the mother of John Mark, the saints were still on their knees, and refused to believe the word of Rhoda “that Peter stood before the gate”.

If they had been praying in unbelief they could hardly have prevailed, for it is said of the doubter, “let not that man think that he shall receive anything of the Lord” (Jas. 1:6, 7). Perhaps in their desire to “continue steadfastly in prayer” they had forgotten the necessity of “watching therein with thanksgiving” (Col. 4:2). Be that as it may, one thing is clear, they prevailed with God without having any prior assurance of it. They knew not that they had been heard until Peter presented himself at the house.

When believers have an intolerable burden upon them so that they pray with strong crying and tears, and with groanings which cannot be uttered, as is often the case preceding a revival, it is very common for such intercessors to know beforehand that they have prevailed.

A striking case of this is given by Charles Finney: “The first ray of light that broke in upon the midnight which rested on the churches in Oneida County, in the fall of 1825, was from a woman in feeble health who, I believe, had never been in a powerful revival. Her soul was exercised about sinners. She was in an agony for the land. She did not know what ailed her, but she kept praying more and more, till it seemed as if her agony would destroy her body. At length she became full of joy, and exclaimed, ‘God has come! God has come!’

There is no mistake about it, the work is begun, and is going all over the region.’ And sure enough, the work began, and her family were almost all converted, and the work spread all over that part of the country. Now do you think that woman was deceived? I tell you, no. She knew she had prevailed with God in prayer. She had travailed in birth for souls, and she knew it” (Lecture II on Revivals of Religion).

Praying through should ever be our objective, but God may permit us to see the answer before we are conscious of having prevailed. To prevail with God for revival is to “seek the Lord until He come” in revival blessing, whether that coming is, at first, only in the conviction of our hearts, as in the above case; or whether it be straightway in the full manifestation of divine power.

Alas, not all who pray, though their prayers be fervent and prolonged, succeed in prevailing with God. Of Moab we read, “when he wearieth himself upon the high place, and shall come to his sanctuary to pray, that he shall not prevail” (Isa. 16:12). And the reason was not because Moab was outside the elect race of Israel, but because God had seen “the pride of Moab, that he is very proud” (verse 6). There are many such hindrances which are set forth in Scripture as specific reasons for unanswered prayer. It is these basic factors in our approach to God that must now be considered.

The All-Inclusive Condition

When David asked the question, “Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? And who shall stand in His holy place?” - and answered it by declaring, “He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart” (Ps. 24:3), he set before us the all-inclusive condition of our approach to God. This is true in all aspects of prayer, but especially in that of intercession.

He whose hands are clean and whose heart is pure has fulfilled all the basic conditions of prevailing prayer; he is a righteous man, and “the supplication of a righteous man has much strength [to prevail] in its working” (Jas. 5:16 lit. trans.). To intercede is to plead in the court of heaven against our adversary the Devil, to say with the widow in the parable, “Do me justice of mine adversary” (Luke 18:3, margin). But that adversary is also in the court to

oppose us as “the accuser of [the] brethren” (Rev. 12:10), and any unrighteousness he can find in us will strengthen his case against us, and must lead to our defeat.

“The Judge of all the earth” cannot vindicate a law-breaker, therefore the suppliant, if he would win his suit, must have a case which bears investigation. The strength of his appeal must lie in the fact that he has righteousness on his side. “The eyes of the Lord are toward the righteous, and His ears are open unto their cry” (Ps. 34:15).

Who are the righteous? Who are the pure in heart? Only those who have in repentance turned from their sin, abandoned their own righteousness, and in faith subjected themselves to the righteousness of God (Rom. 10:3-4). None other is deemed righteous by the great Judge, and none other has any right of appeal whatsoever in the court of heaven.

This however is not all. The saving work of Christ in the believer is the ground, but not the guarantee of heart purity. In other words, being born again does not necessarily ensure that our hands are clean and our hearts pure, in the sense of this passage. We may be true believers and yet not be qualified to “ascend into the hill of the Lord” as effective intercessors. Lot is described as “that righteous man” (2 Pet. 2:8), but he had not the righteousness of the intercessor, and when God sought for a man to stand in the gap for Sodom that He might not destroy it, He had to turn to Abraham. It is worthy of note that Abraham did far more for Sodom from without than Lot ever did from within.

The righteousness of the intercessor is not merely that which is imputed, or put to our account, when we believe (Rom. 3:21-28), but that which is imparted and manifested in a holy life. This is the righteousness that a believer must seek (Matt. 6:33), and after which he must hunger and thirst (Matt. 5:6), to prevail as an intercessor. This necessarily involves an honest dealing with all in the life that is contrary to the righteousness of God, especially those unrighteousnesses that are specifically stated in Scripture to hinder prayer.

Sin

Harbouring in the life that which we instinctively know to be sin will effectively prevent us praying through to God. “If I regard [or countenance] iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear” (Ps. 66:18). All fellowship with God is rendered impossible by unjudged sin. This is obvious the moment we consider His character. “God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in the darkness, we lie, and do not the truth” (1 John 1:5).

It was to the Lord’s people that Isaiah had to say, “Your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid His face from you, that He will not hear” (Isa. 59:2). The hands that are lifted up in the hill of the Lord must needs be “holy hands”, lest God should have to say as He did to His ancient people, “When ye spread forth your hands, I will hide Mine eyes from you: yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood” (Isa. 1:15).

But the situation was one they could remedy, and so the message continued, “Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before Mine eyes” (verse 16). The blood to cleanse and the water to sanctify are available today, and may be applied by confession and faith (1 John 1:9; Acts 26:18).

Is there one reading these lines with some sin of thought, word, or deed upon the conscience? Make no pretence of praying until that sin has been confessed and repented of, for God says, “Bring no more vain oblations; [your] incense is an abomination unto Me” (Isa. 1:13). Such prayers are not only ineffective, they are an insult to the throne of God’s holiness - an insult far greater than that of an earthly subject who appears in the august presence of his sovereign

in torn or dirty clothes; or who, on being introduced, should stretch out a filthy hand. James was addressing Christians when he said, "Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double-minded" (Jas. 4:8).

Idolatry

In addition to general sins and iniquities, there are some specific sins that are specially mentioned in Scripture as barriers to prevailing prayer, and these must be carefully watched. One is idolatry. Of some of the elders of Israel God had to say, "These men have taken their idols into their heart. . . should I be inquired of at all by them?" (Ezek. 14:3). God will resolutely turn His face from the prayers of all who cherish idols in their hearts. In the very postures commonly adopted in prayer, the bowing of the head or the bending of the knee, the sovereignty of God is acknowledged. To submit to this proper relationship between the Sovereign and the suppliant is the foundation of all prayer.

Idolatry, however, denies this very thing. How can we expect the One Whom we are commanded to love with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, to grant our petitions when He sees in our hearts that which rivals His supremacy? Would a sovereign grant the petition of a subject he knew to be disloyal? Would a lover release her treasures to a beloved who she had discovered secretly cherished another more than her? Let us remember as we pray, "all things are naked and laid open before the eyes of Him with whom we have to do" (Heb. 4:13). "Who [then] shall ascend into the hill of the Lord. . .? He that hath a pure heart" - cleansed from the pollutions of idols.

Lord, I come to Thee for rest,
Take possession of my breast.
There Thy blood-bought right maintain,
And without a rival reign.
J. NEWTON.

An idol may be defined as any person or thing that has usurped in the heart the place of pre-eminence that belongs to the Lord. When a relationship with a friend or loved one is causing the spiritual life to wane we may suspect that that one has become an idol. When we are seeking first our business interests and vainly supposing that God will add to us the things of His kingdom, when in fact we are more concerned and anxious about material prosperity than spiritual prosperity, we should examine ourselves as to whether we are not joined to idols. When our homes and families become the be-all and end-all, and we are prepared to make a spiritual compromise to please them; when some pastime or recreational interest is our absorbing passion; when we are more concerned about our outward appearance than the state of our hearts; when our minds are perpetually full of some material possession or some human ambition, are we not as guilty of idolatry as any Israelite who bowed the knee to Baal? "What agreement hath a temple of God with idols?" (2 Cor. 6:16).

The dearest idol I have known,
What'er that idol be,
Help me to tear it from Thy throne,
And worship only Thee.
W. COWPER.

It is true that where idols are detected they must be ruthlessly exterminated; but since prevention is better than cure it is vital to heed the exhortation, "guard yourselves from idols" (1 John 5:21). A sure preventative is to maintain at all times the freshness of our "first love"

toward the Saviour; to have, like Count Zinzendorf of Moravia, but “one passion - Jesus, Jesus only”; to cultivate His continual presence and live always in the sunshine of His smile. For as idolatry is an insuperable obstacle to prevailing prayer, just so is a personal, all-absorbing passion for Christ a mighty factor in praying through. “Delight thyself also in the Lord; and He shall give thee the petitions of thine heart” (Ps. 37:4).

Of the one who dwells in the secret place of the most High the Lord says, “Because he hath set his love upon Me. . . he shall call upon Me, and I will answer him” (Ps. 91:14, 15). All the great intercessors of the Bible have been characterized by this intensity of devotion to the Lord. It was so with Abraham, “the friend of God”; Moses, “whom the Lord knew face to face”; David, the man after God’s own heart; Daniel, the man greatly beloved; and Paul, who suffered the loss of all things and counted them as refuse that he might win Christ. No wonder they princes who prevailed with God.

An unforgiving Spirit

Here is a common obstacle to prevailing prayer. Christ said, “Whosoever ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have aught against anyone; that your Father also. . . may forgive you” (Mark 11:25). In the pattern prayer of the Lord, the fact that “we have forgiven our debtors” is cited as a ground upon which we ask God to “forgive us our debts” (Matt. 6:12). At the conclusion of the prayer the Lord further showed that the reverse was also true, that if we did not forgive we should not be forgiven. There are clearly two aspects of forgiveness in the New Testament, and they need to be distinguished. Failure to do this leads to confusion, and to the harmful theory that the teachings of Christ in the Gospels do not apply to this age (see Matt. 7:26; 28:20).

There is the initial forgiveness of the sinner, and there is the conditional forgiveness of the saint. The former is for ever ours when we repent and believe the gospel: “Repent ye and be baptized. . . unto the remission of your sins” (Acts 2:38; 3:19; 13:38, etc.). This, accompanied as it is by the new birth, brings the sinner into that relationship with God of Father and child. From then on conditional forgiveness applies. As children of God our fellowship with the Father is possible only as the sins we commit are confessed and thereupon forgiven (1 John 1:9).

Where a believer does not confess he is not forgiven, though he is still a child of his Heavenly Father. A child who refuses to acknowledge his wrongdoing forfeits his father’s forgiveness, ceases to enjoy his fellowship, and may, if he persists in his course, be disinherited, but he does not cease to be his child. He cannot be un-born. So it is in the spiritual relationship. This forfeiting of forgiveness concerns only those whose relationship to God is that of Father and child, as Christ showed when He said, “neither will your heavenly Father forgive you. . . .” While we regard the iniquity of an unforgiving spirit in our hearts, how can the Lord hear our confession of other sins, and bestow the forgiveness that we refuse to another? (see Matt. 18:21-35). “With what measure ye mete it shall be measured unto you” (Matt. 7:2).

The importance of this teaching in relation to prevailing prayer cannot be over-emphasized. Many a time a bitter spirit maintained by one Christian towards another has been like a great dam holding back the river of blessing; only when the one concerned was broken down by the Spirit of God were the sluice-gates of blessing opened.

The famous “four points” which Evan Roberts believed conditioned the outpouring of the Spirit were (1) Dealing with unconfessed sin. (2) Dealing with doubtful things. (3) Implicit obedience to the Spirit. 4) Public confession of Christ.

Under the second point he would commonly say: “Have you forgiven everybody, everybody, EVERYBODY? If not, don’t expect forgiveness of your own sins. You won’t get it.”

Sins of Omission

These are obvious hindrances to prevailing prayer. “Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, we have boldness toward God; and whatsoever we ask, we receive of Him, because we keep His commandments, and do the things that are pleasing in His sight” (1 John 3:21, 22). Have we an uncondemned conscience concerning the things that God has commanded us to do? Have we kept His commandments? How can we stand before the throne with that boldness which prevails with God if our conscience is accusing us of disobedience? The particular command that the apostle has in mind here is that of loving one another in a practical way, for he has just said, “Whoso hath the world’s goods, and beholdeth his brother in need, and shutteth up his compassion from him, how doth the love of God abide in him? My little children, let us not love in word, neither with the tongue; but in deed and truth” (verses 17, 18).

Failure to obey the supreme command of Christ to “love one another”, and to do it “in deed and truth”, and “out of a pure heart fervently”, is an obvious cause of failure in prayer. This is even taught in the Old Testament. According to the law our whole duty manward is contained in the precept, “Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself”; but Solomon reminds us that, “He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer is an abomination” (Prov. 28:9). Love cannot do other than minister to the needs of others according to its ability. “God so loved. . . that He gave.”

Believers who are mean and close with that which God has given them when there is need all around them, and the work of God is retrenching in many lands through lack of support, need not look far to see why their prayers do not prevail. “Whoso stoppeth his ears at the cry of the poor, he also shall cry, but shall not be heard.” (Prov. 21:13; see also Isa. 58:7-9). After George Muller’s death it was discovered that he had during his life given away, out of personal gifts designated to him, £81,490. He left £60, plus the value of his books and furniture, estimated at £ 100. Such sacrificial giving had without doubt a direct bearing on the extraordinary power he possessed to prevail with God in prayer.

Another common sin of omission relates to vows. “When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it; for He hath no pleasure in fools: pay that which thou vowest” (Eccles. 5:4). If we have made a vow to God and have not fulfilled it; if we promised that we would do something, and have not done it, we need not expect to prevail in prayer. As well may a man who has persistently refused to pay his just debts go to his creditor and ask for further credit. The hands we lift up in the sanctuary are not holy hands unless they have fulfilled the promises and vows our lips have uttered. A vow performed, however, gives us power with God. It is said of the Egyptians, in a day yet future, they “shall vow a vow unto the Lord, and shall perform it. . . and He shall be entreated of them, and shall heal them” (Isa. 19:21, 22). And again, “Pay thy vows unto the Most High: and call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify Me” (Ps. 50:14; also 65:1, 2). It was when Jonah said, “I will pay that which I have vowed” (Jonah 2:9, 10), that his prayer prevailed, and he was delivered from the belly of the fish.

There are many other things that could be dealt with under this heading. Some of them are not covered by specific commands, but conscience tells us that they are among the “things that are pleasing in His sight” which we have failed to do. Let us put them right now if we would prevail in prayer.

Unchristlike Relationships

These, especially between husband and wife, may be a serious hindrance to prevailing prayer. Husbands are commanded, “Dwell with your wives according to knowledge, giving honour unto the woman, as unto the weaker vessel, as being also joint-heirs of the grace of life; to the end that your prayers be not hindered” (1 Pet. 3:7).

Where a husband fails to show that due tenderness and consideration and unselfishness for the weaker vessel, or where the wife fails in her duty towards her husband, which is that “she doeth him good and not evil all the days of her life”, and “the law of kindness is on her tongue” (Prov. 31:12, 26), effective intercession will be greatly hindered. Failure on the part of either or both to see that the most intimate matters of their married life are pleasing before His all-seeing eyes and stamped with “holiness unto the Lord”, may effectively prevent their prevailing with God.

Impure Motives

Whatever form our praying takes, if it be worship, confession, supplication, or intercession, it is vital that we “draw near with a true heart” (Heb. 10:22), that is, in absolute sincerity, if we would really touch the throne. James speaks of two reasons why “ye have not”: firstly, “because ye ask not”; and secondly, “because ye ask amiss, that ye may spend it in your pleasures” (4:2, 3); in other words, the motive in asking is selfish. When the motive in prayer is the satisfying of our own desires and pleasures, or when we desire the Almighty to pander to our own pride and love of reputation, or to act for our own convenience, the motive is clearly unholy, and God cannot and will not fulfil our petitions.

It is possible to pray for a right thing with a wrong motive. It is certainly pleasing to God that we plead for revival, but our prayer for revival may be displeasing to God because the motive is wrong. It is vital to examine our hearts on this matter. Let us pause a moment and ask ourselves, “Why do I want revival? How much does my own personal gain figure in my thinking and praying for it?”

R. A. Torrey wrote in this connection, “Many prayers for revival are purely selfish. The churches desire revivals in order that the membership may be increased, in order that the church may have a position of more power and influence in the community, in order that the church treasury may be filled, in order that a good report may be made at the presbytery, or conference, or association. For such low purposes as these, churches and ministers oftentimes are praying for a revival, and oftentimes too, God does not answer the prayer.

Why should we pray for a revival? For the glory of God, because we cannot endure it that God should continue to be dishonoured by the worldliness of the church, by the sins of unbelievers, by the proud unbelief of the day, because God’s word is being made void; in order that God may be glorified by the outpouring of His Spirit on the church of Christ.”

Among those who seek God for revival, there may be few who are, from the outset, wholly free from the admixture of selfish motives in their petitions. This need not deter or discourage if this condition of prevailing prayer is kept constantly in view. When we are aware of being moved by anything less than a desire for the supreme glory of God, let us avail ourselves of the cleansing of the blood by confession, and look to God in faith that He may by the Spirit bring “every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ” (2 Cor. 10:5). God uses the very activities and heart exercises of prayer to effect this.

The diaries of David Brainerd, whose prayers and labours brought revival in 1745 to the American Indians to whom he had been sent, contain this entry: “I was wholly free from selfish ends in my supplications for the poor Indians. . . All my cares, fears, and desires

disappeared, and were of little more importance than a puff of wind. I longed that God would get to Himself a name among the heathen, and I appealed to Him with the greatest freedom that He knew I 'preferred Him above my chief joy'."

Such selfless pleading is irresistible in the courts of heaven. There is prevailing power in our intercessions when we can pray with the sincerity of David, who said, "Give ear unto my prayer, that goeth not out of feigned lips" (Ps. 17:1); and when we can truly append this desire to our petitions, "that the Father maybe glorified in the Son" (John 14:13).

In view of the desperate need of revival, are we willing to draw near to God and plead for this great thing? If so, we must continually remember the way of approach that God has enjoined. The priest of old, as he drew near to the sanctuary, first to the altar, red with the blood of sprinkling, and then the laver with its pure water.

The altar would remind him that in approaching God the conscience must be purged from the guilt of sin, while the water, for the washing of his body, would speak of the cleansing of the outer life - the action of the Spirit applying the word, and effecting obedience to it in the life. This is "the washing of water [the Spirit] with the word" (Eph. 5:26) to which the Psalmist also referred when he said, "Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed thereto according to Thy word" (Ps. 119:9). Both the blood and the water would seem to cry out, "Be ye clean, ye that bear the vessels of the Lord" (Isa. 52:11).

So with us, only clean hands and a pure heart can qualify us for the sanctuary, and these necessitate the continual application of blood and water. "Purge me with hyssop [the blood], and I shall be clean: wash me [the water], and I shall be whiter than snow" (Ps. 51:7).

Let the water and the blood,
From Thy riven side which flowed,
Be of sin the double cure,
Cleanse me from its guilt and power.

A. M. TOPLADY

The way into the holiest is open. The need of the hour is true intercessors. The goal of revival beckons us. "Let us draw near with a true heart in fulness of faith, having our hearts sprinkled [with the blood] from an evil conscience, and our body washed with pure water" (Heb. 10:22).

CHAPTER TEN

THE DYNAMICS OF PRAYER

"Thou hast wrestled with God. . . and hast prevailed" (Gen. 32:28, Darby).

From the basic factors which condition our approach to God we now come to the working factors, the dynamics of prevailing prayer. These are the operations of mind and heart which give force to our praying. These are the conditions of prayer to which God has pledged Himself to respond.

But there's a power which man can wield
When mortal aid is vain,
That eye, that arm, that love to reach,
That listening ear to gain.

That power is prayer, which soars on high,
Through Jesus to the throne,
And moves the hand which moves the world,
To bring salvation down.
J. A. WALLACE.

These principles are closely related to those just considered, for the state of one's heart in approaching God will largely determine the working of one's heart in the exercise of prayer. The New Testament contains six principles, and any one of them, if obeyed, will ensure that the prayer prevails. The first requires that we pray

In the Position of Abiding

"If ye abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatsoever ye will, and it shall be done unto you" (John 15:7). In the previous chapter the Lord Jesus had told the disciples that the Holy Spirit would come to them. "In that day," He said, "ye shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in Me, and I in you" (14:20). In other words, the Spirit would reveal to them the true significance of the Son being "in the Father," and that they were similarly in Him, and He in them.

What He meant by being "in the Father" is fully unfolded throughout the gospel of John. The Father was His whole source and sphere of life. He had not come of Himself, but had been sent by the Father (John 7:28; 8:42). He had no teaching or words of His own, but spoke the words given Him by the Father (John 7:16, etc.). He could do nothing of Himself, only what He saw the Father doing (John 5:19). His very life depended on the Father (John 6:57). He ever sought, not His own will or glory, but the Father's (John 5:30; 8:49). Because He chose to be limited by the Father's will, dependent on the Father's resources, seeking the Father's glory, He could truly declare, "I am in My Father".

To abide in Christ is to maintain in principle the same relationship towards Him that He maintained towards the Father. "He that saith he abideth in Him ought himself also to walk even as He walked" (1 John 2:6). This means firstly, a life of submission in which we gladly consent to the limitations of "that good and acceptable and perfect will of God". We accept a bondage which we find to be perfect freedom. We pray, "Make me a captive Lord, and then I shall be free." This was truly His life who said, "I delight to do Thy will, O my God" (Ps. 40:8); and again, "My meat is to do the will of Him that sent Me" (John 4:34). It must be ours also if we would abide.

Then it must be also a life of renunciation of ourselves, our abilities, our resources. We have to come to the place of weakness and emptiness that His strength may be made perfect in us. This is the place of abiding. He is the vine, we are the branches. The vine has everything, the branch has nothing. "As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself. . . so neither can ye" (John 15:4). This fact, obvious to the mind, does not easily sink down into the heart. Through the bitter experiences of failure we have to learn the lesson.

Hudson Taylor said that when God decided to evangelize Inland China, He looked around to find a man who was weak enough for Him to use. The attitude of self renunciation characterized the life of the Saviour. "The Son can do nothing of Himself" (John 5:19, 30); "My teaching is not Mine" (John 7:16); "neither have I come of Myself" (John 8:42). We are called to follow Him. "Whosoever he be of you that renounceth not all that he hath, he cannot be My disciple" (Luke 14:33).

Finally, abiding involves a life of faith which looks to Christ for all, and finds its all sufficiency in Him. Alongside the statement of Christ, "Apart from Me ye can do nothing" (John 15:5), we must put Paul's triumphant declaration, "I can do all things in Him that strengtheneth me" (Phil. 4:13). The Saviour revealed that His was a life of faith in dependence on the Father, when He said, "I live because of the Father" (John 6:57). But He also declared, "Because I live ye shall live also" (John 14:19), and this requires the same attitude of faith that possessed Him. Paul set forth the true life of renunciation and of faith when He said, "I live; and yet no longer I, but Christ liveth in me. . . I live by faith, the faith of the Son of God [Darby], who loved me, and gave Himself up for me" (Gal. 2:20). This is truly the abiding life.

As well as abiding in Him, the condition requires that His words abide in us. These He had earlier described as "spirit and life" (John 6:63), that is full of divine energy and life giving power. It is impossible to embrace those life giving words without experiencing their spiritual and moral force. Christ had to say of some, "My word hath not free course in you" (John 8:37). They rejected both Him and His message, to their own eternal disaster. Others accepted the message joyfully, but did not allow it to root fully in their hearts, so that the new growth withered in the hour of persecution; or they allowed it to be choked by worldly cares, and so to become unfruitful. These received the word, but did not allow it to abide in them. There were those, however, who allowed His word to make its home in their hearts, to take deep root, and to spring up in spiritual fruitfulness. "They have kept Thy word," He said of them to the Father (John 17:6). His words had already begun to abide in them, doing their quickening and fertilizing work.

There may be different grades or degrees of abiding, according to our spiritual understanding and development. The principle, however, does not change. When we can say from the heart, "To me to live – Christ" (Phil. 1:21), we are surely abiding in Him, and this gives us a position of authority with God in prayer. So long as we fulfil the condition, as it is revealed to us, the Lord is pledged to answer whatever prayer we offer. So long as we abide in Christ and His words abide in us, He can safely trust us with a blank check drawn on the bank of heaven. "Ask whatsoever ye will, and it shall be done unto you."

In His holy humanity the Saviour's prayers were never refused by God, because He was ever abiding in the Father. "Father," He prayed, "I thank Thee that Thou heardest Me. And I knew that Thou hearest Me always" (John 11:41). Seeking neither His own will nor His own glory, but ever the Father's, He had only to ask in order to receive. We shall be trusted in the same way when we fulfil the same condition. When the Father knows that it will be in His interests and for His glory that a certain petition is fulfilled, He cannot but respond to it. Such petitions ever flow from the life that abides in Christ. This suggests our next great condition of prevailing prayer. It must be –

In the Will of God

"And this is the boldness which we have toward Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He heareth us: and if we know that He heareth us whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions which we have asked of Him" (1 John 5:14, 15). Notice that this verse is designed to give us a holy confidence before God, "this is the boldness which we have." Sometimes when a believer prays with boldness he is reproved by another, and reminded that he can only receive if it is God's will, and that he should pray with submission. The use that some make of this verse, always tacking on to their petitions, "if it be Thy will", would make the promise read, "This is the uncertainty that we have towards Him, that only if we should

happen to pray according to His will is He at all likely to hear us." Thus would they make this word, given for the strengthening of their faith, a refuge for their unbelief.

Now notice the phrase, "anything according to His will". "Anything" gives the wonderful scope of the promise; "according to His will" gives the divine limitation. Someone has well said that nothing is beyond the reach of prayer, save that which lies outside the will of God. Prevailing prayer therefore involves a knowledge of the will of God. Then comes the assurance, "He heareth us." According to Scripture usage, for God to hear our prayer is for Him to accept it and fulfil the petition.

To speak of God "hearing and answering prayer" is mere tautology. If God hears, He answers; if He does not answer, then He does not hear. "And if we know that He heareth us whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions which we have asked of Him" (verse 15). "And if" shows that verse 15 is additional as well as conditional. We may pray according to God's will and so prevail without verse 15, without knowing that He has heard us or having the prior assurance that we have prevailed, until the answer comes. But where we have this assurance that He is hearing, where in fact we have "prayed through", we know we have in the purpose of God received the answer, and the petition will be fulfilled.

The vital condition, then, is that our petition is in the will of God. Is it possible to discover His will in the matters we bring before Him in prayer? There is much general praying we may do, viz. "for all men; for kings and all that are in high place" (1 Tim. 2:1), where we may not know God's will, and yet do right to pray. But in the specific petitions that we offer, especially concerning ourselves, we have every reason to expect to know God's will.

"Wherefore be ye not foolish, but understanding what the will of the Lord is" (Eph. 5:17), "that ye may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding" (Col. 1:9), "but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God" (Rom. 12:2). But how may we know the will of God concerning our petitions?

The word of God may teach us His will. There are things for which we pray that are plainly revealed in Scripture to be His will for us. If we pray for holiness we may be sure that we pray according to His will because He has commanded us to be holy (1 Pet. 1:15, 16), and because "this is the will of God, even your sanctification" (1 Thess. 4:3). Are we praying for wisdom? "God. . . giveth to all liberally and upbraideth not" (Jas. 1:5). Are we asking for the power and gifts of the Spirit? "How much more shall your heavenly Father give [the good things of] the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him" (Matt. 7:11; Luke 11:13). But what of revival? It has already been shown in chapter three that the promises in Scripture which reveal God's willingness to send revival are legion. Let us take them out of the showcase and turn them into fuel for prayer.

We may also be taught the will of God by the operation of the Spirit in our hearts. "And in like manner the Spirit joins also His help to our weakness; for we do not know what we should pray for as is fitting, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession with groanings which cannot be uttered. But He [God, Jer. 17:10] Who searches the hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because He intercedes for saints according to [the will of] God" (Rom. 8:26, 27, Darby).

Christ's intercession for the believer is effected apart from him. The Spirit's intercession for the believer is effected through him. Verse 23 states that we groan, verse 26 that He groans, but these are not two groanings but one. Are you in ignorance of how and what to pray? You have One within, "if so be that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you," who has perfect knowledge

of the divine will, faultless intercommunication with the Father, and His almighty power in intercession is limited only by your own degree of preparation and willingness and capacity for prayer. He is the gracious Paraclete (Comforter), that is, the Advocate called to our side to present our case and plead our cause in the courts of heaven. Let us allow Him full play. Let us give Him opportunity to lead us, burden us, and strengthen us, if we would pray according to God's will and prevail.

It must ever be remembered that knowing the will of God involves a heart in full submission to that will, whatever it may be. "If any man willeth to do His will, he shall know. . ." (John 7:17). Secondly, it involves a patient waiting upon God in prayer that the Spirit may enlighten us. We have to pray with David, "Show me Thy ways, O Lord; teach me Thy paths. Guide me in Thy truth, and teach me. . . on Thee do I wait all the day" (Ps. 25:4).

The testimony of one of the greatest prayer warriors of modern times illustrates the importance of these two features, the willing heart and the waiting heart, in discerning the will of God. After seven weeks of patient waiting upon God regarding the building of two additional houses for his orphan age at a cost of about 50,000, George Muller of Bristol wrote: "I have still day by day been enabled to wait upon the Lord with reference to enlarging the orphan work, and have been during the whole of this period in perfect peace, which is the result of seeking in this thing only the Lord's honour and the temporal and spiritual benefit of my fellow men.

Without an effort could I by His grace put aside all thoughts about this whole affair, if only assured that it is the will of God that I should do so; and, on the other hand, would at once go forward, if He would have it be so. . . After having for months pondered the matter, and having looked at it in all its bearings and with all its difficulties, and then having been finally led, after much prayer, to decide on this enlargement, my mind is at peace." (from A Narrative of the Lord's Dealings with George Muller).

Thus may we also, by patient waiting upon God, pray our way through into the assurance of His will. This is the place of faith, which leads us to the next great principle. . . Prayer to prevail must be –

In Faith

"Jesus. . . saith. . . Have faith in God. Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall say unto this mountain, Be thou taken up and cast into the sea; and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that what he saith cometh to pass; he shall have it. Therefore I say unto you, All things whatsoever ye pray and ask for, believe that ye have received them, and ye shall have them." (Mark 11:22-24; see also Matt. 21:21, 22). "If ye have faith. . . nothing shall be impossible unto you" (Matt. 17:20). "Let him ask in faith, nothing doubting" (Jas. 1:6).

The faith that operates in prayer is not an uncanny "knack" or mysterious faculty which some saints have, but which it is not given to the rest to possess. "Have faith in God" is a command of Jesus Christ, and as such we are expected to obey it (Matt. 28:20). The One Who commands us to believe is the One Who enables us to believe. Faith, however, cannot be worked up. No mere decision of the will can produce it. It is necessary to understand and obey the laws by which faith operates.

The basis of faith is a right heart condition before God. The deadliest enemy to faith in the heart is pride. This is a common reason for a weak faith, especially pride in spiritual things. A concern about our reputation in the eyes of men, rather than in the eyes of God; a jealous desire to guard our position, rights or dignity, though it be at the expense of the Lord's, may effectually destroy the spirit of faith in the heart. "How can ye believe, which receive glory

one of another, and the glory that cometh from the only God ye seek not?"(John 5:44). Effective faith in prayer is clearly impossible with such a heart condition.

It is deeply significant that the two who were commended by Christ in the Gospels for their outstanding faith were also outstanding for their humility. There was the centurion who said, "Lord, I am not worthy that Thou shouldest come under my roof," but of whom Christ said, "I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel" (Matt. 8:8-10); and there was the Canaanitish woman who alluded to herself when she said, "The dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their master's table," to whom the Saviour said, "O woman, great is thy faith." (Matt. 15:22-28).

On another occasion when the apostles asked the Lord to increase their faith, He spoke of the servant ploughing, or feeding sheep, who had to learn to be humble as well as obedient towards his master. He concluded, "Even so ye also, when ye shall have done all the things that are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants; we have done that which it was our duty to do." (Luke 17:5-10). An obedient humble heart is the first secret of the increase of faith.

Then the instrument of faith is the word of God, with its untold wealth of precious and exceeding great promises. It is the promises that quicken faith, and it is faith that apprehends the promises. We do not speak here of the gift of faith which is bestowed on a few (1 Cor. 12:9; 13:2), but the grace of faith which is open to all: all, that is, who are "the heirs of the promise"(Heb. 6:17). Faith cannot look to God to do other than what He has promised. Since the very nature of faith is reckoning on the faithfulness of God, it is of necessity bounded by His promises.

The faith of Abraham was just this, he "believed God"(Rom. 4:3), believed that He meant what He said, and would fulfil it. "Looking unto the promise of God, he wavered not through unbelief, but waxed strong through faith, giving glory to God, and being fully assured that, what He had promised, He was able also to perform" (Rom. 4:20). With his eyes fixed upon the promise of God, Abraham's faith grew strong, until at length it could cast aside even the mountain of physical impossibility, and grasp the promised blessing.

Faith, mighty faith the promise sees
And looks to God alone,
Laughs at impossibilities
And cries, "It shall be done."

"So faith then is by a report, but the report by God's word."(Rom. 10:17, Darby). Faith grows exceedingly in the soul whose gaze is fixed upon the promises. Such faith is like the grain of mustard seed, so small in its beginnings, but containing within itself the life principle which can grow into something mighty under the quickening influence of the Spirit.

Finally there is the exercise of faith, even patience. The mark of a vital faith is that it endures. God desires that we may obtain the promises (Heb. 11:33), but this requires a faith which has been purified and perfected through the exercise of patience. God is not only concerned that our praying should change things, but that it should change us; that through patient waiting upon Him our spiritual characters may be purified and deepened.

God told Abraham that he would have an heir in his old age, a child of promise; but the years passed by and still there was no son. When the improbable had become the impossible, then Abraham's faith was made perfect, and he was certain that the promise would be fulfilled - and so it was. "And thus, having patiently endured, he obtained the promise"(Heb. 6:15). But Abraham was not unique, for many have obtained in the same way. Let us then be "imitators of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises" (Heb. 6:12).

"Believe that ye have received", is the Saviour's word to us, "and ye shall have." It is clear that during the waiting time Abraham believed that he had received, for the simple reason that he was "giving glory to God" in confident anticipation of the blessing. While still praying and waiting he was brought to the point of faith where he was as sure of the son that was to be given, as if he held the babe in his arms. To reach the same point should be our goal as we pray for revival.

Referring to the outbreak of the awakening in Kilsyth, July 23rd, 1839, William Burns wrote: "Some of the people of God who had been longing and wrestling for a time of refreshing from the Lord's presence, and who had, during much of the previous night, been travailing in birth for souls, came to the meeting, not only with the hope, but with well nigh the certain anticipation of God's glorious appearing."

We cannot expect to reach this point without perseverance and patience. You may have prayed long and earnestly for revival. Your faith may have been sorely tried and tested. You may have been tempted to give up in despair. Hold on! Hold on! for He is faithful that promised. The very testing is effecting in you the will of God, and preparing you for the blessing. "Cast not away therefore your boldness, which hath great recompense of reward. For ye have need of patience, that, having done the will of God, ye may receive the promise." (Heb. 10:35).

Then prevailing prayer must be also –

In the Name of Christ

"And whatsoever ye shall ask in My Name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son" (John 14:13; other refs.: John 14:14; 15:16; 16:23, 24, 26). There is an astonishing emphasis in the New Testament on the value and power of the Name of Christ. We call upon it for salvation (Rom. 10:13); we are washed, sanctified, and justified in it (1 Cor. 6:11); we are baptized into it (Acts 10:48); and so come to hope in it (Matt. 12:21). Further, in that Name we should meet together (Matt. 18:20), give thanks (Eph. 5:20), pray (John 14:13), preach (Luke 24:47), teach (Acts 4:18, 20), perform the supernatural (Mark 16:17), in fact, do all things (Col. 3:17). This is the Name we are privileged to bear, and for which we are called to suffer (Acts 9:15, 16). It should be our supreme desire to see it magnified, as it was in Ephesus, in a time of powerful revival (Acts 19:17).

The Name of the Lord Jesus is the very sphere of our life and the very source of our authority. Can He be less than God who bears a Name of such significance? To deny the deity of Christ is to deny the divine authority which Scripture attaches to His Name.

What is the meaning of praying in His Name? When we speak today of acting in another's name we use the expression in much the same way as Scripture, Dr. Torrey put it thus: "If, for example, I should go to the First National Bank of Chicago, and present a check which I had signed for fifty dollars, the paying teller would say to me: 'Why, Mr. Torrey, we cannot cash that. You have no money in this bank.' But if I should go to the First National Bank with a check for five thousand dollars made payable to me, and signed by one of the large depositors in that bank, they would not ask whether I had money in that bank or in any bank, but would honour the check at once. So it is when I go to the bank of heaven, when I go to God in prayer. I have nothing deposited there, I have absolutely no credit there, and if I go in my own name I will get absolutely nothing; but Jesus Christ has unlimited credit in heaven, and He has granted to me the privilege of going to the bank with His Name on my checks, and when I thus go, my prayers will be honoured to any extent." (How to pray).

To pray for revival in the Name of Christ, is to pray as His representative, and the prayers are as effective as if it were His own blessed lips that framed them, and His own holy hands that were lifted up upon the throne of Jehovah. Therefore to pray in the Name of the Son is to pray with all the authority of the Son, who has Himself openly declared, "All authority hath been given unto Me in heaven and on earth." (Matt. 28:18).

In olden times a man might be rudely awakened in the night by a great knocking on his outer door, and a soldier's voice calling out, "Open in the King's name." It would not matter that the soldier was but a corporal, and that he had only a handful of men under him: if he was acting for the king, all the authority of the king lay behind his command, and none would be able to withstand it. "The king's word hath power; and who may say unto him, What doest thou?" (Eccles. 8:4). How much more the word of the King of kings!

There are many prayers that have "in the Name of Jesus" appended to them which are not honoured in heaven. There may well be those who never pray without using this formula as a "rubber stamp." to whom the Saviour might truly say, "Hitherto have ye asked nothing in My Name" (John 16:24). There are other prayers, however, that omit the expression and yet fulfil the condition, and so prevail.

What does the condition involve, and how may we be sure that we are praying in the Name? It means that we pray as His representatives, that is, according to His mind and purpose.

When in prayer we are moved by His compassion, motivated by His interests, weighed down by His burdens, reaching out towards His objectives, then we are praying in His Name. In a word, it involves being one with Him in will and purpose. When, prior to His death, the Lord Jesus spoke to His disciples about praying in His Name, He taught them that they had not yet prayed thus (John 16:24), but that they would do so "in that day" (John 16:26) referring to Pentecost (see 14:16-20).

Praying in the Name awaited the moment when they should receive the Spirit and be baptized into the body of Christ. They would thus be united in the Spirit with their risen Head. "In that day," He declared, "ye shall ask in My Name." Thus the whole matter hinges on our experimental union with Christ. It is but the prayer activity of one who is abiding in Him, and presents yet another aspect of praying in God's will.

It has been shown that praying in His Name involves acting as His representative, but this applies not only to the asking, but also to the receiving. When we obtain what we ask in the Name of Christ, we are still bound by the fact that we are His representatives. It is still His desires and purposes that must ever be before us.

If a landowner authorized his agent to collect the rental due from one of his tenants, the agent would go and ask for it in his master's name, and in that name would receive it. When, however, he has the money in his hand, he does not cease to be his master's agent. He is not free to spend the money as he likes, but to hold it in trust as a steward, disposing of it only according to the will of his master.

It is so with us. We ask in His Name; we receive in His Name; we hold in His Name.

Everything obtained is a trust, and one day we shall be called to give an account. This is directly connected with the question of right motives considered in the previous chapter. "Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may spend it in your pleasures." (Jas. 4:3). The Lord Jesus must take care to safeguard His rights, and our acting only in His Name is His safeguard.

"When Scripture speaks of men who have given their lives for the Name of the Lord Jesus or of one ready to die for the Name of the Lord Jesus, we see what our relation to the Name must be: when it is everything to me, it will obtain everything for me. If I let it have all I have, it

will let me have all it has.” (Andrew Murray). Let us take a final look at the opening verse, ”Whatsoever ye shall ask in My Name. . . that the Father may be glorified in the Son.”

Here, then, is the acid test. We pray in the Name only when the supreme objective of our praying, colouring all our thoughts and desires concerning it, is that ”the Father maybe glorified in the Son”. There is unlimited scope here to pray for revival, for when is the Father more glorified in the Son than when the Spirit is working in the midst of the church in resistless power?

Then, to prevail in prayer means praying –

In the Spirit

Scripture speaks of ”praying in the Holy Spirit”(Jude 20), and again, ”praying at all seasons in the Spirit” (Eph. 6:18). Since all saints without distinction are exhorted to pray thus, there can be no suggestion that this is an experience outside the reach of all but the most exalted believers. Paul not only expected the Ephesian saints to pray thus, but to do so ”at all seasons”.

What does it mean to pray in the Spirit? It means, in a phrase, to pray in the realm of the Spirit. It is possible for praying to be vain talking, like the teaching of some whom Paul described (1 Tim. 1:6), or like the vain repetitions of the heathen (Matt. 6:7), neither of which is even intelligent. Such formalism is nothing more than an activity of the lips; it is praying in the realm of the body. It is possible, however, for our praying to be thoughtful and intelligent, and even scriptural in its phraseology, but nothing more. Such is praying in the realm of the mind, and this can never prevail with God.

The praying we are concerned with is that which may utilize the body, that is, the lips may express it; and that which demands the cooperation of the mind with all its faculties; but is essentially that which moves in the supernatural realm of the Spirit. This is but another aspect of praying in faith. Reason can take us so far, but faith reaches out into a realm where reason cannot go. ”Where reason fails with all her powers, there faith prevails and love adores.” Praying in faith is not irrational but super-rational. It is exactly thus with praying in the Spirit.

It involves three things:

Firstly, the Spirit has anointed the suppliant. Without the anointing of the Spirit there can be no praying in the Spirit. In Old Testament times those who acted Godward for the people, the intercessors of Israel, were the priests. Before they could exercise this ministry they had to be anointed. The Lord Jesus promised the disciples that through the Holy Spirit, the promised Comforter, they would have a new insight into the mind of God: ”In that day ye shall ask Me no question”(John 16:23, margin); and they would be enabled to pray in His Name, obtaining whatever they asked: ”If ye shall ask anything of the Father, He will give it you in My name.” (John 16:23). Thus praying in the Spirit is also related to praying according to God’s will and praying in the Name of Christ. May the Lord raise up those who, like Stephen, shall be, ”full of faith and of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 6:5), that they may be mighty to pray in faith and in the Holy Spirit.

Secondly, the Spirit is directing the prayer. We are ignorant of the things for which to pray and how we ought to pray for them, but the omniscient Spirit helps our weakness by interceding on our behalf, and this intercession of the Spirit in us and for us is in perfect accord with the mind of God (Rom. 8:26, 27). So here is another link with praying in the will of God. The mighty intercessions of the Spirit are dependent on the use of our yielded wills, minds, and desires. When we grant Him these, our praying is in fact His praying in us – we are praying in the Spirit.

Thirdly, the Spirit is energizing the praying. To pray in the Spirit is supremely to pray in the energy of the Spirit. There is perhaps no work that requires more energy than praying. There is a constant temptation to faint (Luke 18:1). So great are the demands of the prayer battle, that "even the youths [with their energy and enthusiasm] shall faint and be weary, and the young men [in the prime of their strength] shall utterly fall: but they that wait upon the Lord [that they may be directed and energized by the Spirit] shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles [achieving the impossible]; they shall run, and not be weary [accomplishing the extraordinary]; they shall walk, and not faint [doing the humdrum]" (Isa. 40: 30, 31). Such will be found "praying at all seasons in the Spirit".

Some may pray regularly and fervently. They may exercise a measure of faith. They may pray according to God's will. They may witness their prayers answered from time to time. But what is it that makes the praying of those who have become mighty in intercession so different? What is the secret of such astonishing energy and irresistible faith? How is it they can plead with such boldness, and are able with authority to cast mountains into the sea? Just this, they are praying with holy energy; they are praying in the Spirit.

Finally, prayer will prevail whenever believers pray –

In Unison

"If two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of My Father, which is in heaven." (Matt. 18:19). The importance of acting in unison is clear enough in the natural realm. The power of a tug of war team depends, not so much on the total strength or weight of its members, but on the precision with which they pull as one. Said Solomon, "Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labour. For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow: but woe to him that is alone when he falleth, and hath not another to lift him up. Again, if two lie together, then they have warmth: but how can one be warm alone? And if a man prevail against him that is alone, two shall withstand him." (Eccles. 4:9-12). In other words, when it comes to the peril of stumbling, growing cold, or being overcome by the enemy, "Two are better than one."

This same principle was demonstrated by the Lord when He sent out the Twelve (Mark 6:7) and later the Seventy (Luke 10:1) "by two and two". When the ass and colt were to be brought (Matt. 21:1), or the upper room prepared for the Passover (Mark 14:13), He sent two disciples. There was the same principle when the Holy Spirit separated Barnabas and Paul for their special work (Acts 13:2). When the partnership was broken by dissension the principle was still followed, "Barnabas took Mark", while "Paul chose Silas".

There appear to have been few, if any, "lone wolves" or free lance preachers among those early workers. The mighty ministry of these that "turned the world upside down" was characterized by teamwork. References to "Paul's companions in travel" (Acts 19:29), his "fellow workers" (Rom. 16:21, etc.), his "partner" (2 Cor. 8:23), his "fellow soldier" (Phil. 2:25, etc.), reveal what a vital part these played in the apostle's ministry. He seemed out of his element when he found himself without them (Acts 17:15, 16; 2 Cor. 2:13).

This wonderful prayer promise shows that the principle of united action has a special significance in the realm of prayer. "If two of you," that is the smallest possible combination, and therefore includes any larger, "shall agree. . . as touching anything that they shall ask", means very much more than general outward agreement concerning the objective of the praying, or the petitions offered. Two believers may pray for the same thing, using even the same words, without knowing the agreement spoken of here.

The Greek word for "agree" in this verse might be transliterated "symphonize". From the cognate noun we get our word "symphony", translated "music" in Luke 15: 25. As in an orchestra different personalities, playing different instruments, with varying skill and ability are made to "symphonize", and so produce harmony pleasing to the ear, so in the realm of prayer, even when outward expression and manner of praying may be totally different, there can be a harmony of spirit that reaches the ear of God, delights His heart, and moves His hand to bestow the blessing desired.

How may this spiritual oneness in prayer be effected? Acts 15 records the controversy in the church at Jerusalem over the circumcision of Gentile converts. The whole assembly was concerned about this matter, and yet was divided upon it, some holding that it was necessary before they could be saved, others that it was not. One and another gave their judgment until the mind of the Spirit became clear, and the whole church was brought to see it. "It seemed good unto us, having come to one accord," ran the decree they then issued (Acts 15:25). Many were the mistimed, discordant notes when the music began that day. How were they all brought to such perfect harmony before the assembly separated? An unseen Conductor controlled the orchestra, and the movement of His hand effected the harmony. Present there, though unseen to human eye, was "the hand of God to give them one heart" (2 Chron. 30:12). The hand was the Spirit, and the harmony produced "the unity of the Spirit". The church was in submission to Him; there was the exercise of patience; and the seemingly impossible was achieved. "It seemed good unto us. . . it seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us" (Acts 15:25, 28) - that was the secret. Although divided, they wanted the mind of God; they were miraculously brought to one mind; they knew that this one mind must be the mind of God.

This incident provides an illustration of much united prayer that has prevailed. Initial discord of spirit may be inevitable, but where hearts are earnestly seeking the mind of God, are open to the influences of the Spirit, and are prepared to wait patiently before the Lord, He is able, we know not how, to produce that "symphonizing" prayer which brings from heaven the answer, "It shall be done." By this wondrous working of the Spirit heaven and earth are linked in the fulfilling of the will of God. The Lord had said, "What things soever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and what things soever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (Matt. 18:18); and then He added, "If two of you shall agree on earth. . . it shall be done. . . in heaven."

Earth is characterized by discord and division, heaven by harmony and unity. When spiritual unity comes to those praying on earth, it has come from heaven through the operation of the Spirit, and such praying must return to heaven and be ratified there. To all such praying on earth, God will respond in heaven with His divine "Amen" – it shall be done." What power He has put into the hands of His people! And yet how little used, how seldom proved!

Let us view this great truth from another aspect presented to us in Scripture, that of the Church being the body of Christ, the means by which the Head in heaven expresses Himself on earth. A child playing with a skipping rope demonstrates the control of the mind over the body. By means of the spirit animating that child the head exercises control and causes the members to move in harmony.

Even so with those who have been baptized into the body of Christ. When two or more are praying in spiritual unity it is because the Spirit of the ascended Head, sent forth to possess and empower the body, is effecting the harmony, that the will of the Head may be done. The Psalmist expressed the same truth when he said, "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity! It is like the precious oil upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, even Aaron's beard; that came down upon the skirt of his garments; like the

dew of Hermon, that cometh down upon the mountains of Zion.” (Ps. 133). This wondrous unity is ”like the oil. . . like the dew”, because both are typical of the Spirit, and this is ”the unity of the Spirit”. The oil comes down from the Head, even to those represented by the lowest extremity (or skirt) of the garments. The dew comes down from the exalted summit of Hermon, whose snow clad peak is often hidden behind the clouds, to the lowlier mountains of Zion. Spiritual unity may be enjoyed on earth but it can only come from heaven.

Having likened the blessedness of this unity to oil and dew, the Psalmist concludes, ”For there [where brethren dwell together in unity] the Lord commanded the blessing, even life for evermore.” Once this unity is effected in prayer, the blessing is assured. Of the hundred and twenty in the upper room we read, ”These all with one accord continued steadfastly in prayer.” (Acts 1:14). Through patient and steadfast waiting upon God they were brought to that symphony of prayer which knew no discordant note, and which brought from heaven the first great outpouring.

When again believers ”with one accord continue steadfastly in prayer” for such a visitation, the Spirit will surely be poured out again. The Lord has not withdrawn His promise. ”If two of you shall agree. . . it shall be done.” This unity is the crown of spiritual preparation. When the saints pray as one, revival is nigh, even at the doors.

Not only is revival the product of unity, but the producer of unity. It is characteristically a time when personal, social and sectarian barriers are thrown down, when hearts are melted and fused in the fires of the Spirit, and when believers see themselves as never before ”all one in Christ Jesus”. ”They shall see, eye to eye, when the Lord returneth to Zion” (Isa. 52:8). Perhaps there is no time when the yearning of the Saviour, ”that they may be one” (John 17:11) is more nearly fulfilled than in seasons of revival. They provide a blessed foretaste of a day yet future when the saints shall ”all attain unto the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a full grown man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ” (Eph. 4:13), and the Savior’s prayer be finally answered.

For the present let this great principle of spiritual unity be harnessed to the task of praying down the blessing. Are you praying for revival alone? Ask God to give you another of like mind with whom you may agree, that the power of your praying may increase manifold. Are you already praying with others? Look to God to bring all to that ”one accord”, that heart agreement that ensures the answer.

Steps to the Throne

It is recorded that ”there were six steps to the throne” which King Solomon made (2 Chron. 9:18). Through Christ we have access in prayer to a throne infinitely greater and more glorious than Solomon’s. Praying in the position of abiding, in the will of God, in faith, in the Name of Christ, in the Spirit, and in unison are the six steps to the throne of God. They are all connected and interrelated, and any one of them is enough to lead us through to God in prevailing prayer. We have only to plant the foot of prayer upon one, and God has pledged Himself to grant us, not something, but the very thing that we ask. If we pray for revival, fulfilling any of these principles, we shall obtain revival. ”Let us therefore draw near with boldness unto the throne of grace, that we may receive. . .” (Heb. 4:16).

CHAPTER ELEVEN

WIELDING THE WEAPON

"After this manner therefore pray ye." (Matt. 6:9).

Paul, that outstanding soldier of Christ, has said that "the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but mighty before God to the casting down of strongholds." (2 Cor. 10:4). Although many will acknowledge that one of the greatest of these weapons is "all prayer", comparatively few seem to be able to use it with real effect against the hosts of darkness. In addition to the vital principles just considered, there are other important features set forth in Scripture emphasizing the manner in which the weapon should be wielded for success.

Firstly, prevailing prayer necessitates that in our petitions we should be – Definite

Much ineffectiveness in prayer is caused by the vagueness of the request. If water is allowed to flow at random over a wide area it will dissipate its energy and produce only a marsh. If confined to a riverbed its power may be harnessed to turn a mill or generate electric power. There is, of course, a place for general praying, but the kind of praying that prevails is that which has been focused by the Spirit of God on a definite objective. There is a place and time in military strategy for general harassing tactics, but when the moment arrives for attack and advance, success depends on the concentration of force at the strategic points. If the vital objectives are seized, victory is assured.

When Bartimaeus cried out to Jesus to have mercy on him, the Saviour asked him, "What wilt thou that I should do unto thee?" (Mark 10:51). Was it not obvious to the Saviour what he wanted? Of course, but the Lord was encouraging him to be definite in his petition, to change "have mercy upon me" to "Lord, that I may receive my sight." We often ask God to bless this or that; He might well answer, "What wilt thou? What exactly do you want Me to do for you?" Be specific, be definite in prayer. Let the prayer objectives be clearly defined. If we want revival, let us plead the promise of the outpouring of the Spirit. Let us pray for the church to be quickened in love and life and power. Let us pray for believers to be filled with the Holy Spirit. Let us pray that conviction may seize the godless, and that there may be a great turning to God. Let us pray that the Lord alone may be exalted in that day.

Charles Finney recorded the following: "Some ladies had come over to New York, and were much struck with the progress of the revival movement there, particularly with some instances of remarkable conversions that had occurred in the case of individuals after special prayer made by Christians. They asked me a good many questions, and, among other things, wanted to know if I really thought it of any use for them to pray for a revival in their place. I related some facts to encourage them, and told them to go home and agree, together with other ladies of their acquaintance, to observe a closet concert of prayer for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

They went home, and engaged some half dozen of them for that purpose, at sunrise, at midday, and at sunset. Three times a day they prayed for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on their place. Now, mark, they had a definite object in their prayer. They had no minister, but when the Sabbath came round the people assembled to hear a sermon read, and the conviction that the Holy Spirit was there that day was irresistible. At the close of the service no fewer than seventy individuals, who had been awakened, came together to be instructed by the deacons in regard to what they should do about the salvation of their souls, and a great revival followed."

Being definite in prayer not only concentrates spiritual pressure upon the vital objectives, but also serves to quicken faith in the heart of the suppliant. For Bartimaeus to say before that crowd, "Lord, that I may receive my sight," not only required faith, but served to quicken faith that the Lord would do it. It is so with us. If we are definite in our prayer, God will be equally definite in His answering. "Jabez called on the God of Israel . . . and God granted him that which he requested." (1 Chron. 4: 10).

Secondly, our praying should be –

Daring

This is a characteristic of faith in action – it is daring. The possibilities of daring prayer are not limited by the personality, imagination, or courage of the one who prays, but solely by what is revealed to that one of the power of God, the promises of God, the will of God. When the Spirit of Truth illuminates the histories and promises of Scripture, what scope there is for daring prayer. A quickened faith must truly exclaim, "With God all things are possible" (Matt. 19:26).

But the question that needs to be faced is this: is our praying in its very nature an acknowledgment of the omnipotence of our God and of His willingness to bless super-abundantly? Someone has well written, "we feel instinctively that our praying is mistaken when it has ceased to be daring – whenever it has all tamed down to a decorous and decent asking for the very minimum of God's expenditure of power, and when our requests impose upon Him no requirement of action which is beyond our natural level of thought."

We can imagine the feelings of someone with exceptional power and ability, who is compelled to stand by inactive and watch another struggle in weakness and incompetence to fulfil some task that he could willingly do for him in an instant. It must be torture indeed to possess extraordinary powers and not be given the opportunity to exercise them. How often do we keep the Almighty standing by in silent inactivity, with all the power of the universe in His hands, yearning to intervene, to demonstrate His power and reveal His glory; while we toy with spiritual things, earthbound in our thinking, working, and praying! Well might the Lord say of us, "Oh that My people would hearken unto Me. . . I should soon subdue their enemies, and turn My hand against their adversaries" (Ps. 81:13), and again, "I will go and return to My place, till they acknowledge their offence, and seek My face." (Hos. 5:15). On the other hand, a daring faith does not stagger at the promises of God; a daring faith can open the windows of heaven for revival; a daring faith delights the heart of God.

The Lord emphasized this same truth when he spoke in Luke 11:5 of the man who knocked up his friend at midnight with the request, "Friend, lend me three loaves." Although he was refused at first, he eventually obtained all that he needed. How? "Though he will not rise and give him, because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity [shamelessness – Darby] he will arise and give him as many as he needeth." The rendering "importunity" greatly limits the meaning; the word is shamelessness or impudence, and conveys the idea of the daring element in prayer.

He was daring because of the hour when he made request. It was midnight. This midnight hour which finds the church of Christ slumbering, and the world in spiritual darkness and need, is but a challenge to daring prayer. Are we bold enough to accept the challenge? He was daring because of the measure of his asking.

The Eastern loaves were large and substantial. Could he not have made do with half a loaf till morning came and he could buy more? No, he was daring enough to ask for three, and by his

boldness he obtained as many as he wanted. He was daring because he persevered until he obtained. He was met with a rebuff, "Trouble me not"; a shut door, "the door is now shut"; a hindrance, "my children are with me in bed;" a definite refusal, "I cannot rise and give thee": but he persevered until the rebuff was withdrawn, the door opened, the hindrance removed, the refusal reversed. The Lord was careful to point out that it was not because of his friendship with the other, but because of his daring that he prevailed. "Let us therefore draw near with boldness unto the throne of grace." (Heb. 4:16).

Thou art coming to a King,
Large petitions with thee bring;
For His grace and power are such
None can ever ask too much.
J. NEWTON.

Thirdly, our praying should be – Intense

Peter was miraculously released from prison through such praying by the church. "Peter therefore was kept in the prison: but prayer was made earnestly of the church unto God for him." (Acts 12:5). The word "earnestly" is derived from the verb "to stretch out," and suggests that they were drawn out in prayer to their utmost capacity. As an athlete straining for the tape, they were praying at full stretch. The apostle whose deliverance was effected by this kind of praying uses the word in the only other reference in the New Testament, "love one another from the heart fervently" (1 Pet. 1:22; cf. Acts 26:7; 1 Pet. 4:8; Luke 22:44). Perhaps the only English word that adequately conveys the meaning of the original is "intensively". A comparative form of the word is used to describe the praying of the Saviour in the garden, "And being in an agony, He prayed more earnestly [or more intensively]: and His sweat became as it were great drops of blood falling down upon the ground." (Luke 22:44). This supreme example of intensive praying shows that it is related to soul agony, and those who enter this realm of prayer with their Lord must expect to know something of the fellowship of His sufferings.

"As soon as Zion travailed, she brought forth her children." (Isa. 66:8). This might be a true description of the birth of many a revival. Movements of the Spirit are born out of soul travail, and no record shows this more clearly than the diaries of David Brainerd. E. M. Bounds says of him, "His whole life was one of burning prayer to God for the American Indians. By day and by night he prayed. Before preaching and after preaching he prayed. On his bed of straw he prayed. Retiring to the dense and lonely forests he fasted and prayed. Hour by hour, day after day, early morn and late at night, he was praying and fasting, pouring out his soul, interceding, communing with God. He was with God mightily in prayer, and God was with him mightily, and by it he being dead yet speaketh."

Let us glance at a few entries in his diary three years before the visitation of the Spirit upon his labours, and see how this young warrior of only twenty four years wielded the weapon of all prayer.

His entry for Monday, April 19, 1742, reads as follows: "I set apart this day for fasting and prayer to prepare me for the ministry, to give me divine aid and direction, and in His own way to 'send me into His harvest'. In the forenoon, I felt the power of intercession for precious immortal souls; for the advancement of the kingdom of my dear Lord and Saviour in the world; and withal, a most sweet resignation, and even consolation and joy in the thoughts of

suffering hardships, distresses, and even death itself, in the promotion of it: and had special enlargement in pleading for the conversion of the poor heathen. In the afternoon God was with me of a truth. Oh, it was a blessed company indeed! God enabled me so to agonize in prayer that I was quite wet with sweat, though in the shade and the wind cool. My soul was drawn out very much for the world; for multitudes of souls. I think I had more enlargement for sinners, than for the children of God; though I felt as if I could spend my life in cries for both."

Then on Monday, June 14, the same year, he wrote "I set apart this day for secret fasting and prayer, to entreat God to direct and bless me with regard to the great work I have in view, of preaching the gospel. Just at night the Lord visited me marvellously in prayer: I think my soul never was in such an agony before. I felt no restraint; for the treasures of divine grace were opened to me. I wrestled for absent friends, for the ingathering of souls, and for the children of God in many distant places. I was in such an agony, from sun half an hour high, till near dark, that I was all over wet with sweat; but yet it seemed to me that I had wasted away the day, and had done nothing. Oh, my dear Jesus did sweat blood for poor souls! I longed for more compassion towards them."

If there are those who read such accounts of intensive praying only to reflect with a sigh, "It is too high, I cannot attain unto it," let them recall that "Elijah was a man of like passions with us," that he was overtaken by fear, despondence, and self pity, and yet "he prayed fervently" (Jas. 5:17) and prevailed with God.

Intensive praying, however, cannot be worked up; it is a burden that God places upon prepared hearts. When through the Spirit we are possessed with such a consuming desire for revival that we feel we must either pray it down or perish in the attempt, we may be confident that God is going to send it. When the cry of the church is, "Give me children or I die," then revival is nigh, even at the doors.

It is said that when Dr. Charles Goodell was sent to a run down Methodist Church in New York city, his people said to him, "We hardly expect a revival here any more. We had them in years gone by, but times have changed." When Sunday came and he went into his pulpit and looked into the faces of his people, he said, "My brethren, they tell me you do not expect a revival here. I am telling you this morning that there will be a revival here, or there will be a funeral in the parsonage."

The revival came, and a church dead and discouraged was quickened into life. Such an inflexible determination, inspired by the Spirit, is the underlying factor behind that intensive praying that prevails with God. It is this same determination that provides the next characteristic.

Fourthly, prevailing prayer must be – Importunate

We are exhorted to "pray without ceasing" (1 Thess. 5:17). This means praying on in spite of delays and discouragements, and through weakness and fatigue, until prayer is answered. Importunate praying serves to build up spiritual pressure on the enemy until his defences crumble and the victory is won. Isaiah declared, "For Zion's sake will I not hold my peace, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest, until her righteousness go forth as brightness, and her salvation as a lamp that burneth"; and again, "I have set watchmen upon thy walls, O Jerusalem; they shall never hold their peace day nor night: ye that are the Lord's remembrancers, take ye no rest, and give Him no rest, till He establish, and till He make

Jerusalem a praise in the earth” (Isa. 62:1, 6). Here, then, is an inspired picture of importunate prayer in action.

If our spiritual battle is one of successive advance and retreat, it may very often be due to lack of persistence in prayer. It was the uplifted hands of Moses on the hilltop that swayed the battle waged by Joshua in the valley (Exod. 17:8-13). The hand stretched out in conflict is immediately influenced by the hand stretched up in intercession. “When Moses held up his hand, . . . Israel prevailed: and when he let down his hand, Amalek prevailed.” (verse 11). Charles Finney always said that when he lost the spirit of prayer he ceased to preach with power. “But Moses’ hands were heavy” (verse 12); this is a sad yet fitting description of much of our praying. But before the day was done, Moses, supported by his companions, became importunate, “and his hands were steady until the going down of the sun. And Joshua prostrated [margin] Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword.” May God give us the steadfast hands of importunate prayer.

Spiritual stamina in intercession is so rare, and the temptation to faint by the way is so great, that the Lord “spake a parable unto them to the end that they ought always to pray, and not to faint” (Luke 18:1-8). The lesson of the parable is this: the widow, who was pleading in court for justice against her adversary, could not move the unrighteous judge by appeals to the law, though it catered for her protection as a widow, because the judge “feared not God”. He was not moved by appeals to human sympathy or the thought of his reputation, for “he regarded not man”. Where all factors and arguments failed, one consideration weighed so with the judge as to cause him to do her justice of her adversary – the fact that “she came oft unto him”. Said he, “Because this widow troubleth me, I will avenge her, lest she wear me out by her continual coming.” Because of the insistence of her pleading, and for no other reason, the judge changed his attitude, and the widow won her case.

“And shall not God” – Who, unlike the judge, is infinitely righteous, and ever ready to regard man in his weakness – “avenge His elect” – who stand in a special relationship to Himself – “which cry to Him day and night” – in importunate prayer – “and He is longsuffering over them?” – that patience may have its perfect work in them also – “I say unto you, that He will avenge them speedily.”

Here, then, is the moral: if a judge without pity or compunction could be moved by the importunate pleadings of a helpless widow, how much more shall God, righteous, merciful, longsuffering, be moved by the importunate pleadings of His elect.

In the little booklet *Vibrations*, Lilius Trotter of Algiers recounts the following, which should encourage every child of God to persevere in prayer: “One of the pillars that support the gallery of our old Arab house had fallen down into the court and lay shattered on the pavement, carrying with it a block of masonry and a shower of bricks. Down below, alongside of us, a native baker had installed himself six or seven years ago. For hours every night two men had swung on the huge see-saw which in some mysterious way kneads their bread, and every blow backwards and forwards had vibrated through our house, and now at last the result was seen in the shattering of masonry that had looked as if it would last as long as the world. There is a vibrating power going on down in the darkness and dust of this world that can make itself visible in startling results in the upper air and sunlight of the invisible world, ‘mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds.’ Each prayer beat down here vibrates up to the very throne of God, and does its work through that throne on the principalities and powers around us, just as each of the repeated throbs from below told on the structure of our house, though it was only the last one that produced the visible effect. We can

never tell which prayer will liberate the answer, but we can tell that each one will do its work.”

As we may be called to pray on, week after week and month after month, for revival, let us be assured that each petition will play its part until the cumulative effect of our praying shall be manifested in the sudden demonstration of God’s power. Let us therefore, like the early church, ”continue steadfastly in prayer, watching therein with thanksgiving” (Col. 4:2). Yes, with importunate praying there must be watching.

Fifthly then, prevailing prayer must be – Vigilant

There are two important words in the Greek of the New Testament meaning to watch. Both are used with the thought of precautionary watching, such as the watching of the sentry (Eph. 6:18; Acts 20:31). Both are also used with the thought of anticipatory watching, looking out for some expected event to take place, as watchmen for the morning, or servants for their returning lord (Mark 13:33; Matt. 24:42). Both these aspects apply in the realm of prayer. There must be precautionary watching because there are innumerable perils to be faced by the warrior who wields the weapon of all prayer. There must also be anticipatory watching, for faith is continually expecting the fulfilment of its petition.

The need for precautionary watching must be plain when we remember that ”our wrestling is not against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world rulers of this darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places” (Eph. 6:12). The prayer warrior faces an enemy with immense spiritual resources and centuries of experience in spiritual conflict. He is engaged in a battle to the death, and no quarter can be asked or given. When the Devil cannot carry the position by a frontal assault, he will use a flank attack or employ fifth column tactics. Where he cannot intimidate us as a roaring lion, he will come as an angel of light to beguile us. What a need there is for vigilance!

Firstly, we must take precaution by watching unto prayer; that is, with a view to prayer. ”Praying at all seasons. . . and watching unto this very thing” (Eph. 6:18 Darby; cf. 1 Pet. 4:7). In other words our approach to prayer requires constant vigilance. The Devil will do his utmost to keep us off our knees. He is a master in the use of decoys and distractions. When the time comes for prayer, how many pressing duties suddenly clamor for attention! Is not this the activity of Satan? ”We are not ignorant of his devices,” we say; but are we not? Or is it that we succumb in spite of our knowledge?

Even such a man of prayer as Andrew Bonar knew such continual attacks of Satan. ”With me,” he wrote in 1856, ”every time of prayer, or almost every time, begins with a conflict.” We are never likely to obey the exhortation to be ”praying at all seasons”, unless we are also ”watching unto this very thing”.

Secondly, we must take precaution, not only by watching unto prayer, but by watching in prayer. ”Watch and pray that ye enter not into temptation.” On the night of His betrayal the Saviour said, to His apostles, ”I will no more speak much with you, for the prince of the world cometh: and he hath nothing in Me; but that the world may know that I love the Father, and as the Father gave Me commandment, even so I do” (John 14:30). The days of His flesh were drawing to a close, and the last momentous conflict with Satan was at hand. As the Saviour entered the garden of Gethsemane He took with Him that favoured trio, Peter, James,

and John, that they might share His cup of sorrow, and watch with Him in that last great conflict.

As our Saviour penetrated the dark recesses of that garden in company with the three, it was as though all the forces of hell were let loose upon Him. The fact that "He began to be greatly amazed and sore troubled" suggests that even the Saviour Himself had not anticipated the unutterable horror of that hour. We can only estimate the intolerable pressure of evil upon His spirit by His own words, "My soul is exceeding sorrowful even unto death: abide ye here, and watch with Me" (Matt. 26:38).

In the hour of His deepest woe He sought the fellowship of these three disciples. It is doubtful whether we could find anywhere in Scripture a more striking contrast than the picture that is now presented to us. On the one hand we see the Son of God prostrate on the ground, agonizing for a world's redemption, the sod beneath Him wet with His sweat and tears; on the other hand we see the men who had pledged their allegiance to Him, had promised to go with Him to prison and to death, all unaware of the conflict and peril of the hour, in the oblivion of sleep. Tenderly He rebukes them, surprise and sorrow mingling with His words, "What, could ye not watch with Me one hour? Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation"(Matt. 26:40).

He who enters with his Lord the Gethsemane of prayer conflict may expect to find himself "in the forefront of the hottest battle", and must not be surprised if he is a constant target of the Adversary. His only safety lies in ceaseless vigilance. Any who set themselves, like Nehemiah, to pray and work for revival may find, as that man did, that they have stirred a hornet's nest of satanic opposition. Such counter attacks can only be met as Nehemiah met them. "We made our prayer unto our God, and set a watch against them day and night" (Neh. 4:9).

A military commander's decision to launch an attack is based largely upon military intelligence, the disposition and strength of the enemy, his morale, his movements and plans. Such information has been gleaned by thousands of watching eyes. Similarly, if we would wage war with the weapon of all prayer, we must watch for the movements of the enemy; otherwise we shall be launching a blind offensive, which may give the enemy who is ever ready to counterattack, the opening for which he has been waiting.

Principalities and powers,
Mustering their unseen array,
Wait for thy unguarded hours:
Watch and pray.

Watch, as if on that alone
Hung the issue of the day;
Pray, that help may be sent down:
Watch and pray.

C. ELLIOTT.

Then the need for anticipatory watching, which looks for the expected answer, is suggested by the exhortation, "Continue steadfastly in prayer, watching therein with thanksgiving"(Col. 4:2). One wonders whether there is any faith in the praying that is never followed by expectant watching. "We should watch daily," wrote Richard Sibbes, "continue instant in prayer; strengthen our supplications with arguments from God's word and promises; and mark how our prayers speed. When we shoot an arrow we look to its fall; when we send a ship to sea we look for its return; and when we sow we look for an harvest. . . It is atheism to

pray and not to wait in hope. A sincere Christian will pray, wait, strengthen his heart with the promises, and never leave praying and looking up till God gives him a gracious answer.”

When God had answered by fire on Mount Carmel and the prophets of Baal had been slain, Elijah said to Ahab, ”Get thee up, eat and drink; for there is the sound of abundance of rain. So Ahab went up to eat and to drink. And Elijah went up to the top of Carmel; and he bowed himself down upon the earth, and put his face between his knees. And he said to his servant, Go up now, look toward the sea. And he went up, and looked, and said, There is nothing. And he said, Go again seven times. And it came to pass at the seventh time, that he said, Behold, there ariseth a cloud out of the sea, as small as a man’s hand” (1 Kings 18:41).

While Elijah persevered in prayer his servant persevered in watching for the answer. We might think that ”a cloud. . . as small as a man’s hand” was an insignificant token – the first sign of answered prayer is often like that – but to the watching eye of faith it was the harbinger of ”a great rain”.

We say we are praying for the rain of revival, but are we watching for the cloud? Are we ready to act in faith when it appears? As Colossians 4:2 suggests, watching in this way should ever be accompanied by thanksgiving.

This suggests our sixth feature. Prevailing prayer should be – Thankful

”In everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving” (Phil. 4:6). In view of the Lord’s abounding mercy towards His children, it is indeed becoming that they should ”enter into His gates with thanksgiving, and into His courts with praise” (Ps. 100:4), but this is by no means all. That the Lord has said, ”Whoso offereth the sacrifice of thanksgiving glorifieth Me” (Ps. 50:23) should be sufficient to move us all to do it, but we are concerned here with thanksgiving in its bearing upon prevailing in prayer.

A praising and thankful spirit has a remarkable ability to quicken the faith of the suppliant, and to release spiritual power for the effecting of that for which we pray. This was so in the case of Abraham who ”waxed strong through faith, giving glory to God” (Rom. 4:20). Again, in the visions of Patmos, John tells us of those who overcame the dragon ”because of the blood of the Lamb, and because of the word of their testimony” (Rev. 12:11). The praising ”lips which make confession to His Name” (Heb. 13:15) are a vital part of the word of testimony by which we overcome.

At the dedication of the temple by Solomon, the climax of the impressive ceremony was reached ”when the trumpeters and singers were as one, to make one sound to be heard in praising and thanking the Lord; . . . then the house was filled with a cloud. . . so that the priests could not stand to minister by reason of the cloud: for the glory of the Lord filled the house of God” (2 Chron. 5:13).

It has been characteristic of the recent movement in the Hebrides, that on many occasions when the congregation united in a psalm of praise, the power of God came down, and ”many were the slain of the Lord”. When Jehoshaphat went out in battle against Ammon, Moab, and Mount Seir, ”he appointed them that should sing unto the Lord, and praise the beauty of holiness, as they went out before the army, and say, Give thanks unto the Lord; for His mercy endureth for ever. And when they began to sing and to praise, the Lord set Tiers in wait against the children of Ammon. . . and they were smitten” (2Chron. 20:21). It is certainly true that they who have ”the high praises of God in their mouth” have also ”a two-edged sword in their hand” (Ps. 149:6). It was thanksgiving as well as prayer that shut the lions’ mouths for

Daniel. Scripture records that "he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God" (Dan. 6:10).

By precept and by practice Paul taught the churches that prayer and thanksgiving are two that God hath joined together, and no man ought to put asunder. He exhorts us to "pray without ceasing", and then, as though in the same breath, he adds, "in everything give thanks" (1 Thess. 5:17). At the commencement of almost every epistle he writes in words like these: "We give thanks to God. . . praying always for you" (Col. 1:3).

When, at Philippi, he and Silas were arrested by the authorities for no other crime than delivering a captive of Satan, they had their garments rent off them, and their backs lacerated by many stripes of the rod. They were cast into the inner prison, and their feet made fast in the stocks. They were indeed "in the wars", but they were "the wars of the Lord", and these veteran warriors knew how to fight in them. Not by murmurings and recriminations, but by a spirit of prayer and praise they would conquer; and so the midnight hour found them "praying and singing hymns unto God", the other prisoners their silent, wondering audience (Acts 16:25).

The mighty earthquake that opened every prison door and loosed every man's bands, the attempted suicide of the jailer, his subsequent conversion with his whole house, and the eventual release of the apostles complete the wonderful story. How irresistible is the gospel war chariot when drawn by the steeds of prayer and praise.

Finally, the seventh feature must be noted. To prevail in prayer we must be – Patient

That perseverance and vigilance are vital to prevailing prayer has already been stressed, but these qualities demand yet another which is basic to the whole ministry of intercession – patience. In prayer the self-discipline involved in patient waiting is one of the means by which God fits us to receive the answer, and this is especially true in revival. God will very likely keep us waiting much longer than we would have chosen or could have expected. The waiting period, whether short or long, is a time of indispensable preparation for the outpouring that God has purposed.

The greater the blessing God intends, the longer the time, in all probability, that we shall have to wait, because the preparation needs to be correspondingly deeper. Therefore, discouraged prayer warrior, "let patience have its perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, lacking in nothing" (Jas. 1:4) when at length God's hour shall strike.

Let us not think, as we plead for revival, that we have to move God to share our concern and burden about the matter. We feel as we do because God has stirred us to share but a fraction of His concern. Our longing is but a feeble, pale reflection of His own. Our exercise of patience should draw us into deeper fellowship with "the God of patience", who has manifested such longsuffering towards the sons of men. How long has He waited for us before we began to wait for Him? Let us also remember that for nigh on two thousand years the Son has been at the Father's right hand engaged in this very ministry of praying and waiting – "till His enemies be made the footstool of His feet" (Heb. 10:13). "The Lord direct [our] hearts into the love of God, and into the patience of Christ" (2 Thess. 3:5).

It has already been shown that the rains of Palestine, especially the former and the latter, are typical of the outpouring of the Spirit; and that these rains could only be expected at their appointed seasons, and so they had to wait for them, and they did so with eager anticipation. Job alludes to this in describing how men waited for his counsel: "They waited for me as for

the rain; and they opened their mouth wide as for the latter rain" (Job 29:23). "Are there any among the vanities of the heathen that can cause rain?" asked the prophet, "or can the heavens give showers? Are not Thou He, O Lord our God? Therefore we will wait upon Thee; for Thou hast made all these things" (Jer. 14:22).

Just as the first outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost revealed the essential features of every subsequent outpouring, so the preparation for that outpouring constitutes a pattern for those that follow. The apostles were charged by Christ to "wait for the promise of the Father" (Acts 1:4). They did so by continuing steadfastly in prayer until the day of Pentecost was fully come. All this shows us that waiting in prayer is not an incidental but an essential in the work of preparation. We cannot have revival when we like. We can have it if we fulfil the conditions, but one of these is that we continue patiently in prayer until God's time comes. Even God has to wait for the moment He has Himself ordained. "The husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient over it, until it receive the early and latter rain. Be ye also patient" (Jas. 5:7).

If by the grace of God we are enabled to continue patiently in prayer for God's intervention, is it possible that we could be disappointed at last? Promises innumerable spring from the sacred page to deny such a thought. "Wait on the Lord, and keep His way, and He shall exalt thee" (Ps. 37:34). "None that wait on Thee shall be ashamed" (Ps. 25:3; cf. Isa. 49:23). "The Lord is good unto them that wait for Him, to the soul that seeketh Him" (Lam. 3:25). "Though [the vision] tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not delay" (Hab. 2:3). "For ye have need of patience, that, having done the will of God, ye may receive the promise" (Heb. 10:36). The experience of every patient and expectant soul is a testimony to "a God. . . which worketh for him that waiteth for Him" (Isa. 64:4).

Few, if any, in modern times have demonstrated so forcibly the value of patient waiting upon God as George Muller. Referring to his daily prayer for the conversion of certain individuals, in some cases for many years, he wrote: "Still the answer is not yet granted concerning those persons, while in the meantime many thousands of my prayers have been answered, and also souls converted, for whom I had been praying. I lay particular stress upon this for the benefit of those who may suppose that I need only to ask of God, and receive at once. . . Patience and faith may be exercised for many years, even as mine are exercised, in the matter to which I have referred; and yet am I daily continuing in prayer, and expecting the answer, and so surely expecting the answer, that I have often thanked God that He will surely give it, though now for nineteen years faith and patience have thus been exercised."

Similarly, David Brainerd's diary not only reveals, as we have seen, the intensity of his praying, but how it pleased God to test his patience to the utmost. During his labours among the American Indians, he had often been uplifted by hopeful signs of a work of God among them, only to be disappointed when the effects seemed to fade away, so that he wrote on August 2nd, 1745, "My rising hopes, respecting the conversion of the Indians, have been so often dashed, that my spirit is as it were broken, and courage wasted, and I hardly dare hope." But though endurance was stretched to the full Brainerd continued to cling to God. The following day he records "a surprising concern" among the people as he preached. This increased daily, and in less than a week the Spirit of God was mightily poured out, and the revival had begun.

His reflections on this, in the conclusion of Part I of his journal, are deeply significant: "It is remarkable that God began this work among the Indians at a time when I had the least hope of seeing a work of grace propagated amongst them. I was ready to look upon myself as a

burden, and began to entertain serious thoughts of giving up my mission. I do not know that my hopes respecting the conversion of the Indians were ever reduced to so low an ebb. And yet this was the very season that God saw fittest to begin this glorious work! And thus He ordained strength out of weakness, by making bare His almighty arm at a time when all hopes and human probabilities most evidently appeared to fail. – Whence I learn, that it is good to follow the path of duty, though in the midst of darkness and discouragement.”

Be strengthened then, discouraged Christian, to ”wait on God continually” (Hos. 12: 6). In response to patient persevering prayer God will surely, in His own good time, open to you the windows of heaven.

O living Stream – O gracious Rain,
None wait for Thee, and wait in vain
(*TERSTEEGEN 1769*).

The doorway of prevailing prayer lies open if we will but enter in. Abraham, Hannah and Samuel, Daniel and Nehemiah, Moses and Elijah, Paul and Epaphras, and countless others whose names are known only to God, were men and women of like passions with us, but they prayed and prevailed. They became what they were by grace, in spite of what they were by nature, even as we read of Jacob: ”In the womb he took his brother by the heel; and in his manhood he had power with God” (Hos. 12:3). Their prayers ascended as incense to the throne. Through intercession they opened to a dying world the treasures of grace. Who follows in their train?

Chapter 12

PREPARING THE WAY

”The voice of one that crieth, Prepare ye in the wilderness the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain: and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it” (Isa. 40:3).

These familiar words of Isaiah set forth from yet another aspect the conditions and promise of revival. Firstly, there is the forerunner and his ministry, ”The voice of one that crieth. ”Secondly, there is the proclamation he makes, heralding the approach of the Sovereign: ”The King is coming! Prepare for the King!” Finally, there is the promise that when He comes, the state of the wilderness, with its valleys and mountains, its crooked and rough places, shall be transformed; and His glory shall be universally revealed.

It is characteristic of the Old Testament prophets to speak of revival in terms of a divine visitation. ”His going forth is sure as the morning,” declared Hosea (6:3). Habakkuk described his vision of revival thus: ”God came from Teman, and the Holy One from mount Paran. . . His goings were as of old” (3:3, 6). If a sovereign should decide to visit some of his subjects unannounced, he would not be likely to use the occasion to demonstrate his majesty and glory. On a state visit, however, when he does come forth in royal splendour, it is essential that preparations in keeping with the grandeur of the occasion be made. It is indeed a state occasion when God comes forth in the splendour and power of revival, for it is a time, as

Isaiah reminds us, when the glory of the Lord is revealed before the eyes of all. Suitable preparations must therefore be made, and first of all God has to find a man who will communicate to men His intentions. He raises up a herald for the hour of preparation. "Behold, I send My messenger, and he shall prepare the way before Me: and the Lord whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to His temple" (Mal. 3:1).

The Forerunner

In preparation for a great visitation, God may raise up many messengers, each preparing the way of the Lord in his own appointed sphere. This is surely a day when God is looking for forerunners to blaze the trail of revival; not smooth preachers, but rugged prophets: men of the stamp of Elijah, who, with the hand of the Lord upon him, girded up his loins and ran before the king to the entrance of the royal city (1 Kings 18:46). Thus he demonstrated the spiritual work he was doing as a forerunner. On Carmel Elijah had prepared the way of the Lord, and now the Lord was coming "as the rain, as the latter rain that watereth the earth"(Hos. 6:3).

Those whom God calls to such a ministry - and a call is essential - must be prepared for a pathway of unpopularity and misunderstanding. "Thou troubler of Israel" was the way Ahab addressed Elijah (1 Kings 8:17), and so this prophet whom God had sent to deal with the "Achans in the camp" (see Joshua 7:25) was himself accused of being one. John the Baptist demonstrates also this element in the ministry of the forerunner. Standing alone as the champion of righteousness, he unmasked the hypocrisy of the religionists and even denounced the sin of the king upon the throne. This man, who was "much more than a prophet", was called to seal his ministry with his blood, yet he succeeded in preparing the way of the Lord. "Among them that are born of women there hath not arisen a greater than John the Baptist" (Matt. 11:11). A forerunner must needs be one who can say, "I truly am full of power by the Spirit of the Lord, and of judgment, and of might, to declare unto Jacob his transgression, and to Israel his sin" (Mic. 3:8).

Jeremiah was another forerunner. In a day dark with declension and judgment his fearless ministry helped to check the evils of the time, and prepare the way for a reviving that he did not live to witness, under Ezra and Nehemiah. The commission given him of the Lord is deeply significant: "I have this day set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms, to pluck up and to break down, and to destroy and to overthrow; to build, and to plant" (Jer. 1:10). It will be noted that there is twice the emphasis on the negative element as on the positive; two thirds of his ministry was to be destructive, and only one third constructive. This is characteristic of the work of a forerunner. Stumbling blocks of iniquity have to be taken up (Isa. 57:14) and stones of unbelief have to be gathered out (Isa. 62:10) if the way of the Lord is to be prepared. The very word "prepare" contains this idea of casting out, emptying, and clearing as a field before planting. Destruction, ruthless and thorough, must precede the greater work of construction that is to follow. It takes a man who "fears no one but God and hates nothing but sin" to proclaim the message of the forerunner.

The Proclamation

The first point to note in the proclamation of the forerunner is the place of visitation. It is obvious that one who prepares the way of the king must reveal what part of his domain the king is about to visit, and where it is that preparations are to be made. "Prepare ye in the wilderness. . . make straight in the desert," cries the prophet. We should not be surprised to discover that God does not often choose the well watered garden, the fruitful field, or the luxurious forest as the scene of a divine visitation in revival, for they have no need. He

chooses rather the dry and weary land, parched and barren, whose yawning cracks plead to heaven for showers; it is here that God is pleased to come in the rain of the Spirit.

The promise that "the glory of the Lord shall be revealed" expresses the very nature and purpose of revival. God therefore chooses the place which provides the greatest scope for the demonstration of that glory. When the spiritual wilderness is transformed into a paradise men exclaim "this is the finger of God"; they acknowledge that "the exceeding greatness of the power" that has accomplished the miracle must be of God and not of men, and so the Lord alone is exalted in that day.

"Wilderness" is that which the farmer looks upon as unworkable, and therefore hopeless. Maybe that word is a fitting description of the sphere of your spiritual activities, that which has been for so long the scene of your travail and tears, your labours and longings. When it seems a sheer impossibility that there should be a work of God there, take heed to the command, "prepare ye in the wilderness. . . make straight in the desert", for God has promised that "The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad; and the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose" (Isa.35:1).

Here is a message of hope for some discouraged servant. The God to whom no situation is impossible, has chosen the desert as the place in which to manifest His power and glory.

"Strengthen ye the weak hands," continues the prophet, "and confirm the feeble knees. Say to them that are of a fearful heart, Be strong, fear not: behold, your God will come with vengeance, with the recompense of God; He will come and save you. . . For in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert. And the mirage [margin] shall become a pool, and the thirsty ground springs of water"(verses 3-7).

Before this wonderful work of transformation can take place a way must be prepared, a highway must be made straight. But who is to do it? You! "Prepare ye. . . the way of the Lord," cries the forerunner. But how is it to be done? There are perhaps four ways in which this command should be obeyed. Firstly, there are our own hearts; secondly, there are the hearts of our fellow believers; thirdly, there are the hearts of the lost; and finally, there are the heavenly regions.

"Beginning with me" is the first step. "Blessed is the man whose strength is in Thee; in whose heart are the highways"(Ps. 84:5). It is not necessary to add to what has been said in an earlier chapter on heart preparation, and what it involves. The Psalmist simply reminds us that the heart which is rightly related to God is a highway for Him. Isaiah's wonderful description of waters breaking out in the wilderness and streams in the desert (chap. 35) goes on to say, "And an highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called The way of holiness" (verse 8).

We need only pause to ask ourselves again, Is my heart, is my life a highway of holiness for God? Have I swept away the stones of unbelief? Have the crooked places of unrighteousness been made straight? Have I taken up the stumbling blocks of inconsistency, unreality, and worldliness? When the God of unsullied holiness moves in the irresistible power of revival, will He find in me the avenue He needs in this spiritual wilderness? If, my reader, you cannot answer "Yes" to these questions, lay down this book and seek the Lord now. When revival comes it may be too late.

It was said of David Brainerd, "God could flow unhindered through him. The omnipotence of grace was neither arrested nor straitened by the conditions of his heart; the whole channel was broadened and cleaned out for God's fullest and most powerful passage, so that God with all His mighty forces could come down on the hopeless, savage wilderness and transform it into His blooming, fruitful garden." Here was one who truly prepared the way of the Lord in his

own life, and God saw to it that His glory was revealed in revival. When it comes to the mighty movements of the Spirit, every heart is either a highway or a hindrance.

"Moving to others" sums up the next sphere in which we must prepare the way of the Lord. Revival truly begins in us, but it does not end there. There must be a sense of responsibility towards our fellow believers who do not yet feel the need or see the possibilities of the hour. "Write the vision, and make it plain. . . that he may run that readeth it" (Hab. 2:2). Until the vision is written others will never read; until others read they will never run, as men with a mission, as those sent of the Spirit. The vision must be written upon our hearts, upon our lips, upon our lives, if the way of the Lord is to be prepared in the lives of others. There must be expectancy in our praying, passion in our preaching, boldness in our planning, and holiness in our living if we are to stir the saints. We must be miniature forerunners, each in our own sphere; it is not enough to prepare the way in our own hearts, we must prepare the way in the hearts of others. This is a ministry which demands steadfastness of purpose, desire, and expectancy, for it is fraught with disappointments. Some seem to catch the vision at once, but setbacks, delays, or opposition take their toll, and they lose that vision. Others are slow to catch fire, but once aflame they are steadfast and irresistible in their burning.

"Reaching the sinners" suggests the third sphere in which the way of the Lord should be prepared. It is certainly true that in times of revival God very often takes the work right out of the hands of man and bids us stand still and see His salvation. But, note well, there is no standing still in preparing the way for revival, for it is a time of vital activity. We must heed the command, "preach the word; be instant in season, out of season" (2 Tim. 4:2) if we would prepare the way of the Lord in the hearts of sinners. There must be a tireless sowing of the seed. Every legitimate means and every available opportunity must be seized to make known the gospel of Christ.

Brainerd wrote of the revival among American Indians: "I never saw the work of God appear so independent of means as at this time. I discoursed to the people, and spoke what, I suppose, had a proper tendency to promote convictions; but God's manner of working upon them appeared so entirely supernatural, and above means, that I could scarce believe He used me as an instrument. . . And although I could not but continue to use the means which I thought proper for the promotion of the work, yet God seemed, as I apprehended, to work entirely without them. I seemed to do nothing, and indeed to have nothing to do, but to 'stand still and see the salvation of God'." This is of course the mark of heaven sent revival, but in contemplating such a glorious time of reaping, let us not forget those preceding years when Brainerd, despite bodily weakness, innumerable hardships, and constant discouragements, ploughed and sowed and fainted not. The work of God is not so independent of means as sometimes it appears.

"A few years ago a warm current called El Nina, which usually comes before Christmas, swept southward along the west coast of South America in greater volume than ever before. It brought with it torrential showers, which visited parts of South America which had not known rain since the year 1551. El Nina turned thousands of miles of desert into paradise in an incredibly short time, as it caused millions of hardy seeds which had lain dormant in the ground through decades of drought to sprout and grow with incredible vigour" (from *Rent Heavens* by R. B. Jones).

These remarkable facts are a salutary reminder that showers of rain alone can never turn a wilderness into a paradise. Rain must fall upon seed if there is to be a harvest. This has a most important bearing in the realm of revival. The hearts of the unconverted need to be well sown with the word of God in preparation for the outpouring of the Spirit. If we sow bountifully we

may expect to reap bountifully, and if we sow sparingly we may expect to reap in like manner, when the rain of the Spirit comes. Many who seem in an awakening to be converted without any human agency, who "spring up among the grass, as willows by the watercourses", are very often the harvest of some bygone sowing that only needed the life giving rain of the Spirit.

If we would prepare the way of the Lord in the hearts of sinners, then we must cover the ground with the incorruptible seed. We should of course desire and expect immediate results; but if these are delayed, let us not think they are denied. When the rain of the Spirit descends from heaven there will be a harvest above all that we could have asked or thought.

"Wherefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not vain in the Lord" (1 Cor. 15:58). Never mind if we seem to be prophesying unto the dry bones. Never mind if we seem to be ever sowing and never reaping. God's hour will strike. "Let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not" (Gal. 6:9). We must be undaunted by spiritual weather conditions, we must persevere with this work, for "He that observeth the wind shall not sow; and he that regardeth the clouds shall not reap. . . In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thine hand: for thou knowest not which shall prosper, whether this or that, or whether they both shall be alike good" (Eccles. 11:4, 6).

"But we are not all preachers," someone may say. That is sadly true, but the Lord expects us to be, though He may call but a few to a public ministry. In the early days of the church, when persecution broke out against the work in Jerusalem, it was as though the Devil had, in malice, kicked over the brazier of revival, and scattered the coals throughout Judea and Samaria. But this did not extinguish the fire; it spread it. Wherever the live coals were cast new fires broke out. "They therefore that were scattered abroad went about preaching the word" (Acts 8:4). But who were these who were scattered? "They were all scattered abroad. . . except the apostles" (8:1).

All classes of believers in the church - the old and the young, the educated and the illiterate, the gifted and the not so gifted, the men and the women - were all, the apostles alone excepted, scattered abroad spreading the glad tidings. The extraordinary rapidity with which the movement spread may be traced to the fact that all the Christians of the early church were preachers, and so it should be with us. From place to place, and from door to door they went; in the streets and in the marketplaces, and wherever people were to be found, there were the Christians, testifying and exhorting, preaching and persuading, discussing and discoursing. They truly prepared in the wilderness the way of the Lord by scattering the land with the seed of the word, and we are called to do the same.

"Preparing the Heavenlies" is the final way in which we are to "make straight a highway for our God". The region immediately above the earth, called in Scripture "the heavenly places", is the sphere of spirit forces by which Satan controls the world. These demon powers are variously described as "principalities", "powers", "world rulers of this darkness", "spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places" (Eph. 6:12; cf. 3:10). Though they work through human personalities, they are not themselves human, but Satanic. By their effective working the minds of men are darkened and their wills held captive to sin (2 Cor. 4:4; 2 Tim. 2:26, margin).

Through their authority and agency "the whole world lieth in the evil one" (1 John 5:19). This is literally true of the earth, for being spherical it is completely enveloped by these heavenly regions which are all enemy territory. Since the rain of the Spirit must come down through these lower heavenly places before there can be revival, and since this can only be in answer

to prayer, Satan is prepared to throw everything into the conflict if he can only prevent or hinder this wondrous operation of the Holy Spirit. A way must therefore be prepared in the heavenlies for the Lord by "fighting prayer". Says the apostle, "Our wrestling is not against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, etc. . . in the heavenly places"(Eph. 6:12). Therefore we cannot engage in this prayer warfare unless we are strong in the Lord, and have put on the whole armour of God (verses 10, 11).

There have been many occasions when it seemed certain to those watching and praying that God was about to visit them in revival, but on the very eve of the outpouring, or even after it had begun, the Enemy came in like a flood and swept almost everything away. Such instances confirm the reality of these powers of darkness which lie behind the stubborn wills and darkened hearts of men. We may be prayerful and spiritual, we may be courageous and determined, we may even be filled with the Spirit and succeed in breaking into "the strong man's house" and putting our hand upon his goods; but if we have not learned the secret of prayer warfare, and how to bind "the strong man", he will very likely return in fury and drive us out. Such a counterattack can have a devastating effect on those who have been praying and labouring hopefully, and it can also supply opposers of the work with the ammunition they require.

If the work is to be safeguarded from such reverses, and if there is to be solid progress towards revival, the prayer warrior must set himself to win this battle in the heavenlies. Not until we have prepared a way up there can the Lord set before us down here "a door opened, which none can shut" (Rev. 3:8). How we may overcome the Evil One in this prayer warfare was demonstrated to us by the life of the Son of God, and opened to us by His death and resurrection. Referring to Himself casting out demons, He spoke of first binding the strong one, and then entering into his house and spoiling his goods (Matt. 12:29; Luke 11:21). In every encounter with Satan the Lord Jesus manifested a superiority that was absolute. Though truly God, He overcame on earth as man filled with the Spirit, as He Himself was careful to point out: "If I by the Spirit of God cast out demons. . ." (Matt. 12:28). With the last great encounter with Satan before Him, the Lord Jesus solemnly declared, "Now shall the prince of this world be cast out" (John 12:31). Thus did He set His face as a flint to go to the cross, moving with sure and measured tread to His final conquest.

Ride on! Ride on in majesty!
In lowly pomp ride on to die:
Bow Thy meek head to mortal pain,
Then take, O God, Thy power, and reign.
H.H. MILMAN.

The victory of the cross was conclusive. It sealed for all time the doom of Satan, and the resurrection of Christ displayed that victory before the universe. The Saviour had returned from the dead as the risen conquering Son to claim the spoils of victory. The purpose of His mission, "that through death He might bring to nought him that had the power of death" (Heb. 2:14) and "that He might undo [lit. trans.] the works of the devil" (1 John 3:8), had been fulfilled. "Having put off from Himself the principalities and the powers, He made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in [the cross]" (Col. 2:15). Having spoken with His mouth, He has with His own hand fulfilled it. The light that shines from the vacant cross and the empty tomb shows us our heavenly David with the head of Goliath in His hand. Behold the strong one, overcome by a stronger than he, stripped of the armour wherein he trusted, and bound with the cords of divine justice.

In spite of the reality of this victory, the fact remains that Satan is still permitted to have great power. The divine sentence passed upon him at the cross is not yet executed. He knows that his time is short and that God will bruise him under our feet shortly. Meanwhile the conquest of Satan at Calvary only becomes effective when applied by faith, and this is done through wrestling in prayer. From our new vantage ground, risen with Christ and seated with Him in heavenly places (Eph. 2:5, 6), we have to pin down and neutralize the enemy who has for so long dominated those regions. Pleading the victory of Christ we must wage war in prayer against the forces of darkness, using those principles of intercession already considered. Thus do we prepare the way of the Lord in the heavenly regions that He may come down in the majesty and power of revival.

The Promise

When we have prepared the way of the Lord in our hearts, in the hearts of others, in the hearts of sinners, and in the heavenly places, then "Our God shall come, and shall not keep silence: a fire shall devour before Him, and it shall be very tempestuous round about Him" (Ps. 50:3). We must expect a spiritual revolution if the wilderness is to be transformed into the garden of the Lord. God will see to the revolution if we will provide Him with the roadway. Herein lies the wonder of the promise. It is not our concern to transform the general situation, to deal with valleys and mountains, crooked paths and rough places, and whatever else may make up the spiritual wilderness. Give God a highway and He promises that "every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain: and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it". This is the revolution of revival: the wilderness turned upside down and inside out.

God is promising that this visitation will bring a reversal of values and a transformation of conditions. The valleys, abased and despised in the eyes of men, shall be exalted. The fear of God, obedience to His word, reverence for His day, love of righteousness and truth and equity, and all the things which have become valleys and depressions, matters of no account, in the foolishness of man's thinking, shall be exalted to a place of prominence according to God's original intention. Similarly, mountains of pride, unbelief, materialism, worldly cares, pleasures, ambitions and lusts of other things, all in fact which seems to present an insuperable barrier to the movements of God in our day, within the church and without it, shall flow down at the presence of the Lord.

"The crooked shall be made straight:" crooked lives, characters, thoughts, words, habits, actions shall be made as straight as the woman whom Christ healed, who was bowed together and could in no wise lift herself up (Luke 13:11). And the rough places of life, harsh and unrelenting and graceless, places that have never known the all subduing tenderness of the love of Christ, shall be made smooth by the grace of the Lord. This is what God promises to do, in greater or lesser degree, in the visitations of revival.

Lastly, all the promise is gathered up and expressed in one final all inclusive declaration, "And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together." Here is the highest and holiest thing in revival, the manifestation of God, the shining forth of His glory before the eyes of men. It is the soul who, like Isaiah, has caught a glimpse of that effulgent glory - and one glimpse is enough to spoil him for all of earth - who will go forth, whatever the cost, to obey the divine command by preparing the way of the Lord, that men too may behold that glory and be changed (2 Cor. 3:18). But what is the cost? That is a question that must now be answered.

Chapter 13

PAYING THE PRICE

"Bring ye the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be meat in Mine house, and prove Me now herewith, saith the Lord of Hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it" (Mal. 3: 10).

On the conditions of revival much has been said of the negative aspect, but there are certain positive factors that must now be considered. It is an easy matter to pray for revival without realizing what is involved, but it is quite another thing to pray with a clear appreciation of the price that must be paid.

There may well be Christians praying for revival who, if they knew the implications, would be crying to God not to send it. With some there may be a willingness to face up to the question of sin, but an unwillingness to face up to the question of sacrifice; yet the latter is as much bound up with the conditions of blessing as the former. It is possible that some who oppose the emphasis on revival have a clearer view of the cost than some others who are in favour of it, and in this may be found the real reason for their objections. Be that as it may, we cannot escape from the fact that there is a price to be paid, for Scripture is emphatic on the point.

Robbing God

Through His prophet Malachi God had to say to His people, "Return unto Me, and I will return unto you" (3:7). One can almost hear their offended tone as the orthodox make answer, "Wherein shall we return?" (verse 7). "We have not wickedly departed from the Lord; why do you thus accuse us?" And the Lord answers them, His voice vibrant with anger and yet mellowed by grief, "Will a man rob God? yet ye rob Me. . . in tithes and offerings. . . even this whole nation" (verses 8, 9). The closing days under the old covenant reveal that the sin of God's people was that of robbing Him on a nationwide scale. What of the closing days under the new? Is history repeating itself? How many earnest Christians are irreproachable when called to "render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's", but are verily guilty when it comes to rendering "unto God the things that are God's" (Matt. 22:21). Consciences are stirred when there is failure to settle debts with fellow-men, but there is often little or no concern that debts to the Lord remain unpaid. Such must face this accusation of God, "Ye rob Me."

The question, "How much owest thou unto my lord?" - which the unjust steward put to his lord's creditors (Luke 16:5) - is a pertinent question for us to ask one another today. Can we forget that there was a day when the only feeling we had in our hearts towards the God who gave us life and breath and all things, was one of enmity? He it was who had commended His love toward us while we were thus in rebellion against Him, by sending His Son to die for us. With what infinite longsuffering and relentless love He continued to pursue us, until He brought us with broken and contrite heart to the Saviour's feet. We cannot estimate the grace and the patience, the goodness and the mercy that have followed us all our life long unto this hour. In the light of all this and much more that is bound up in our inheritance, and reserved in heaven for us, let us face the question, "How much owest thou?"

When I stand before the throne

Dressed in beauty not my own,
When I see Thee as Thou art,
Love Thee with unsinching heart;
Then, Lord, shall I fully know
Not till then how much I owe.

R. M. MCCHEYNE.

However, we already know enough of the goodness of the Lord to answer, with the prompting of the Spirit, that we owe "a hundred measures". If we are able in any degree "to apprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth" of that love of Christ which passeth knowledge, we are bound to confess that nothing less than a hundred per cent should be the measure of our response. "Love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all." We may, however, acknowledge in theory that everything belongs to the Lord, and yet utterly fail in the practical outworking of it. The lip service we pay to the truth of "full surrender" may all too easily cover a practical failure to render to the Lord His due.

Under the old covenant God claimed absolute possession of all that belonged to His people, and indeed of everything that He had created. "The silver is Mine, and the gold is Mine, saith the Lord of Hosts" (Hag. 2:8). "The earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein" (Ps. 24:1). "For every beast of the forest is Mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills" (Ps. 50:10). This did not, however, relieve His people of their responsibility to honour the Lord with their substance, and with the firstfruits of all their increase (Prov. 3:9), to be faithful and diligent in the rendering of their tithes and offerings. When David blessed the Lord for the free will offerings that the people had brought for the building of the temple he said, "But who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able to offer so willingly after this sort? For all things come of Thee, and of Thine own have we given Thee" (1 Chron. 29:14). It was this people to whom God had to say later, "Ye rob Me. . . in tithes and offerings." Let us now consider four ways in which the church of Christ may be guilty of **doing the same**.

Devotion

It is possible that we are robbing God of the love and devotion which are His due. Of all the offerings we may bring to the Lord, the expression of our heart's affection is supreme. He cannot accept any substitute for this. He may have blessed us with many human loves, but He demands the firstfruits of our devotion for Himself, for the firstfruits are holy unto the Lord. These were not only first in sequence, but first in quality. He is not content to accept the second best. He will brook no rival for that first place in the heart. "He that loveth father or mother [or anyone else] more than Me is not worthy of Me" (Matt. 10:37). He, who has poured out His love upon the sons of men in measureless fulness, is He likely to be satisfied with that pittance which is all too often confined to Sunday mornings, offered from cold hearts, and which we dare to call "worship"?

The following is another extract from *The Price They Paid*, an account of a movement of the Spirit among missionaries in India: "We were directed to Malachi 3:10, 'Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse', and found that one tithe was worship and praise of Christ. The Lord brought our past lives into review before us, and we saw how continually we had denied Him fellowship, praise, and love, for which He is longing. We spent a good deal of time in those days just worshipping and glorifying the Lamb upon the throne. Our eyes were continually brought to focus on the cross." The Lord is commanding us also, "Bring ye the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be meat in Mine house." Again and again He

comes to His house hungry for the meat offering of our devotion, thirsty for the drink offering of our love; He meets us there to receive His portion, and receives it not. Do we wonder that the heavens are shut up and there is no rain? "Return unto Me," He says, "with the warmth of true devotion, and I will return unto you with the rain of the Spirit."

Time

Are we robbing God of that portion of our time that He expects us to yield to Him in a special way? It is true that all our time is His, whether occupied with secular or domestic duties, or even with social or recreational activities, and that all should be done to His glory. But over and above this, God expects us to preserve time from the incessant claims of temporal things to devote utterly to Him and His interests, in the same way as He expected the Israelite not only to acknowledge that all he possessed was God's, but to give a proportion specifically and wholly to God. There is much land to be possessed in the spiritual realm, there are priceless treasures to be sought and obtained, and these can only become ours when we are prepared to give time to seeking them with undivided attention. "Ye shall seek Me, and find Me, when ye shall search for Me with all your heart" (Jer. 29:13). How can we do this when pressed down with the cares of this life, legitimate though they may be? Whether our responsibilities are great or small, as followers of Christ we are to obey His command, "Seek ye first His kingdom, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you" (Matt. 6:33).

At a certain missionary training college the students are required to account for every minute of their day, that they might learn self discipline in the use of time, and how to use the moments to the best advantage. It may be a revelation to the reader to put pencil to paper in a similar way and account for the past week and how many of its 168 hours have really been devoted to God. Whether we care to submit to such a test or not, it is certain that it will all be revealed at the judgment seat of Christ when "each man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it" (1 Cor. 3:13).

Had some remembered what it was they were to "seek first", even God's kingdom and righteousness, they might have halted the expansion of their businesses; they might have refused the more lucrative job that robbed God of the time they had been giving Him; they might have been content with the smaller house or the less congenial surroundings, instead of moving away from the sphere where God was using them. To many a Christian swamped with business God has to say, "Ye rob Me of My time." Such might argue that we fail to understand the situation, the cost of living, the needs of a growing family, and so on. Perhaps this is so, but the Saviour understands, and He answers, "All these things shall be added unto you." No one ever sacrificed anything for Christ's sake and lost out by it.

The founder and head of an immense and prosperous factory, having listened to an address by a servant of God, wrote to him as follows:

"Your words may save a soul from death. Early days - I was out and out The Spirit of God was mighty.

I. Obedience to Him was a delight.
His word was illuminated.
It was the chief delight.
His service was supreme.
Everything was done by prayer.
Great distress and crises in business.
Remarkable deliverances.

II. Tide turned.
Prosperity dawned.
Responsibilities increased.

III. Prayer time shortened.
Practically nil today.
Experience of His presence gone.
Life no longer on the heights.
Foundations of things on low level.
Impossible through sheer impotency.
Habits have the grip.
Will power gone.

IV. The truth and force of your words realized, but case hopeless.
With the outline of your address I can fill in practically all you said: it shall be my close study and may be the recovery of my soul."

With this solemn case before us, let us take heed to the apostle's words, "Look therefore carefully how ye walk, not as unwise, but as wise; redeeming the time, because the days are evil" (Eph. 5:15). May we never have to regret the hours that we might have devoted to Him, but squandered on ourselves and our selfish interests. Time lost can never be reclaimed.

Take time to be holy, the world rushes on;
Spend much time in secret with Jesus alone.
By looking to Jesus like Him thou shalt be;
Thy friends, in thy conduct, His likeness shall see.

W. D. LONGSTAFF.

If we truly desire that God shall open the windows of heaven and pour us out the blessing of revival, then we must render to Him forthwith the tithe of our time. Do we already give a little? God says, "Bring ye the whole tithe into the storehouse."

Gifts

Here is another sphere in which God is robbed by His people. Gifts may be natural endowments which God desires to purify and set apart as holy unto Himself, or they may be spiritual gifts which are the manifestations of the Holy Spirit received by faith (1 Cor. 12). In either case they are gifts from God, for "a man can receive nothing, except it have been given him from heaven" (John 3:27). This fact should keep every believer humble. It was to those who were zealous of gifts that Paul had to say, "Who maketh thee to differ? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive? but if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?" (1 Cor. 4:7). As the farmer scatters his seed in the expectation that it will return in harvest, even so does "the Father of lights", from whom cometh down "every good gift" (Jas. 1:17), expect that each shall return to Him again, bringing an increase of honor and glory to His Name.

It has been the continual objective of Satan to frustrate the purpose of God, and so to rob Him of His portion in His people. All too often he has succeeded, and believers have been, though often unconsciously, ready tools in his hand. Where human talents are made to serve selfish interests, to minister to our promotion, popularity, social prestige, or material prosperity, his evil purpose has in that measure been achieved, and the divine purpose has failed. It is

inevitable that talents retained for ourselves will serve the Devil's purposes more than God's; yielded to Him, however, their powers and influence are transformed and multiplied beyond measure.

When Stenburek, already famous as a German artist, was converted to Christ he longed to serve His newly found Saviour. What could he do? He had no gifts in preaching or speaking. It flashed into his mind that since he could paint, his brush must declare the love of God and glorify His Savior. As he laid his wondrous artistic power at the feet of His Lord, his natural ability was purified, quickened, and inspired by the Spirit; and thus the brush of the artist led many a soul to Christ. "What is that in thine hand?" asked the Lord of Moses (Exod. 4:2). It was only the humble rod of the shepherd; cast down it became a serpent; taken up in faith it became the rod of God by which signs and wonders were done in Egypt. If we yield that shepherd's staff to Him, He will transform it into the rod of God.

As with natural gifts, so with the spiritual. Even these may be prostituted to fulfil the desires of the flesh. The carnal man will seize with grasping fingers the choicest spiritual flower that God has placed in his garden, only to discover too late that he has shed the bloom. When God invests spiritual gifts in men He looks for His investment to return with eternal dividends.

Where, however, such gifts become a means of ministering to the flesh, an occasion for pride and ostentation, the opportunity of obtaining the praise of men, then that which should return to God is retained for self, and God is thus robbed of His portion. But we may rob God also by neglecting our spiritual gifts, as well as by abusing them.

The servant who hid his lord's talent in the earth was as guilty of robbing him as if he had invested it and misappropriated the dividends. Have we allowed temporal things so to swamp us, or personal considerations so to weigh with us, that our gifts have run to seed? Let us own at once that we are guilty of robbing God, and take heed to the apostle's words, "Neglect not the gift that is in thee" (I Tim. 4: 14), "Stir up the gift of God, which is in thee" (2 Tim. 1:6); and let all who desire to bring the whole tithe into the storehouse that the windows of heaven may be opened observe well the words of Peter, "According as each hath received a gift, [minister] it among yourselves, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God" (I Pet. 4:10).

Money

Primarily, the verse in Malachi suggests that God's people had been robbing Him in the matter of their material giving. The Israelite was commanded to honour the Lord with his substance and with the firstfruits of all his increase (Prov. 3:9). This involved, firstly, returning a tenth (or tithe) to the Lord (Gen. 28:22; Deut. 14:22). Over and above this proportion that was owed, the Israelite had opportunity to give free will and other offerings. It would appear that an Israelite's giving did not commence, strictly speaking, until he had paid his tithe. Here in Malachi God accuses His people of robbing Him in both tithes and offerings (3:8).

They were speaking and acting as though they had fulfilled their obligations while they were giving God short measure, imagining that they would escape detection, and that no one would know. They were despising God by offering Him beasts that were blind, lame, or sick, that they would not offer to their governor (1:6-8). "But cursed be the deceiver, which . . . sacrificeth unto the Lord a blemished thing: for I am a great King, saith the Lord of Hosts, and My Name is terrible among the Gentiles" (1:14).

How is it with us under "the better things" of the new covenant? Does God expect less from His people under grace than He demanded from His people under law? Shall we who live in the full blaze of Calvary and Pentecost, who are blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, and who are looking for that blessed hope - shall we give less than

they who only knew "a shadow of the good things to come"? It is true that we are not under law, and that there is no specific command in the New Testament that we must give a tenth or any other definite proportion of our income to God. You may rejoice in this freedom, "only use not your freedom for an occasion to the flesh" (Gal. 5:13). Remember, God's love was measured by His giving (John 3:16; Eph. 5:25) and so is ours. The teaching of the New Testament is, "Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over. . . for with what measure ye mete it shall be measured to you again" (Luke 6:38). This is but a restatement of that Old Testament proverb, "There is that scattereth, and increaseth yet more; and there is that withholdeth more than is meet, but it tendeth only to want" (Prov. 11:24). God's ways have not changed.

Our heart attitude to our money and possessions may be a very real index to our spiritual state. "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon the earth . . . but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven . . . for where thy treasure is, there will thy heart be also" (Matt. 6:19-21). Since it is obviously impossible for our hearts to be in two places at once, we cannot lay up treasure on earth, and at the same time lay it up in heaven. Which are we doing? The command of Christ is, "Sell that ye have, and give alms; make for yourselves purses which wax not old, a treasure in the heavens that faileth not" (Luke 12:33). Are we obeying it? It is a spiritual tragedy when God's stewards feel free to lavish what has been entrusted to them on needless and even harmful luxuries while the interests of God's kingdom in many lands are declining through lack of means. Is it not clear that such Christians do not look upon their money as God's but as their own to use as they please?

"Let each one of you lay by him in store, as he may prosper" (1 Cor. 16:2), is the New Testament standard of giving, and it is certainly no lower than the Old Testament. It means in a word that instead of living up to our income we are giving up to our income. When John Wesley commenced his ministry he found he could manage to live on his meager stipend. As God prospered him and his income increased he resisted the temptation to raise his standard of living; instead he continued to live in simplicity and gave the rest away. Since he gave the Lord His due, is it any wonder that the heavens were opened on his ministry?

Have we not here one vital reason why so often today "the heaven is stayed from dew, and the earth is stayed from her fruit" (Hag, 1:10), even that many of God's people are more wrapped up in their own earthly interests, than in those of His heavenly kingdom? Before the fall of Jericho God had said, "The city shall be devoted, even it and all therein, to the Lord" (Joshua 6:17). This was not only because of its wickedness, but because it was the firstfruits of Israel's conquest of Canaan, and therefore belonged to God.

"All the silver, and gold, and vessels of brass and iron, are holy unto the Lord: they shall come into the treasury of the Lord" (6:19). It will be remembered that Achan committed a trespass in the devoted thing, in that he secretly retained for himself that which should have been devoted to God. This one man's sin resulted in the Lord's anger being kindled against all Israel, so that they turned their backs before their enemies and were smitten at Ai. The judgment that befell Achan and his family teaches us how solemnly God views this sin of robbing Him of His due, and suggests a possible explanation for some of the reverses sustained by God's people in the wars of the Lord.

Much the same lesson is repeated in the story of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5). The church had been obeying the command of Christ, "Sell that ye have and give alms," "for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, and laid them at the apostles' feet"(Acts 4:34). But these two desired "to make a fair

show in the flesh”, to give the appearance of utter consecration while they ”kept back part of the price”.

Deceit is anathema to God at all times, but more particularly when it is planned deceit in relation to holy things. No one had compelled them to sell the land - ”Whiles it remained, did it not remain thine own?”; and when sold no one had forced them to devote the money to God - ”after it was sold, was it not in thy power ?” (5:4). But they wanted the blessings of consecration without paying the price. In their sin and folly they thought that they were only dealing with the church; they did not perceive that it was the Head of the church with whom they had to do. Their end reminds us that ”it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (Heb. 10:31).

This solemn act of divine judgment is recorded for our warning. It is better not to vow unto the Lord than to vow and not pay (Eccles. 5:5); it is better that we should openly fail to pay our tithes, than pretend to do so while withholding part of what is due; it is better that we should not seek revival, if, while we appear to mean business, we keep back part of the price. Let us face it now; let us face it on our knees before God: REVIVAL IS COSTLY. If it were otherwise the people of God would be more ready for it than they are, and perhaps God would send it more often. God is saying to us, ”Bring ye the whole tithe into the storehouse.” Whether it be our devotion, our time, our gifts, our possessions, or whatever else it is we have not been rendering to Him, He demands nothing less than ”the whole tithe”. If the windows of heaven are to be opened the price must be paid in the coin of sacrifice.

Speak to us, Lord, till shamed by Thy great giving,
Our hands unclasp to set our treasures free;
Our time, our love, our dear ones, our possessions,
All gladly yielded, gracious Lord, to Thee.

ANON.

Prove Me Now

That the blessing may be poured out God not only says, ”Bring ye the whole tithe”, but also, ”Prove Me now herewith.” The one is the divine challenge to sacrifice, the other is the divine challenge to faith. We cannot prove God until all the tithes are in, for they constitute the ”herewith”, the ground on which we prove Him. The bringing in of all God’s due does not necessarily secure the outpouring, for there must also be the exercise of faith. When faith is made perfect, when in the words of this passage we can prove God now, He will surely respond in a way which shall be worthy of His promise of a blessing which shall overflow our capacity to receive it. Perhaps there are those who have, according to their knowledge and ability, laid all at His feet, yet the blessing tarries, and they have wondered why. It is evident that they have not yet arrived at an unwavering faith that can prove God now.

The need for patient waiting upon God has already been emphasized. This factor needs to be balanced by remembering that the time must come when God says, ”Prove Me now.” Let us beware that as we pray for revival we do not in our thinking defer it forever to some remote time in the future, when God may be saying, ”Now is the accepted time.” It is an imperfect faith that always relegates the desired blessing to a tomorrow that never comes. If we would see revival, we must sooner or later deal with this procrastination of unbelief. Deeply significant are the words of the Lord to Ezekiel: ”Son of man, behold, they of the house of Israel say, The vision that he seeth is for many days to come, and he prophesieth of times that are far off. Therefore say unto them, Thus saith the Lord God: There shall none of My words be deferred any more, but the word which I shall speak shall be performed, saith the Lord

God” (Ezek. 12:27). The acid test of a faith that is made perfect is the ability to prove God now. When we find it in our hearts to do this, revival will be nigh, even at the doors. In the words of Charles Finney, ”If God should ask you this moment, by an audible voice from heaven, ’Do you want a revival?’ would you dare to say ’Yes’? ’Are you willing to make the sacrifices?’ would you answer ’Yes’? ’When shall it begin?’ would you answer, ’Let it begin tonight - let it begin here - let it begin in my heart now.’?”

Chapter 14

THE SOUND OF MARCHING

”And it shall be, when thou hearest the sound of marching in the tops of the mulberry trees, that then thou shalt bestir thyself: for then is the Lord gone out before thee to smite the host of the Philistines” (2 Sam. 5:24).

Soon after David had been established king over Israel, the Philistines came up and occupied the valley of Rephaim. David inquired of the Lord, and was told to go up against them. A bold frontal assault carried the day, and the Lord delivered them into his hand. Some time after, the Philistines repeated the manoeuvre, but David, without presuming on earlier guidance or relying on past success, inquired of the Lord again. This time he was told to make a detour, take up a position behind them by the mulberry trees, and wait till he heard the sound of marching. This was to be the sign that ”God’s host” (Gen. 32:1, 2) was on the move, and that the powers of heaven were being thrown into the conflict to secure overwhelming victory.

These two battles help to illustrate the difference between God’s method in normal evangelism on the one hand, and His method in revival on the other. In the first it is man’s activity with divine aid that is prominent, in the second it is God who goes into battle, and man has only to move in the train of His victory and gather the spoils. For the moment we are only concerned to notice that preceding this remarkable operation in which God went forth for the salvation of His people, there was ”the sound of marching”. This warning sign, this harbinger of revival was heard only by those in the battle, the right men in the right place at the right time.

Just as there are recorded in Scripture signs that are to warn the watchful of the imminence of Christ’s return, so there are also signs given to us by which we may discern that God is about to fulfil His promise to pour out the Spirit. ”Behold, the former things are come to pass, and new things do I declare: before they spring forth I tell you of them” (Isa. 42:9). This ”sound of marching” must be analysed and described so that if it is now present our ears may be attuned to hear it, or if it should come in the future we may be quick to recognize it.

Let us take heed that we do not look at the wrong factors for evidence of impending revival. General Booth of the Salvation Army, writing to his eldest daughter, ”the Marechale”, when much discouraged during the early days of her work in Paris, advised her to keep her eyes off the waves and fix them on the tide. To be occupied with the waves, with the ebb and flow of the spiritual battle, is to be alternately uplifted and downcast, elated and dejected. It is the unconquerable power of the tide that matters. The factors that reveal the quiet but irresistible trend of God’s purposes are the true index. ”Look! the tides are rising”, Finney used to exclaim, and he was seldom wrong. Are they rising today? Here are some factors that may

help us to answer the question. If we can discern them today we may be quite sure there is "the sound of marching in the tops of the mulberry trees".

A Spirit of Lawlessness and Deadness

It is strange but true that the prevalence of lawlessness in the world and of deadness in the church is often an indication of impending revival. Said the Psalmist, "It is time for the Lord to work, for they have made void Thy law" (Ps. 119:126). "The wave of spiritual progress recedes, but even in receding it is gathering in power and volume to return, and to rush further in. . . ; when the night is at its darkest the dawn is on the way" (James Burns).

They make a big mistake who always expect to see revival heralded by a decreasing of wickedness or by a marked and widespread improvement in the spiritual state of the church. The very reverse is often the case. Those who look for such improvement may shake their heads at a time when God is about to pour out His Spirit, and declare that there is no hope of a revival. Said Finney, "The prevalence of wickedness is no evidence at all that there is not going to be a revival. That is often God's time to work."

In an address on the eighteenth century revival Dr. P. V. Jenness said: "Every student of history knows that the dawn of the eighteenth century was a time of material prosperity in England. The colonies were pouring their new wealth into the mother country. It was a day of luxury, dishonesty, speculation, and extravagance, and was followed by a severe panic when the South Sea bubble collapsed. It was a time of increased intellectual activity and expression. The freedom of worship secured through the Reformation had degenerated into licence to defy all authority, human and divine.

Hobbs and Locke made infidelity popular. Gibbon and Hume devoted their talents to discrediting the church. Bolingbroke and Shaftesbury (Note - not to be confused with the famous Christian philanthropist of the nineteenth century) among statesmen helped to create an atmosphere of spiritual chill. The church seemed helpless. The Reformation was a spent force. The ministry was largely corrupt. Blackstone, author of the Commentaries on Law writes as a young man that he sought in vain for a sound gospel preacher in London. The Sabbath was a day of general carousal. Public blasphemy was common. Current literature and common conversation was lascivious and corrupt. God was openly defied. The outlook was dark indeed. Here and there a few godly men and women were crying unto God for reformation and revival. Then the Lord 'made bare His holy arm in the eyes of all the nations, that the ends of the earth might see His salvation.'

Three men were born in one year, 1703, John Wesley in England, Gilbert Tennent in Ireland, and Jonathan Edwards in Massachusetts. Eleven years later George Whitefield was born. These four men were the human agents of the great spiritual awakening that broke, like a storm, over England and America just two hundred years ago."

This extraordinary fact, that the river of blessing is often flowing at lowest level prior to a time of awakening, could be confirmed from history again and again. Jonathan Edwards in his Thoughts on the Revival of Religion in New England (1742) wrote: "Who that saw the state of things in New England a few years ago, the state that it was settled in, and the way that we had been so long going on in, would have thought that in so short a time there would be such a change?" And again, "How dead a time it was everywhere before this work began."

Shortly after the 1904 Revival broke out, the correspondent of the Liverpool Daily Post wrote in that paper: "If I had been asked a month ago whether a revival was probable in Wales, I should have answered, 'No'. It seemed to me that the 'higher criticism' had wrecked the ordinary machinery of a revival, and that, until theology had been reshaped in accordance

with its conclusions, nothing would happen to disturb the prevailing apathy” (from *Rent Heavens* by R. B. Jones).

Prevailing deadness among believers and abounding lawlessness in the world are not an indication that revival is impossible, but that it is imperative. The hopelessness of the situation was to the Psalmist one of the strongest arguments in favor of divine intervention, for he saw therein a challenge that an omnipotent God could not ignore. To him the very need of the hour cried out, “It is time for the Lord to work.”

A Spirit of Dissatisfaction

This second factor may be widespread among peoples of all classes, or it may be confined to a few of the people of God who are being quietly prepared for what God is about to do. James Burns writes that the period preceding a widespread awakening “is characterized by a profound sense of dissatisfaction awaking in many hearts. A period of gloom sets in, a weariness and exhaustion invade the heart, the pleasures of the world no longer satisfy, they set up a deep distaste and satiety. Sick in soul, men turn with a sigh to God; dimly they wake to the consciousness that, in bartering heavenly for earthly joys, they have encountered irremediable loss; that in the decay of spiritual vision the world has lost its soul of loveliness. Slowly this aching grows, the heart of man begins to cry out for God, for spiritual certainties, for fresh visions. From a faint desire this multiplies as it widens, until it becomes a vast human need; until in its urgency it seems to beat with violence at the very gates of Heaven” (*Revivals, their Laws and Leaders*).

Though this widespread dissatisfaction is almost always there in measure, it cannot always be discerned until the movement is under way. But a sure mark of impending revival is where this spirit of dissatisfaction becomes apparent among believers. It may not be widespread, but here and there among different groups there is a growing thirst for a fuller, richer, and deeper experience of God than they have known.

This spiritual restlessness, this holy dissatisfaction that is wrought in their hearts by God causes them to reach out with a great longing for that life more abundant that they know is theirs in Christ. Here are the birth pangs of that new thing that God is about to do, the travail out of which revival is born. “I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and streams upon the dry ground” (Isa. 44:3). “Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled” (Matt. 5:6). Thank God for every thirsty, dissatisfied heart in a day when coldness, apathy, and complacency abound.

This profound dissatisfaction with which these believers view themselves and the work of God around them is nothing less than a thirst for God. “As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after Thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God” (Ps. 42:1). There is a thirst for the holiness of God, for the power of God, for the manifestation of God, for the truth of God.

There is a thirst for the holiness of God. A longing fills the soul for victory over sin and deliverance from the corruptions of the carnal man; for hearts of flesh instead of hearts of stone; to be wholly sanctified and conformed to the image of God’s Son; to walk, like Enoch, in unbroken fellowship with God, and to be well pleasing in His sight.

There is a thirst also for the power of God in personal experience. Believers begin to view with growing concern the ineffectiveness of their own efforts to serve the Lord. They are conscious of the reproach of the ungodly that God is not amongst them, even as was David, when he confessed in the same Psalm. “My tears have been my meat day and night, while

they continually say unto me, Where is thy God?" (Ps. 42:3). The more they examine the pages of the New Testament, and the lives of those whom God has used, the more convinced they become that they too ought to be clothed with power from on high, filled with the Spirit, and speak the word with boldness.

There is a thirst for the manifestation of God, to see His power and glory displayed before the eyes of men. It is this that David expresses in another Psalm, "My soul thirsteth for Thee, my flesh longeth for Thee, in a dry and weary land, where no water is. . . to see Thy power and Thy glory" (Ps. 63:1). That their beloved, yet rejected Lord should be vindicated before the eyes of men becomes the passion of their souls. As in that first recorded prayer meeting of the early church, they long that God would stretch forth His hand to heal and that signs and wonders may be done in the name of Jesus, so that He may be glorified and the hearts of the people may be opened to Him.

Lord, we are few, but Thou art near;
Nor short Thine arm, nor deaf Thine ear:
Oh, rend the heavens, come quickly down,
And make a thousand hearts Thine own.

COWPER.

There is a thirst too for the truth of God. Believers begin to crave for a deeper understanding of God's word; they search for it as for hid treasures, and rejoice in it as one that finds great spoil. There is often a healthy unwillingness to accept without question all that is taught and accepted as orthodox. A spirit of inquiry and discernment necessitates a fresh examination of what Scripture has to say. There is often a purging of the floor of truth, which scatters the chaff of human tradition and interpretation. James Burns points out one of the curious facts connected with the human mind – "its power to see only that which corresponds with current opinion, and of failing to see, not by conscious rejection, but by a strange incapacity, all that opposes it. Every age is imprisoned in its own conceptions, and has to be set free by the master minds which refuse to be enslaved." Such are often raised up preceding or during times of revival, when hearts have been unconsciously made ready to receive fresh light from God.

A Spirit of Sin consciousness

Like the spirit of dissatisfaction, this sensitivity to sin will be in evidence here and there among the people of God, where hearts are being made ready. It will be seen that most of these signs of impending blessing anticipate in the hearts of the few that which is to characterize all who will be affected when revival comes. Just as a cloud "as small as a man's hand" betokened to Elijah on Carmel the sound of abundance of rain, and was to him the earnest of "the heaven black with clouds" (1 Kings 18:44, 45), so does this growing sensitiveness to sin in the hearts of the few indicate to the watchful eye that the day is at hand when God shall be revealed in holiness, and men shall repent in dust and ashes. The God who dwells in "the high and holy place" has promised "to revive the heart of the contrite ones" (Isa. 57:15). A spirit of contrition among the saints is therefore a strong indication that revival is coming.

This conviction of the conscience regarding personal sin is usually manifested by confession. Christians are not easily brought to the point where they are prepared to obey the exhortation, "Confess therefore your sins one to another" (Jas. 5:16), to apologize and ask forgiveness, and to make restitution. Where this happens, and there is a deep desire on the part of the saints to

walk in the light with God, and in love one with another, it is evident that the Spirit of God is working, and hearts are being prepared for the outpouring of the Spirit. "A revival of religion may be expected when Christians begin to confess their sins one to another. . . when there is an ingenuous breaking down, and a pouring out of the heart in making confession of their sins, the floodgates will soon burst open, and salvation will flow over the place" (Finney).

A Spirit of Tender Concern

Where this is found in the hearts of believers it is a strong indication that revival is at hand. "Thou shalt arise, and have mercy upon Zion: for it is time to have pity upon her, yea, the set time is come. For thy servants take pleasure in her stones, and have pity upon her dust" (Ps. 102:13, 14). When the harsh, unfeeling criticism with which believers often speak of the state of the church or the sin of the world gives place to a deep solicitude and tender concern which manifests the strong compassion of the Son of God, then we may be sure that the hour of revival is near. When believers feel as though they could cry out with the weeping prophet, "Oh that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people!" (Jer. 9:1), then it is evident that the fountains of the great deep are being broken up, that the windows of heaven may be opened (Gen. 7:11). When the saints mourn before the Lord, as did Hannah, Nehemiah, and Daniel, the answer of heaven will be as near to them as it was to those of abygone age when they wept in the secret place.

A Spirit of Expectancy

This is a further mark of coming revival, when found in the hearts of God's people. To find groups of Christians in different places, meeting independently of one another, with no denominational or other connection, and yet possessing the same spirit of desire and expectancy throbbing in their hearts, is presumptive evidence that it has been created by the sovereign Spirit, that out of the fulness of His loving heart God may abundantly satisfy it. The measure of expectancy may vary greatly; with some it is little more than a vague presentiment that something, they hardly know what, is going to happen; with others it is a clear and definite expectation of the outpouring of the Spirit. But however dim or definite it may be, it is the beginning of that spirit of faith that rises like the waters within the lock gates, until it has reached the required level, and the ship of revival moves forward on its divinely appointed way.

News of stirrings of the Spirit or even outpourings of the Spirit in other parts is a means God commonly uses to foster this spirit of expectancy. Every evidence of God's willingness to bless in other places should be to every longing soul a most hopeful sign of impending revival. "If God has done it there, may He not do it here also?" – this is the simple but reasonable ground of optimism. There is nothing more calculated to quicken desire and expectancy in prepared hearts than the news of what God has done or is doing elsewhere. When there comes news of striking conversions, of local movements of the Spirit, of touches of revival – if we may call them such – here and there, longing hearts will beat with quickened expectancy, and opened ears will hear God saying through these unusual events, "I will work, and who shall reverse it?" (Isa. 43:13, R.V. margin).

A Spirit of Unity

When this is manifest among various believers it is a strong indication that revival is at hand. "With one accord" marked the preparation of those early believers for the first outpouring of the Spirit, and so it has been in every subsequent outpouring. In spite of the prayer of the Son of God, "That they all may be one," sectarianism, exclusivism, and an attitude of spiritual

superiority have everywhere split the people of God. Churches and groups act as though they and they alone were the rightful recipients of divine blessing.

The Lord's servants outside their circles, although they may be signally used of God, have evidently nothing to impart to them. They only desire ministry from the man who, in the realm of theology, will dot all their "i"s, cross all their "t"s, and subscribe to all their shibboleths. They have, it would seem, the monopoly of truth and spiritual illumination. They feel that God ought to favour them in a special way; and when, as is often the case, He blesses elsewhere, they are at a loss to know why, and all too often try to disparage or belittle what God has done.

When, however, such barriers are thrown down, and believers come together in true humility and on the common ground of their love for Christ and desire for souls; when denominational pride and jealousy are slain, and there is a willingness, without compromising personal convictions, to learn in meekness one of another, to receive light and impart light, then there is evidence indeed that revival is coming. "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity! . . . For there the Lord commanded the blessing" (Ps. 133).

A Spirit of Prayer

Finally, the infallible sign of impending revival is a spirit of prayer for it. When you see this in evidence among the people of God, you may be sure "it is time to seek the Lord, till He come and rain righteousness upon you" (Hos. 10:12). It has been well said that "Satan laughs at our toil, mocks at our wisdom, but trembles when we pray". Therefore we may be confident that where a true spirit of prayer for revival exists, it does not proceed from the Devil. Such a spirit of prayer leads to humbling before God; to confession of sin, coldness, and unbelief; and to the consecration of oneself to the Lord: therefore we may be certain it has not issued from the flesh. Therefore it has come from God; and if God has created and maintained in the hearts of His children that spirit of prayer for revival, however few and feeble they may be, there can be but one logical explanation – He intends to send revival.

This spirit of prayer need not be widespread before it constitutes a sign of impending blessing. It may be but a small group of earnest souls; it may be but a single intercessor who has caught the vision of what God is about to do, and refuses to let Him go until He does it. Such was a case recorded by Finney: "There was a woman in New Jersey who was very positive there was going to be another revival. She wanted to have conference meetings appointed. But the minister and elders saw nothing to encourage it, and would do nothing. She saw they were blind, and so she went forward, and got a carpenter to make seats for her, for she said she would have meetings in her own house.

There was certainly going to be a revival. She had scarcely opened her doors for meetings, before the Spirit of God came down with great power. And these sleepy church members found themselves surrounded all at once with convicted sinners. And they could only say, 'Surely the Lord was in this place, and we knew it not.' The reason why such persons understand the indication of God's will is not because of the superior wisdom that is in them, but because the Spirit of God leads them to see the signs of the times. . . . that converging of providences to a single point, which produces in them a confident expectation of a certain result."

Signs of the Times

"When ye see a cloud rising in the west, straightway ye say, There cometh a shower; and so it cometh to pass. . . . Ye know how to interpret the face of the earth and the heaven; but how is it that ye know not how to interpret this time?" (Luke 12:54). Thus Christ spoke to the multitudes probably less than a year before that first great outpouring of the Spirit. They were

quick to perceive the cloud in the sky, but were blind to that which heralded the spiritual shower. How easy it is to miss the signs of the times, and fail to recognize what God is about to do.

Let us pause a moment and look into our own hearts. Let us look about us. Let us strain our ear to catch any sounds wafted by the wind of the Spirit from distant parts. Is there abroad a spirit of lawlessness and deadness that challenges the Most High, and cries out, "It is time for the Lord to work"? Is there a spirit of dissatisfaction, of soul thirst among the people of God?

Can we find those with a deep consciousness of the holiness of God and the sinfulness of sin, with a readiness to confess the sin and put things right? Are there those with a deep and tender concern for the state of the church and the need of the world? Can we discern a spirit of expectancy, a conviction or premonition that God is about to do a new thing?

Do we find anywhere a new spirit of unity among the people of God, a breaking down of sectarian barriers, and a meeting together on common ground to seek after God? Is there a new spirit of prayer appearing among believers, that cannot be limited to the weekly prayer meeting, but which is seen in groups of Christians on bended knee in cottage or mansion, in school or business premises? Are some seizing for prayer the hurried moments of the lunch hour, praying on into the night, or wakening the dawn with their cries?

If we can answer "yes" to these questions, it matters not that the sun still shines out of an azure sky – we have seen the cloud rising in the west. "Is the seed yet in the barn? Yea, the vine, and the fig tree, and the pomegranate, and the olive tree hath not brought forth; from this day will I bless," saith the Lord (Hag. 2:19). Above the incessant noise of human activity we have heard "the sound of marching" that tells us God is on the move.

Chapter 15

THE SOLEMN ALTERNATIVE

"For the time is come for judgment to begin at the house of God: and if it begin first at us, what shall be the end of them that obey not the gospel of God?" (1 Pet. 4:17).

The Divine Purpose

God has a grander and greater purpose for this age than simply saving souls from hell; He is bringing "sons unto glory" (Heb. 2:10). He is not now concerned with improving the world, but with gathering out of it a people for His Name. He is forging an instrument, glorious and holy, that shall rule and administer the world in the coming age under the sovereignty of His Son.

In this age it is the angels, "sons of God" by creation, who govern the universe. In the age to come it will be the saints, "sons of God" by redemption, who shall judge the world and angels (1 Cor. 6:2, 3; Heb. 2:5). Thus God is now displaying through the church His manifold wisdom to those heavenly powers soon to be replaced by the church (Eph. 3:10). We can hardly contemplate these tremendous events without realizing that something radical must take place in the church as we see it today, if it is ever to be worthy of association with the Son of God in such a capacity, if in fact it is to be "a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but . . . holy and without blemish" (Eph. 5:27).

If an exiled monarch had hopes of returning in power to judge the usurper, claim his throne, and set up again his kingdom, he would surely choose his ministers and administrators from among those who had shown unswerving loyalty towards him, and where possible he would train them in advance to fulfil their future functions. How could he promote to such executive positions those whose devotion to his cause had been lukewarm, who had been ashamed to side openly with him in his rejection, or who had been more concerned in his absence to serve their own selfish interests than his? It is such a picture that Christ paints in the parable of the pounds (Luke 19:11), in which He teaches us that His servants are on probation in this age, being trained and fitted for their function in the age to come. With Christ "the saints of the Most High shall receive the kingdom, and possess the kingdom" (Dan. 7:18, 22). But how are they to be made fit? There must of necessity be a purifying, a making white, a refining, as Daniel also foretold (Dan. 12:10). In the larger scheme of things, God has commonly effected this purifying by:

Revival or judgment

Strange though it may seem, there are distinct similarities between the ways of God in revival and in judgment. Throughout the prophets the thought of a divine visitation is used to describe blessing and revival on the one hand (Jer. 27:22) and a season of judgment on the other (Jer. 50:31). Likewise the overflowing rain could picture a time of spiritual revival (Ezek. 34:26) or of divine judgment (Gen. 6:17). Another figure used of the mighty operation of the Spirit in revival is fire from heaven (1 Kings 18:38; Acts 2:3), but it is also typical of the judgment of God (2 Kings 1:10). All this may be partly explained by the fact that there is an element of judgment present in every revival.

But it is also true that judgment is the solemn alternative to revival. The purifying and quickening of the people of God are a moral and spiritual necessity. Because of His very nature, God cannot and will not permit spiritual decline to continue unchecked. He is ever halting and reversing the trend of the times by means of revival - or judgment. Where His people are not prepared for the one, they shut themselves up to the other.

Some may wonder whether there can be any question of divine judgment upon a true child of God or a true church of God, since the Saviour declared that a believer "hath eternal life, and cometh not into judgment, but hath passed out of death into life" (John 5:24). There can certainly be no question of judgment for being dead in trespasses and sins, because those who believe have passed once for all out of the realm of death into that of life, and there is "no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:1). Subsequent unbelief and disobedience are another matter, and if persisted in must sooner or later evoke the chastisement of the Father.

The Egyptians did not hear Moses' word, nor did they believe on Him who sent him, therefore they came into judgment culminating in the death of the firstborn. The Israelites who heard and believed did not come into judgment, but passed out of death into life. Once redeemed, however, God began to deal with them as a father with his children, and thereafter they suffered chastisements and judgments, some of them severe, at His hands. The apostles drew valuable lessons from this for the warning of the church (Jude 5; 1 Cor. 10). Paul showed that not only the sins of redeemed Israel (1 Cor. 10:6), but the judgments that befell them were "by way of example; and they were written for our admonition" (verse 11). There are also New Testament illustrations of the truth that "the Lord shall judge His people" (Heb. 10:30).

We see from the history of Israel, in Canaan as well as in the wilderness, that God has always worked in His people through revival and through judgment. A time came, however, when

there was no remedy and God could revive them no longer as a nation, but shut them up to the overwhelming judgments of the captivities. Even in the midst of these desolations of Zion we hear the cry of the faithful remnant, "Turn again our captivity, O Lord, as the streams in the South" (Ps. 126:4), and we witness the mercy of God in granting to a few under Ezra and Nehemiah "a little reviving in [their] bondage" (Ezra 9:8).

The close of the New Testament revelation brings again the message of revival or judgment. Before Paul laid down his pen and sealed his faith with his blood, that great sweep of the Spirit that began at Pentecost had begun to wane, with accompanying signs of spiritual decline. John, writing at the close of the first century, conveys to a small circle of seven churches a personal message from the risen Christ (Rev. 2 and 3). Five of them are charged by the Head of the church with sins of departure and commanded to repent. The "germs" which Paul had diagnosed years before, and about which he had faithfully warned the churches (Acts 20: 29), were now an epidemic.

The Lord showed these five churches that there could be no reviving without repentance, and if they were unwilling for this, the alternative was judgment. Doubtless then, as now, the Lord longed to pour out His Spirit, but how could He do this greater thing until they were willing for personal reviving? In these five letters the need of this reviving is laid bare, the way to it is marked out, and the solemn alternative is set forth; it is only these points in the letters we need now consider. If ever there was a message to the churches of today it is here in Revelation 2 and 3.

Love

"I have this against thee, that thou didst leave thy first love" (Rev. 2:4). The Lord's contention with His people at Ephesus centered in this terse and pointed accusation.

The life of God that comes into the center of a newborn soul does not always or at once influence, as it should, the whole circumference of the outer life; hence the exhortations to true believers not to lie, steal, commit fornication, bite and devour one another, etc.

Conversely, spiritual decay may be at work in the heart of a believer or a church without the signs of decline being at once manifest.

The rosy apple with unblemished skin may be rotting at the core. It was so with Ephesus. The glowing commendation of verses 2 and 3 might lead one to suppose that here was a church that left nothing to be desired. This was no doubt man's verdict, but it was not God's; "for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart" (1 Sam. 16:7). Those eyes which were as a flame of fire, piercing through every veneer and searching the hidden depths, had perceived in this church, despite its orthodoxy and its activity, the symptoms of spiritual decline. Ephesus, to whom Paul had declared "the whole counsel of God" (Acts 20:27), to whom had been committed the sublimest truths in the New Testament regarding the church as the bride to be of Christ (Eph. 5:22-32), had declined in that very relationship: she had left her first love.

How true is the saying, "Christianity is a religion of the heart." It is not a religion of the head, though it is essentially rational. It is not a religion of the hand, though it is essentially practical. It is a religion of the heart: for what a man is in his heart that is he in the sight of God. Christ taught that the thoughts, words, and actions that go to make up the life, proceed from the heart (Matt. 12:34; 15:19). Since the heart is the very fountain of man's personality, it is ever the object of Satan's attack. If he can but corrupt the heart he will soon defile the whole life. Solomon was wise to warn us, "Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life" (Prov. 4:23). He would have been wiser still had he practiced what he preached. Implicit in this heart condition of Ephesus were solemn possibilities that only Christ

could see. He had diagnosed in the heart of this church that deadly germ which is responsible for all spiritual decline. Such a condition, threatening as it did the very life of the body, called for drastic action by the Surgeon. Hence the sternness and solemnity of Christ's words to these believers.

What is this "first love" that Ephesus had forsaken? It is the love of her whose every fear and prejudice and reserve have been broken down; whose heart has been utterly captured, she knows not how; and who presents herself to her beloved as his, and his for ever. It is the love of betrothal. It was this love that drew Israel out of the bondage of Egypt into a covenant relationship with the Lord, anticipating a day when He should say to them, "thy Maker is thine husband; the Lord of Hosts is His name" (Isa. 54:5). Alas, they too left their first love, and sorrowfully God had to remind them of it: "I remember for thee the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals; how thou wentest after Me in the wilderness, in a land that was not sown. . . My people have committed two evils; they have forsaken Me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water. . . My people have forgotten Me days without number" (Jer. 2:2, 13, 32). Thus this church of the New Testament, heedless of that which had been recorded for her admonition, was repeating the sin of "the church in the wilderness."

Not only is a first love towards Christ one of the most precious and sacred and beautiful things under heaven, but it is vital to a deeper life and growth in the things of God. When the love wanes, the life will soon decline. Is this the reason why the life of the church today is so low, and the need for its reviving so great? As we consider some of the characteristics of "first love," let us ask ourselves whether the church, whether we ourselves, are guilty of the sin of having left it, or the greater sin of never having had it.

It is pure love, without the taint of worldly attraction, and unweakened by ulterior motive. It is the love of the "pure virgin," uncorrupted "from the simplicity and the purity that is toward Christ" (2 Cor. 11:2, 3). It is a tender love, sensitive to the smallest thing that might bring grief or displeasure to the Beloved, ever seeking to be well pleasing unto Him who said, "If ye love Me, ye will keep My commandments" (John 14:15). It is a supreme love that has conquered all other loves and brought them into subjection, according to His own word, "He that loveth father or mother, etc. . . more than Me is not worthy of Me" (Matt. 10:37). It comes from a heart that can sing:

Jesus, Thy boundless love to me,
No thought can reach, no tongue declare;
Oh, knit my thankful heart to Thee,
And reign without a rival there.

P. GERHARDT.

It is a sacrificial love, because it partakes of the very nature of the love of God and of Christ. "God so loved. . . that He gave His only begotten Son." "Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for it." And this "first love" is but the offspring of the divine love, which ever brings forth after its own kind. It is a love that gives itself up and pours itself out. This had once been the love of the Ephesian church. This was the love she had forsaken.

These are not so much the words of an offended Lord as of a wounded Lover, "I have this against thee, that thou didst leave thy first love." The toil, the zeal, and the orthodoxy of this church could never compensate for the loss of that first love. Her need, more desperate and urgent than she could know, was for a revived love. Is it not the need of the church today? Is it that many believers have lost, or is it that they have never known the freshness and fervency

of "first love?" How easy it is to be deceived over this matter. One may perform the same exercises, pray with the same words, sing the same hymns, as one has always done, and yet the whole be no longer an exercise of the heart, but simply a matter of form or of duty. Said Christ, "This people honoureth Me with their lips; but their heart is far from Me" (Matt. 15:8).

John in his first epistle brings the matter of love for the Lord down to a very practical issue by showing that the measure of a believer's love for God is the measure of his love for his brother, that much and no more (1 John 4:11-21). The Saviour said that His disciples were to be known by their love for each other (John 13:35); instead they have become marked before the world by their strife and division. Is there any need for further evidence that the first love of the early church, who were of "one heart and one soul," and of whom men had to exclaim, "Behold how they love one another," has been largely lost by the church of today?

Compassion for the perishing is another expression of this first love. Most are prepared to pay lip service to the need of the lost, but with how many is there practical indifference? How few are the churches today with a heart like the church of the Thessalonians, to whom Paul said, "From you hath sounded forth the word of the Lord. . . in every place. . . so that we need not to speak anything" (1 Thess. 1:8). Is it not evident that we need a revived love?

The One who still walks in the midst of the lampstands, and before whose eyes every heart is laid bare, not only reveals the condition, but also the cure. Here are the three steps to a revived love: "Remember. . . repent. . . do the first works" (verse 5). "Remember from whence thou art fallen." Christ is not addressing the individual; He is addressing the church. There had been corporate failure, and the Lord calls for corporate action. As a church they had lost their first love; as a church they had fallen; and therefore as a church they needed to remember, that is to go back in thought to their beginning, and realize how great their fall was.

The church of today must do the same. Only through an honest comparison of the love of the early church with the love of the church today can we appreciate the greatness of our fall. Then "Repent." Long have we urged the sinners to do it: now the Lord commands us to do it ourselves. This involves a change of attitude, a change of heart, a humbling before God, who has promised to revive the heart of the contrite ones. Finally, "Do the first works." The church must go back to the beginning, and tread again the pathway of the first love. Of the Macedonian churches we read, "First they gave their own selves to the Lord" (2 Cor. 8:5). This in a phrase is doing the first works. There must be a renewed dedication, presenting ourselves afresh to our Beloved as "in the day of His espousals, and in the day of the gladness of His heart" (Song 3:11).

If the church was not willing to pay the price of a revived love, there could be but one alternative - He would visit her in judgment: "Or else I come to thee, and will move thy lampstand out of its place, except thou repent." The lampstand is the proper place for the light. "Neither do men light a lamp, and put it under the bushel, but on the stand [or lampstand]; and it shineth unto all that are in the house" (Matt. 5:15). The threatened judgment upon Ephesus was that of having the lampstand removed, so that the lamp of corporate testimony would cease to shine. Her organization, her activities, and even her form of witness might continue, but there would be no light there. Can any greater tragedy overtake a church than to lose its testimony? Souls would stumble and perish in the darkness because the light was not shining where it ought to be. Ships that might have found the haven of this church would make shipwreck because the harbor light was not in its place. They shall perish in their iniquity, but their loss God will require at the church's hands - the church that lost her light because she lost her love.

"He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches" today. If the church is not willing to return to her first love, can we expect God to pour out His Spirit? - can we expect Him to withhold His judgment? As we face the alternatives, let us pray individually:

Oh, grant that nothing in my soul
May dwell but Thy pure love alone;
Oh, may Thy love possess me whole,
My joy, my treasure, and my crown:
All coldness from my heart remove;
May ev'ry act, word, thought, be love.
P.GERHARDT.

Truth

"I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there some that hold the teaching of Balaam. . . of the Nicolaitans. . . thou sufferest the woman Jezebel. . . and she teacheth and seduceth my servants" (Rev. 2:14-20). These were the charges Christ brought against the churches of Pergamum and Thyatira. Since they had much the same condition and need, they can be considered together. Their spiritual decline was manifest in an attitude of complacency towards the truth.

Where Ephesus had stood firm, intolerant of evil men and judging those who posed as apostles (2:2), these two churches had slipped. They had not apostatized as a whole, in fact Pergamum earned the commendation, "Thou holdest fast My Name, and didst not deny My faith" (2:13), but both were guilty of an easygoing attitude towards false teaching within the fellowship. Unlike Ephesus, these churches had become tolerant where their Lord was intolerant (2:6). They were treating those teaching error with weak indulgence, when they had been told to "contend earnestly for the faith" (Jude 3). By failing in the exercise of discipline, they revealed that they were no longer jealous for the truth. They were busying themselves about "the house of God, which is. . . the pillar and ground of the truth" (1 Tim. 3:15), unconcerned about the men who were tampering with its foundations.

What was this error that had reared its head in these churches? It was the teaching of Balaam that led those holding it "to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit fornication" (Rev. 2:14, 20). Nothing definite appears to be known about the teaching of the Nicolaitans, but the fact that it was linked with the teaching of Balaam, and that there were those holding it "in like manner" (verse 15), is an indication that it may have been the same evil, though perhaps in a different form. Similarly with the self styled prophetess in the church at Thyatira; Jezebel was probably a figurative name which described her character, but her teaching was that of Balaam (cf. verses 14, 20).

In Numbers (chaps. 25 and 31:16) the origin of the teaching is recorded. It began in the heart of a covetous man who loved the hire of wrongdoing; thus the motive was evil gain. Balaam, whom God had compelled to bless Israel instead of cursing them, counselled the Moabites to seduce the Israelites into the licentious idolatry of Baal Peor. It was a teaching of guile (Num. 25:18) that succeeded all too easily in seducing a people whose strength lay in being separate and undefiled in comparison with the other nations. Balaam himself had testified of this: "It is a people that dwell alone, and shall not be reckoned among the nations" (Num. 23:9); and again, "He hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob, neither hath He seen perverseness in Israel" (Num. 23:21).

The epistles disclose that two principal threats to the life of the New Testament churches were: firstly, the teaching of Judaism with its return to the bondage of ceremonies and rituals;

and secondly, this teaching of Balaam in various forms, with its return to the bondage of the world.

The council at Jerusalem (Acts 15) had the delicate task of marking out for the guidance of the churches the middle path between these two extremes of error. It refused to put the yoke of Judaism upon the neck of the disciples by insisting on circumcision and the keeping of the ceremonial law. But it warned them to abstain from that which would lead to the bondage of the world, such as, "things sacrificed to idols. . . and fornication," which was the teaching of Balaam.

This doctrine of worldliness under the guise of Christianity was gaining momentum in the latter part of the first century. In his second epistle, Peter devotes almost the whole of chapter 2 to those teachers who "followed the way of Balaam," and it is the burden of Jude's whole epistle. These two give us a clear view of the character of the teachers and their doctrine. They despised dominion. They were revelers, adulterous, and covetous. They enticed unsteadfast souls. As Balaam may have justified his evil counsel by arguing that, since God had promised to bless Israel and no one could reverse it (Num. 23:19), therefore they could sin with impunity, so were these Balaam teachers of the New Testament guilty of "turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ" (Jude 4).

In other words, they followed and taught a worldly policy of self-indulgence under the cloak of grace, denying thereby the Lordship of Christ. They argued that they were no longer under the bondage of the law, and therefore could do as they pleased. Their motto might have been, "Let us continue in sin that grace may abound," or "Let us do evil that good may come." They held out a way of escape from the strait gate and the narrow way, offering the wavering believer a new "liberty," while they themselves were "slaves of corruption" (2 Pet. 2:19).

Down the centuries all the seductive skill of Satan has been employed in seeking to break down the fence that God has placed around His people. He has used his evil genius to thwart those glorious purposes that can only be achieved through "an elect race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession" (1 Pet. 2: 9). Paul told the Corinthian believers, "I espoused you to one husband, that I might present you as a pure virgin to Christ" (2 Cor. 11:2). No wonder James addresses the worldly Christians thus: "Ye adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God?" (Jas. 4:4).

Let us face it now: a teaching that encourages conformity to the world, though it takes to itself the name of Christian, and though it works under the orthodox evangelical phraseology, is a doctrine of Balaam. "For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein and overcome, the last state is become worse with them than the first" (2 Pet. 2:20). It were better never to have had opportunity to be espoused to the Lord, than having been betrothed to play the harlot with the world.

The woman who has lost her first love for her husband is the one most open to the temptation of being unfaithful. It is not such a big step from the sin of Ephesus to that which threatened the life of Pergamum and Thyatira. Who can estimate the devastating effect upon the church today of the teaching of Balaam? It is finding its way into circles which one might have thought were forever immune. This modern form of the pollution of idols and committing fornication with the world is one of the greatest scourges among the people of God. As with these two churches, God holds responsible those who, though they have not been deceived and do not follow the teaching, countenance it being taught, and with a criminal indulgence allow it to be followed. The Lord is here contending with those who tolerate that which He

has specifically stated He hates (Rev. 2:6). It is they who are commanded to repent. It is they who must judge this evil thing. The reviving of the truth that the church is set apart as holy for her Lord is in their hands.

”Repent therefore; or else I come to thee quickly, and I will make war against them with the sword of My mouth” (verse 16) ”And I gave [Jezebel] time that she should repent; and she willeth not to repent of her fornication. Behold, I do cast her into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, except they repent of her works. And I will kill her children with death; and all the churches shall know that I am He which searcheth the reins and hearts: and I will give unto each one of you according to your works” (verses 21-23). Once again the alternatives are clear. The Lord was calling these churches to repentance with a view to their being purified and revived. They must deal with this complacency towards worldliness in their midst and the teaching that fostered it. If they refused to exterminate this evil the Lord would visit them, not in revival but in judgment. What the Lord said to His people long ago in the visions of Patmos, He is saying to His people today, ”If you will not purge away the harlotry of the church, I will do it in judgment.”

Pergamum and Thyatira were guilty of the sin of Eli, whose covetous and licentious sons made themselves vile in the priesthood and he restrained them not, concerning whom the Lord said, ”I will judge his house forever, for the iniquity which he knew” (1 Sam. 3:13), and because he refused to repent at the warning of God. But when the time came for judgment to begin, the thing was not done in a corner, but before all Israel. God was fulfilling His word, ”Behold I will do a thing in Israel, at which both the ears of everyone that heareth it shall tingle” (1 Sam. 3:11). So the Lord warns these New Testament believers, ”I will deal with this thing,” and ”all the churches shall know that I am He which searcheth the reins and hearts.” His visitation in judgment would be vindicated before the eyes of all.

When, through the counsel of Balaam, Israel began to commit whoredom with the daughters of Moab, there was one in the camp of Israel who saved the situation by drastic discipline. Phinehas felt as God did about the matter: ”He was jealous with My jealousy among them,” declared the Lord, therefore ”behold, I give unto him My covenant of peace. . . the covenant of an everlasting priesthood; because he was jealous for his God” (Num. 25). The God who cut off the house of Eli because of his tolerance of this evil, perpetuated for ever the house of Phinehas because of his holy intolerance. The truth must be revived that a holy God requires a holy people. Where are they who may, like Phinehas, save the churches of today from the wrath of the Lord’s jealousy?

There was another in a similar day of apostasy, who was ”very jealous for the Lord, the God of Hosts” (1 Kings 19:10). He acted as drastically as his forebear to purge out the idolatry and fornication from the midst of God’s people. In his jealousy for the Lord Elijah averted the fire of divine wrath and brought down the fire of revival. He slew the worshipers of Baal and opened the windows of heaven. ”The God that answereth by fire” is still God. Shall it be the fire of judgment or of revival?

Life

”I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and thou art dead” (Rev. 3:1). This was the divine estimate of the church in Sardis. Since Scripture clearly teaches that a church is composed only of ”living stones,” those who have been spiritually quickened and possess life in Christ, how could Christ say of this church, ”Thou art dead?” . . . Clearly it was meant in a relative sense, not in an absolute sense. If this company had never possessed life Christ would

never have exhorted them to "stablish the things that remain." Since He obviously addresses them as believers, He teaches us that there is a sense in which believers may be dead. Christ's statement follows from His absolute knowledge of their works, "I know thy works, that. . . thou art dead." In essence they had life, but when it came to manifestation or "works," they were dead. This church was like the boy whom the Lord delivered from an unclean spirit of whom it is recorded, "the child became as one dead; insomuch that the more part said, He is dead" (Mark 9:26). The life was there, but it was not being manifested.

There is no suggestion that these believers were dead because of an absence of works. Here is not the deadness of inactivity, for Christ clearly stated that they had works, that He knew them, and that He had found them unfulfilled. Nor is there any suggestion that they were dead because they held heterodox teaching, for though Christ had many things to judge of them, He never implied that they had departed from the faith. Here, then, we are faced with the anomaly of a church which is evangelically orthodox, manifestly active – but dead in the estimate of the Lord. In His address to these believers, the Lord discloses the reasons for their state, and marks out the way whereby the life of the church may be revived.

Firstly, Sardis was a church relying on her past reputation. "Thou hast a name that thou livest." Here was evidently a company with a great spiritual tradition, that had succumbed to the temptation of looking backwards in pride instead of looking upwards in humility and dependence. Doubtless there had been a day when the eyes of this church were truly fixed on Christ, seeking to do all as unto Him; thus had she become great in spiritual power and influence, and had a name among the churches. Now, alas, she had taken her eyes off the Lord and fixed them upon men, more concerned with their commendation than His, striving to live in the borrowed glory of a day that had passed.

Men are impressed by externalities, the Lord only by realities. When the saints at Sardis lost that "single eye" that was set on pleasing the Lord, they became occupied with maintaining forms and traditions, "sadly contented with a show of things." Activity and organization continued, but life and power waned. The church had striven to maintain appearances, and she had succeeded - "Thou hast a name that thou livest," but at the cost of her life - "Thou art dead." Sardis had become like the Necropolis of Cairo, whose streets and houses appear from a distance like those of a thriving community, but when viewed from within it is discovered that the houses are roofless, and in place of the hearthstone there is a tombstone.

Secondly, Sardis was a church not fulfilling her works. "Be thou watchful, and stablish the things that remain, which were ready to die: for I have found no works of thine fulfilled before My God" (Rev. 3:2). It has already been pointed out that the deadness of Sardis was not to be accounted for on the ground of her inactivity. It was the quality rather than the quantity of her works that revealed that she was dead. "The Lord is a God of knowledge, and by Him actions are weighed" (1 Sam. 2:3).

The output of this church, when placed upon the balances of the sanctuary, was found to be deficient of that vital element, "the spirit of life." Here was the activity of converted men without the activity of God. Here was action without unction. Here was a form of religion that, despite its orthodoxy, denied the power thereof.

Thus with all the energy put forth there was no consummation and no fruition. Before God the works were unfulfilled, that is, the divine purpose in them was not being achieved. There was gospel testimony with no conversions; prayer gatherings with no spirit of intercession and no

answers from heaven; ministry of the word with no enrichment to the church; much being done but nothing being achieved. "I have found no works of thine fulfilled."

Unless the life of the Spirit was pulsating through her activities, how could there be fulfilment so as to satisfy the eye of God? She was working in the energy of the flesh, and it is always true that "they that are in the flesh cannot please God" (Rom. 8:8). The case of Sardis is a vivid illustration of the truth that "the mind of the flesh is death" (Rom. 8:6). She was sowing to the flesh, and thus she could not reap fruition and fulfilment, only corruption (Gal. 6:8). Well might the Lord have said to Sardis what He said to Israel years before: "Consider your ways. Ye have sown much, and bring in little; ye eat, but ye have not enough; ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink; ye clothe you, but there is none warm; and he that earneth wages earneth wages to put it into a bag with holes" (Hag. 1:5, 6).

Thirdly, Sardis was a church not living up to her privileges. "Remember therefore how thou hast received and didst hear; and keep it, and repent" (verse 3). She is now reminded by the Lord of how she had received the truth. It is possible that she had been entrusted with a fuller measure of spiritual light than many other churches; and that this was why she had "a name," a reputation among the others. At the first she had accepted in humility and obedience this sacred trust, for Christ reminds her, "Thou. . . didst hear." She had become "obedient from the heart" to that which she had received. The truth had been embraced.

As Ephesus had to be reminded that she had lost her first love, so Sardis had now to be reminded that she had lost her first obedience. Privileged beyond many, and with a reputation surpassing most, she had become careless of her holy stewardship. God had given these believers light that they might walk in it, not boast about it. Every privilege brings an attendant responsibility. Failure to live up to the light received had brought this church to a worse state than if she had never had that fuller light. "If the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is the darkness!" (Matt. 6:23).

Christ had now to command this church to "keep" that which she had at the first received and heard, and to "repent" of her failure to do so. She had let the truth slip, not mentally perhaps, but experimentally. Have we done the same? "Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things that were heard, lest haply we drift away from them" (Heb. 2:1). It is a most solemn thing to receive and not to keep. If there are churches today who, like Sardis, have a name that they live, who speak of the greater light that they have received, they would do well to ponder what Paul would describe as "sound words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Tim. 6:3), when He spoke of our accountability as servants in view of the privileges we have received: "That servant, which knew his Lord's will, and made not ready, nor did according to His will, shall be beaten with many stripes. . . And to whomsoever much is given, of him shall much be required: and to whom they commit much, of him will they ask the more" (Luke 12:47, 48).

Finally, Sardis was a church failing to maintain her purity. The heart attitude of these believers resulted in defilement as well as deadness. There were only "a few names in Sardis which did not defile their garments" (Rev. 3:4). These garments speak of the outer life, that which is plain for all to see. These who were resting on a past reputation, who were satisfied to think that they had been privileged to receive the fuller light, had grown careless about their outward purity. The garments of glory and of beauty had been defiled by the works of the flesh. Instead of "hating even the garment spotted by the flesh" (Jude 23), they were hardly conscious of any defilement there, or that the outer garments were any less pure than they ought to have been. It was clearly taught in the Old Testament that where there was death there was defilement (Lev. 21:1, 11, etc.).

Had these Christians been full of life they would have been vigilant, and so have avoided the spotting of their garments. Only he who watches can expect "to keep himself unspotted from the world" (Jas. 1:27). The moment of decline was when they ceased to watch. The Lord had thus to bring them back to the point of departure in order to show them the way to recovery, to the reviving of their life.

"Be thou watchful, and stablish the things that remain, which were ready to die: for I have found no works of thine fulfilled" (Rev. 3:2). The things that remained in Sardis were her incomplete works. These spiritual activities were a mere shell devoid of the kernel of life, and now even the shell was about to pass away. That which remained could only be saved from final decay and established by a new inflow of divine life. For this the church must awake. There must be a new spirit of vigilance, of obedience, of repentance.

"If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee." Once again the solemn alternative is set forth. If the church was not willing to watch that her life should be revived Christ would visit her in judgment. The words of the Lord to these believers, "I will come as a thief," had evidently no immediate reference to His return, although His second advent is thus described elsewhere. This coming was not a promise but a warning, and its fulfilment was contingent upon the failure of the church to watch - "if. . . thou shalt not watch, I will come," implying that vigilance could avert it. It was a coming of Christ in judgment - "I will come upon thee." And finally, whatever application the warning may have for believers today it applied primarily to this church in Sardis, who Christ knew would no longer exist when He should come again. If the church did not repent Christ must fulfil His word.

The thief comes to dispossess his victim of the precious things in his keeping. In such a manner would Christ come upon this church in judgment if she did not repent and watch. Did these believers boast that they had a name that they lived? He would come and take it from them, and all the churches would know that Sardis was dead. Were they still making much of "the things that remain," the works that were unfulfilled? He would come and these things that were "ready to die" would pass away. Were they satisfied with the light that they had received? He would come and take this from them so that the light that was in them would become darkness. As for the garments that were spotted and defiled, He would come and strip these from them, and their nakedness would be seen by all. "Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame" (Rev. 16:15). In a word, this church lacked the one thing needful, the spirit of life; and if she would not remedy the situation He would come to fulfil His own words spoken here on earth, "whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that which he hath" (Matt. 13:12).

Not only would Christ come to do the work of a thief, but He could come in the manner of a thief. "Thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee." As a thief comes stealthily, secretly, silently, so would Christ come upon this church in judgment. Unheralded He would arrive, undetected He would go. Her precious things would be taken from her without her realizing it. As Samson "awoke out of his sleep, and said, I will go out as at other times. . . But he wist not that the Lord was departed from him" (Judges 16:20); so would she awaken, all unconscious that "the thief" had visited her in her slumbers and that which she should have held fast till He came (Rev. 2:25) had gone.

As we have weighed up the Lord's description of the church in Sardis, has there risen up before us those churches that we know? Have we seen our own spiritual lives mirrored in the condition of these first century Christians? Then we can be assured the warnings apply to us

also. It is ours to determine whether He shall come unto us as the rain, or as the thief, to quicken or to judge.

Zeal

"Thou art lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold" (Rev. 3:16). This was the Lord's appraisal of Laodicea. What is the spiritual significance of being hot, cold, or lukewarm? The final command of the Lord to this church was, "Be zealous therefore and repent" (verse 19); He had evidently been registering the zeal or fervour of this church. Now zeal is not enthusiasm, though it may contain it. There is, however, a fleshly enthusiasm in spiritual things which is the offspring of pride, and which bears no relation to spiritual zeal. To be fervent and to be zealous both convey in the original the idea of heat, of intensity of feeling. Zeal also contains the thought of a jealous concern: "zealous" and "jealous" being interchangeable words in Scripture. A jealous concern for God's glory is the motive of true spiritual zeal. It was jealousy for God's honour that moved the Saviour to purge the temple, but it reminded the disciples of the Scripture, "The zeal of Thine house shall eat me up" (John 2:17).

Registering the temperature of this church's zeal, the Lord says to her, "I would thou wert . . . hot." The zeal that God looks for is "boiling hot," for this is what the word means in the original. How many there were in the sacred records who were "hot" in their zeal for God. Said David, "My heart was hot within me; while I was musing the fire kindled: then spake I with my tongue" (Ps. 39:3). Jeremiah declared, "If I say I will not make mention of Him, nor speak any more in His Name, then there is in mine heart as it were a burning fire shut up in my bones" (Jer. 20:9). But who among the sons of men ever exceeded the zeal of him who described himself as "the least of the apostles," but who "laboured more abundantly than they all" (1 Cor. 15:9, 10). "I am ready," he could say, "not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the Name of the Lord Jesus" (Acts 21:13).

Paul's Christianity was not a pastime but a passion. The zeal that was once engaged in persecuting the church had been reclaimed for God, purged and sanctified; and now, fed by the Spirit of God and burning with holy intensity, it was ever urging him forward "toward the goal for the prize." One can only imagine the feelings of the Saviour as He looked sorrowfully at this church of Laodicea and said, "I would thou wert . . . hot."

"I would thou wert cold." This does not suggest an unregenerate state, for Christ could not have wished that these Laodicean believers had never been redeemed, unless He thereby denied the value of His redemptive work in them. No, the state here described is that of the backslider, who has slipped so far as to reveal no concern at all for the things of Christ. He has opened his life to the world with its icy blast. He has become manifestly cold towards the One to whom he once yielded allegiance. The cares, riches, and pleasures of this life have frozen his soul. There is not even a pretense of zeal; he is cold. But this was not the state of the Laodiceans.

"Thou art lukewarm," that is, the state between the two. Laodicea had neither the spiritual intensity of the hot, nor the spiritual honesty of the cold. The hot are fervent, the cold are indifferent, but the lukewarm are complacent. According to her confession, this church was "hot," for she professed so much: according to her condition, this church was cold, for she possessed so little. These believers were tepid because they had not the concern, the passion, the zeal which would make them hot; and because they were too self-respecting to be numbered with those who were openly cold. "Tepid is that condition in which conviction does not affect conscience, heart, or will" (Campbell Morgan). Whatever convictions these Christians had, they did not lead to action.

"I would thou wert cold or hot." That the Lord would rather they were hot than lukewarm we can readily understand, but why would He rather they were cold than lukewarm? Firstly, because a lukewarm state is a mixture of hot and cold, and the Lord abhors mixtures. Mixture is the work of Satan and spells chaos. This was the state of the creation as we find it on the first page of Scripture (Gen. 1:2), and God set to work to renovate and restore by dividing the things that were different, the light from the darkness, the waters beneath the firmament from those above, the seas from the earth, etc. The same lesson was enshrined in the law. "Thou shalt not let thy cattle gender with a diverse kind: thou shalt not sow thy field with two kinds of seed: neither shall there come upon thee a garment of two kinds of stuff mingled together" (Lev. 19:19). "Thou shalt not plow with an ox and an ass together" (Deut. 22:9-11). Divine order necessitates the separation of those things which by their very nature are irreconcilably distinct.

Secondly, the Lord prefers the cold, because there is an element of hypocrisy in the lukewarm state that is not so with the cold; and the Lord abhors hypocrisy. The profession of those believers, "Thou sayest, I am rich," was denied by their true condition, "and knowest not that thou art. . . poor." When a man's condition denies his profession, that is hypocrisy, even though he may be blind to it. It is the same in the realm of salvation: compare the attitude of Jesus to the self confessed sinner, tax gatherer, and harlot with his attitude to the hypocritical, self righteous Pharisee. To the former He said, "Come unto Me, all ye that labour" (Matt. 11:28); to the latter, "Ye offspring of vipers, how shall ye escape the judgment of hell?" (Matt. 23:33). Though the Laodiceans were hardly conscious of their hypocrisy, they were not thereby absolved from it.

Finally, the Lord prefers the cold because there is more hope for the recovery of the cold than of the lukewarm. There was more hope for the son (representing the tax gatherer) who said, "I will not," but afterwards repented and went, than for the son (representing the Pharisee) who said, "I go, sir," and went not. To the latter Jesus said, "the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you" (Matt. 21:31).

It was to these two classes that the parable of the prodigal was directed (Luke 15: 1-3). Today we may rightly use the story to preach the gospel to sinners, but it has a more poignant application to those who are already sons of the Father, especially in relation to the elder brother in the plot. If the prodigal who openly left the home be taken to represent the cold backslider, and the elder brother who stayed at home, professing that he had never transgressed and yet who never possessed his possessions (verse 29), be regarded as the lukewarm believer, the story will live.

How would we expect a lukewarm, complacent Christian to react to a backslidden brother who not only returns to the Father's house, but into a fulness of joy and blessing that the other has never known? How would we expect him to behave when he is entreated to come in and share these good things? Just as did the elder brother: "He was angry, and would not go in" (verse 28). Ah, there is more hope for the recovery of the cold than of the lukewarm.

The Lord now proceeds to define this lukewarm state. "Because thou sayest, I am. . . and knowest not that thou art. . ." This was the whole situation in a nutshell. Even the hot could hardly be in a better state than rich, having gotten riches, and having need of nothing. Even the cold could be little worse than wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked. They aspired to be among the hot, whereas in all but name they were among the cold.

Their claim was threefold. Firstly, they boasted of their spiritual inheritance: "I am rich." They made much of the great objective side of truth, their spiritual riches in Christ, without realizing that such is vain unless backed up by the subjective or experimental side. In other

words it was no use talking about being spiritual millionaires, while they were living like spiritual paupers. It was no use congratulating each other that they were "Blessed with all spiritual blessings. . . in Christ," or that they were "in everything. . . enriched by Him," if they were manifestly not living in the goal of their inheritance.

Then they spoke of their spiritual increase: "I have gotten riches." They thus included riches gained by them as well as riches given to them. It is right and proper that riches received as an inheritance should be increased by proper use. The faithful servant who has received five talents will gain other five talents. Light obeyed will increase. God deals to each man a "measure of faith," but it may grow exceedingly. "Unto everyone that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance" (Matt. 25:29). This boast might have been true, but was in fact a sad delusion. They mistook increased apprehension for increased appropriation.

Finally, they asserted their spiritual independence: "I have need of nothing." They were self sufficient. No minister of the word, no servant of God could impart anything to them. They knew it all, and they had it all. The exceeding riches of God's grace were not flowing through to meet the need of this poverty stricken church because she had "need of nothing". The Lord has no wealth for the rich, no food for the full. "The hungry He hath filled with good things; and the rich He hath sent empty away" (Luke 1:53).

Did someone suggest an extra church prayer meeting to implore God's blessing? They had no need of such a thing. Was mention made of a day to be set apart for humiliation and confession in view of the prevailing deadness? It was quite uncalled for – things were going well. Was concern expressed that the gospel service was not reaching the people, or resulting in conversions? The gospel service had always been quite adequate, and the results must be left with God. Did someone dare to suggest that there was a suspicion of coldness in the service of worship? The gatherings were all that could be desired.

Such was the claim of these believers; but what had the Lord to say of their actual condition? "And knowest not that thou art. . ." They were oblivious of their true condition before God. Spiritual insensibility is always a mark of lukewarmness. They had not "their senses exercised to discern good and evil" (Heb. 5:14). So much had they emphasized their standing and so little their true state that they were virtually saying, "Everyone that doeth evil is good in the sight of the Lord, and He delighteth in them" (Mal. 2:17). "Thou art the wretched one and miserable." "Wretched" indicates the state of one in the midst of trouble or frustration, as when Paul cried out in the midst of his failures, "O wretched man that I am." "Miserable" means in a state to be pitied, an object of mercy. Paul used this word also to describe what a believer would be without the hope of resurrection: "If in this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all men most pitiable" (1 Cor. 15:19). Where they had thought to be congratulated they were in fact to be commiserated. Why were these believers wretched and miserable, though unconscious of it? Because they were "poor and blind and naked."

"Thou art. . . poor." They could talk about "the unsearchable riches of Christ," they could admire them as though they were their own, but they failed utterly to possess them. This church stands in striking contrast to that of Smyrna whom the Lord consoled in all her tribulation and poverty with the reminder, "But thou art rich" (Rev. 2:9). She had learned the secret of "having nothing, and yet possessing all things" (2 Cor. 6:10).

"Thou art. . . blind." Not only is there a blindness which affects the minds of the unbelieving (2 Cor. 4:4), but of the believer also. Peter reminds us of those spiritual virtues that God has granted to us as believers, and how they may become ours; but he adds, "He that lacketh these

things [who, like the church of Laodicea, does not possess his possessions] is blind, seeing only what is near" (2 Pet. 1: 3-9). These believers were "short sighted" (2 Pet. 1:9, Darby), seeing only the temporal and transitory things of the passing world, and without the heavenly vision for "the things that are above, where Christ is" (Col. 3:1). These believers were indeed "wretched and pitiable," as was sightless Samson, grinding in the prison house.

"Thou art. . . naked." As God looked at this church all that He could see was "flesh." "In my flesh dwelleth no good thing" (Rom, 7:18). "They that are in the flesh cannot please God" (Rom. 8:8). The eye of God can only find pleasure in looking upon one clothed with "the new man" which we are commanded to put on (Col. 3:10). If these believers had ever "put on," then they had certainly failed to keep on. "Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame" (Rev. 16:15). Yes, there is an inevitable shame attached to nakedness in the spiritual as well as the natural realm, and this reproach was upon the Name they bore as well as upon themselves. Little wonder their Lord was deeply concerned that "the shame of [their] nakedness be not made manifest" (Rev. 3:18).

Despite this pathetic picture the Lord had not yet despaired, even of these believers. He outlines the pathway to recovery: "I counsel thee to buy of Me. . ." This meant, firstly, they must renounce their boast to "have need of nothing," for clearly he who has no need, has no need to buy. Secondly, they must be prepared to pay the price, for all buying costs. This must be paid in humility, repentance, diligence, and sacrifice. Finally, they must buy of Him. In Christ Jesus their Lord were all the resources and blessings they could need to meet their poverty, blindness, and nakedness.

For their poverty He offered them "gold refined by fire." Gold means purchasing power. There is practically nothing material beyond the grasp of the natural man if he has gold. There is no spiritual blessing that is beyond the grasp of the spiritual man who has this gold that Christ offers. They needed everything, and they could have everything, if they had "gold refined by fire," that is, a purified faith. "The proof of your faith, being more precious than gold that perisheth though it is proved by fire" (1 Pet. 1:7). Faith is the great purchasing power of the believer. "Believing, ye shall receive" (Matt. 21:22) is an eternal principle of the ways of God. All things are within range of the one who believes (Mark 9:23). If the Laodiceans' claim to be rich meant that they were well to do they were certainly devoid of this gold. Smyrna in her material poverty, however, had much of it (Rev. 2:9). It is indeed seldom that material gold and spiritual gold are found together in any quantity. "Did not God choose them that are poor as to the world to be rich in faith?" (Jas. 2:5). "Buy of Me gold." The gold was in Christ and of Christ. They could henceforth, if they would, "live by faith, the faith of the Son of God" (Gal. 2:20, Darby), just as a pauper, receiving a vast inheritance, would start to live by his newly acquired wealth.

For their nakedness He offered them "white garments." These were also to be bought of Him. If the gold was the faith of Christ, then these garments were the righteousness of Christ; not the imputed righteousness which is the portion of all who believe, but the imparted righteousness, seen in the practical outworking of holiness day by day. They were to "put on the new man." But what is meant by this? The passage goes on to explain, "Put on therefore. . . a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering," and so on (Col. 3:10, 12). "The fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints" (Rev. 19:8). The flesh was to be covered with the white garments of Christlikeness.

Not only had they to buy the garments, but also don them, "that thou mayest clothe thyself," as the R.V. rightly renders it. This is in keeping with the teaching concerning "the new man" which the saints themselves had to put on, and also concerning the Bride of whom we read, "It was given unto her that she should array herself in fine linen" (Rev. 19:8). Only thus could the shame of their nakedness be covered.

Finally, for their blindness He offered them "eye salve to anoint [their] eyes." Of the three things mentioned here, vision is perhaps the most difficult to recover, once it has been lost. Samson recovered his great strength before he died with the Philistines, but he never recovered his vision. In Christ there is an eye salve, more wonderful than that which He once made of clay to anoint the eyes of a man born blind (John 9:6). That day Christ "anointed on" the eyes for outer sight. This eye salve they themselves had to "anoint [or rub] in" that the inner sight might be restored. As the Anointed One, there rested upon Christ "the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord" (Isa. 11:2). The same anointing of the Spirit from Him could bring healing virtue to the blinded vision, causing these believers to know and to be taught concerning all things (1 John 2:20, 27). Thus would they receive "a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him; having the eyes of [their] heart enlightened" (Eph. 1:17); thus would they see the wondrous ways and purposes of God.

That blessed unction from above
Is comfort, life, and fire of love,
Enables with perpetual light
The dullness of our blinded sight.
FROM LATIN OF NINTH CENTURY.

Having sharply reprov'd these Christians, nauseating in their lukewarmness, the Chief Shepherd tenderly adds, "As many as I love I reprove." What matchless grace is this! In spite of everything He loved them still. Since He had not abandoned them, there was still hope of their recovery. "Be zealous therefore and repent" was His last exhortation. In place of their lukewarmness there must be a revived zeal accompanied by a thorough going repentance in view of what they had professed to be, and what in fact they were.

If the Laodiceans were not willing to heed the command of their Lord they would face the solemn alternative of a judgment more imminent than anything He had already issued. "Because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I am about to spue thee out of my mouth" (Darby), as one would vomit out food disagreeable to the palate. If words have any significance, Christ was warning this church of some kind of imminent rejection. Paul was urging the Corinthians to be hot in their zeal for God when he said, "Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? Even so run that ye may attain." Then he added, "I therefore so run. . . lest by any means. . . I myself should be rejected" (1 Cor. 9:24-27).

This solemn warning to Laodicea is also a warning to every lukewarm church or Christian, that though their final salvation cannot be imperilled, they are in grievous danger of being rejected as to the prize. Paul took no chances. "Brethren, I count not myself yet to have apprehended: but one thing I do. . . I press on toward the goal unto the prize of the upward calling of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 3:13, margin).

How would Christ reject this church? "I am about to spue thee out of My mouth." It was from the mouth of the Lord that this church would be rejected, if unrepentant and unrevived. He

had once said, "Everyone therefore who shall confess Me before men, him will I also confess before My Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny Me before men, him will I also deny before My Father which is in heaven" (Matt. 10:32).

If the promise concerning confession applies to true believers, so does the warning concerning denial. The lukewarm Laodiceans, wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked, with Christ standing outside the door, were virtually denying Him. He was about to reject them from His mouth by denying them before His Father, with all the loss that that would involve. "If we died with Him, we shall also live with Him: if we endure, we shall also reign with Him: if we shall deny Him, He also will deny us" (2 Tim. 2:11).

As we have contemplated this final message of the risen Christ, dare we say that the spirit of Laodicea is not abroad today? Is there no trace of it in our own hearts? Are we prepared to pay the price of a zeal revived, ablaze for God? Are we ashamed to be fervent in our devotion to the Lord? Have we faced the solemn alternative? What a need to cry,

Revive us, Lord ! Is zeal abating
While harvest fields are vast and white?
Revive us, Lord, the world is waiting,
Equip Thy church to spread the light.
B. P. HEAD.

The words of Christ shut us up to the reviving of our love, our truth, our life, our zeal - or to certain judgment. "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches."

CONCLUSION

"Who knoweth whether thou art not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?"
(Esther 4: 14).

It was an hour of crisis. A situation had arisen in which the destiny of the elect nation seemed to hang in the balance. Ahasuerus, the despotic monarch of Persia, had consented to sign a decree at the request of Haman, the adversary of God's people, that on a certain day all Jews throughout his vast domain were to be slain. It seemed that certain judgment was about to overwhelm God's people, and that the lamp of Israel would be quenched for ever. But in the wondrous providences of God a Hebrew orphan girl had been brought into a unique relationship with the king. Ahasuerus had chosen Esther as his bride, set the royal crown upon her head, and made her queen (2:17).

God had so ordained that she should come to the kingdom for such a time, that out of desperate weakness His people might be made strong. He had determined that through Esther He would make the wrath of man to praise Him, so that in an hour of impending judgment and calamity there might arise relief and deliverance to the captive daughter of Zion.

It is such an hour of crisis today. Satan, the "Haman" of the people of God, knows that his time is short. From within and from without he is making a last desperate bid to overwhelm the Church. Materialism, Communism, Mohammedanism, Romanism, and Spiritism are making rapid advances. If figures recently issued are reliable, the increasing world population is swallowing up the efforts of the church to evangelize to a finish by preaching the gospel to every creature. "The population of the world increases at a rate of 44 millions per year. There are 400 millions more on earth today that have not been reached with the gospel than there were 1 generation ago. During the last generation alone, 750 millions went into eternity

who had never heard one word about Christ and His salvation” (L. Steiner). It must be obvious to every thoughtful mind that the situation is desperate. Time is running out. World events are moving fast. The nations are lining up for the last great conflagration. Only revival, a last great sweep of the Spirit can meet the need. This is indeed the hour of crisis, and ”who knoweth whether thou art not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?”

The Call to Intercede

”Charge her that she should go in unto the king, to make supplication unto him, and to make request before him, for her people” (4:8). Thus Mordecai, Esther’s guardian, answered the messenger whom she had sent. She was to use her unique relationship with the king for the deliverance of her people. She was to “go in unto the king, to make supplication unto him” who alone could alter the situation. A breach had been made in the defences of God’s people, and the enemy was about to rush in for the kill. But there was one who had the ear of the king, who could therefore stand in the gap, and turn the tide of calamity that would engulf both her and her people.

Like Esther, many of God’s people today are oblivious of the breaches in our defences that leave us wide open to the enemy. They look upon the Mordecais of today who foresee the perils, as pessimists. Like Esther, they would like to take from these realists the sackcloth of their gloomy outlook, and clothe them with the bright garments of their own wishful thinking (4:4). The Church needs to be awakened to the perils of the hour and the possibilities of revival.

Down the years God has ever looked in the hour of crisis for intercessors. Sometimes He has looked in vain. Has He to say to His people today what He said long ago through Ezekiel: ”Ye have not gone up into the gaps, neither made up the fence for the house of Israel, to stand in the battle in the day of the Lord”? (Ezek. 13:5). The word of God, the need of the church, the plight of the world, the possibility of revival, the shortness of the time, would unitedly urge us ”to go in unto the King”. God forbid that He should have to say of His people today: ”I sought for a man among them, that should make up the fence, and stand in the gap before Me for the land, that I should not destroy it: but I found none” (Ezek. 22:30). Today God is seeking for a man, a woman. Will you be that one? ”Who knoweth whether thou art not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?”

The Challenge to Sacrifice

”All . . . know, that whosoever, whether man or woman, shall come unto the king into the inner court, who is not called, there is one law for him, that he be put to death, except such to whom the king shall hold out the golden sceptre that he may live” (Esther 4:11). Mordecai was in fact urging the young queen to take her life in her hands by going into the presence of the king unbidden. He was in fact asking her to cast aside all thought of self-preservation, and to be willing to sacrifice herself for the life of her people. A desperate situation demanded desperate measures.

Is not the situation desperate today? Where are those who are willing to sacrifice themselves that they may go ”up into the gaps. . . to stand in the battle in the day of the Lord”? Where are those who will put their lives in jeopardy that they may “turn back the battle at the gate”? God is looking for the intercessor who will live the life of crucifixion, laying down his life daily for the cause of Christ. Such was a saintly woman who lived in the West Country and who passed away but a few years ago. Although in failing health she had a clear vision of the need of revival and a great prayer burden for it. Her sister declared that she probably hastened her end by her agonizing in prayer for the windows of heaven to be opened. Such are the Esthers

who turn the tide for God. Paul said of himself, "I hold not my life of any account, as dear unto myself, so that I may finish my course" (Acts 20:24), and of Epaphroditus, "for the work of Christ he came nigh unto death, hazarding his life" (Phil. 2:30). Who follows in their train?

The Issues at Stake

"Think not with thyself that thou shalt escape in the king's house. . . For if thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, then shall relief and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place, but thou and thy father's house shall perish" (Esther 4:13, 14). In the face of the sacrifice she was being called upon to make Esther hesitated. She was counting the cost. The reply of Mordecai, however, set forth with unmistakable frankness the issues at stake. Esther might refuse the call to intercede, trusting to her relationship with the king to save her skin if the worst happened. In a word Mordecai shatters such a thought. "Think not with thyself that thou shalt escape."

To hold her peace at such a time would not bring disaster to her people, but to herself. God would certainly deliver His people. He was not shut up to Esther or anyone else. If she failed in this hour of desperate need and of great opportunity, if she shirked the issue, relief and deliverance would arise to the Jews from some other quarter, but she and her house would perish.

Many are convinced that God is going to revive His people; that there is scriptural ground for that conviction has already been shown. The Lord is now calling for intercessors; it may be that some have heard the call through reading this book. If we fail, God will bring relief and deliverance from some other quarter. "For the Lord of Hosts hath purposed, and who shall disannul it? and His hand is stretched out, and who shall turn it back?" (Isa. 14:27). We must, however, face the consequences of our refusal. Sometimes the issue is not one of "Revival or Judgment" but of "Revival and Judgment".

The very tide of blessing may sweep away those who will not obey, or will not believe. It was so in the siege of Samaria. Elisha brought the promise of imminent deliverance, declaring that on the morrow fine flour and barley would be sold at normal prices in the gate of Samaria. The king's captain replied, "Behold, if the Lord should make windows in heaven, might this thing be?" (2 Kings 7:2). Said Elijah, "Behold, thou shalt see it with thine eyes, but shalt not eat thereof," and so it came to pass. In the stampede for food he was trodden to death. Relief and deliverance came to the people, but he perished in his unbelief. It is a major tragedy when a soul lives to see revival, but not to partake of it, because of disobedience or unbelief.

Do we believe? We cannot have a true expectation of revival while refusing the call to intercede. Our apathy denies our belief. The solid and practical proof of faith in this matter is a readiness to lose our lives in this ministry of intercession, that we may find them in revival. To fail to do so when God calls is to bring upon ourselves a curse instead of a blessing. Deborah and Barak in their song of victory over the hosts of Sisera, praised God "For that the leaders took the lead in Israel, for that the people offered themselves willingly" (Judges 5:2); but they also pronounced an anathema upon the inhabitants of Meroz because they failed to do so.

It was an hour of crisis and of opportunity, but they refused "to stand in the battle in the day of the Lord." "Curse ye Meroz, said the angel of the Lord, curse ye bitterly the inhabitants thereof; because they came not to the help of the Lord, to the help of the Lord against the mighty" (verse 23). It is a grievous thing to stand aloof in pride, or to hold back in fear or unbelief, when the Spirit of God is moving. The Lord will surely require it. Shall we then hold our peace, or shall we go in unto the King?

The Solemn Resolve “So will I go in unto the king, which is not according to the law: and if I perish, I perish” (Esther 4:16). Moved by the desperate need, awed but not intimidated by the peril involved, convinced that she had come to the kingdom for this very hour, the young queen came to this solemn resolve to lay herself upon the altar of sacrifice, to stand in the gap in the hour of crisis, to go in unto the king, and if she perished, she perished. She had faced the challenge, counted the cost, and had thus come to a steadfast determination to deliver her people by her intercession, or die in the attempt. She went in unto the king. He held out to her the golden sceptre, thus accepting her person. He said, “What wilt thou, queen Esther? And what is thy request?” She prevailed with the king for her people. She reversed the situation, and so turned the day of distress into the day of deliverance, and the day of judgment into the day of revival.

When the breaches were wide, and the wrath of God ready to sweep us to hell, the Son of God stood in the gap, and interposed His precious body to save His people from their sins. He is Himself the guarantee of God’s willingness to send the revival so desperately needed, for “He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not also with Him freely give us all things?” (Rom. 8:32) – revival among them. The appalling need of this hour is only matched by its unique opportunity to afford a display of the power and glory of God. Many a faithful intercessor of the past has desired to see the things which we are about to see, and has not seen them. In His matchless grace, God has brought us to the kingdom for such a time as this. The Saviour calls us to follow His steps in the pathway of intercession.

Shall we – dare we disappoint Him?
Brethren, let us rise!
He who died for us is watching
From the skies –

Watching till His royal banner
Floateth far and wide,
Till He seeth of His travail –
Satisfied!

A. J. JANVRIN.

”Now unto Him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, unto Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus unto all generations for ever and ever. Amen” (Eph. 3:20, 21).

A PRAYER FOR REVIVAL

O, GOD, send us the Holy Ghost! Give us both the breath of spiritual life and the fire of unconquerable zeal. O, Thou art our God, answer us by fire, we pray Thee!
Answer us both by wind and fire, and then we shall see Thee to be God indeed. The kingdom comes not, and the work is flagging. Oh, that Thou wouldst send the wind and the fire! Thou wilt do this when we are all of one accord, all believing, all expecting, all prepared by prayer. Lord, bring us to this waiting state! God, send us a season of glorious disorder. Oh, for a sweep of the wind that will set the seas in motion, and make our ironclad brethren, now lying so quietly at anchor, to roll from stem to stem!

Oh, for the fire to fall again – fire which shall affect the most stolid! Oh, that such fire might first sit upon the disciples, and then fall on all around!

O God, Thou art ready to work with us today even as Thou didst then. Stay not, we beseech Thee, but work at once.

Break down every barrier that hinders the incoming of Thy might! Give us now both hearts of flame and tongues of fire to preach Thy reconciling word, for Jesus' sake! Amen!

C. H. SPURGEON