

THE WAY OF REVIVAL

Luke 3:1-6

"It was 1904. All Wales was aflame. The nation had drifted far from God. The spiritual conditions were low indeed. Church attendance was poor, and sin abounded on every side.

Suddenly, like an unexpected tornado, the Spirit of God swept over the land. The churches were crowded, so that multitudes were unable to get in. Meetings lasted from ten in the morning until twelve at night. Three definite services were held each day. Evan Roberts was the human instrument, but there was very little preaching. Singing, testimony, and prayer were the chief features. There were no hymnbooks, they had learned the hymns in childhood; no choir, for everybody sang; no collection, and no advertising.

Nothing had ever come over Wales with such far-reaching results. Infidels were converted; drunkards, thieves, and gamblers saved; and thousands reclaimed to respectability. Confessions of awful sins were heard on every side. Old debts were paid. The theater had to leave for want of patronage. Mules in coal mines refused to work, being unused to kindness! In five weeks, twenty thousand people joined the churches."

In this graphic manner, Dr. Oswald Smith tells us what happened when God swept through a country in revival blessing. Is it any wonder that some of God's children long to see another outpouring of God's Spirit? It is just here, however, that we must remind ourselves that such a longing must be tempered with the knowledge of the "way" of revival. Yes, there is a way of revival and it is a costly way -- before the salvation of God can be seen. That great revivalist and reformer John the Baptist, put it this way: "Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be brought low; and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways shall be made smooth; And all flesh shall see the salvation of God" (Luke 3:4-6). With these words he summed up the conditions that are ever to determine the opportunity for God to work. If revival in terms of the full salvation of God is to be seen, then we must give attention to three things:

I. What Is Enjoined.

The challenge is, "Prepare ye the way of the Lord" (Luke 3:4). In eastern lands, when an emperor or king was due to pass through the country, men were sent to prepare a highway for him. Isaiah and John borrowed that figure to set forth what is enjoined in having a revival. And so the word rings out, "Prepare ye the way of the Lord." Now if we are to catch the personal message in those words, we must first seek out the spiritual principles and then apply them to our personal lives. When God says, "Prepare ye the way of the Lord," He is instructing us to be a means of access through which Christ can reveal Himself. So many church members today are obstructions to Christ, and not ways of access. Six times in the Acts of the Apostles Luke employed this term to identify the true followers of Christ. Even a poor demon-possessed girl had to exclaim, concerning Paul and Silas, "These men are the servants of the most high God, which shew unto us the way of salvation" (Acts 16:17). Can this be said of you? Is your life a way of:

1. Triumphant prayer?

Is your life what the writer to the Hebrews called "the way into the holiest" (Hebrews 9:8)? When people encounter you, are they ushered into the presence of God?

2. Abundant life?

It is one thing to have life; it is quite another to enjoy abundant life. God's purpose for each believer is that he might "reign in life by one, Jesus Christ" (Romans 5:17). Paul knew something of that experience when he wrote, "For to me to live is Christ" (Philippians 1:21). May the Lord deliver us from merely existing and bring us into the joy of really living.

3. Consistent holiness?

Holiness is not the privilege of the so-called aristocracy of heaven; rather, it is the divine expectation and standard of everyone who names the name of Christ. The Word of God reminds us that "For this is the will of God, even your sanctification" (I Thessalonians 4:3). It also says, "For God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness" (I Thessalonians 4:7). Peter put it plainly when he wrote, "But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy" (I Peter 1:15-16). Robert Murray McCheyne said that the greatest ambition of his life was that he might be a holy man.

4. Transcendent love?

To have everything else but to be void of love is to be and to do nothing.

So the command is clear: "Prepare ye the way of the Lord." That is to say, become such a way of prayer, of life, of holiness, and of love that others can see the salvation of God.

II. What Is Entailed.

"Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be brought low; and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways shall be made smooth" (Luke 3:5). John's mission was to prepare the way of the Lord by spiritually filling all the valleys, leveling the mountains, straightening the ways of crookedness, and smoothing out the rough places. And in a similar manner, if we are to prepare the way of the Lord, we shall have to face up to what is spiritually entailed.

1. The valleys of defeat must be filled.

"Every valley shall be filled." Valleys are depressions and divisions in the earth's surface, and as such symbolize aspects of defeat in the believer's life. There are the inward depressions. Their number is legion, but they can always be recognized by the fact that they keep the Christian in a state of depression. Some of the well-known ones are temper, jealousy, bitterness, resentment, moodiness, slavish fear, and an inferiority complex. Then there are outward divisions -- anything and everything that tends to break up the unity of the Spirit in the bond of

peace. Are you defeated by these depressions and divisions in your life? Remember they are the valleys which must be filled up if the way is to be prepared for revival and the salvation of the lost.

2. The mountains of disbelief must be leveled.

"Every mountain and hill shall be brought low." Clearly the mountains in this connection speak of disbelief. Unbelief springs from pride, and until we are humbled God can never exalt us in blessing. Peter tells us, "God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble. Humble yourselves, therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time" (I Peter 1:5-6). If we are not prepared to humble ourselves, God has to do it, and that is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. "Those that walk in pride he is able to abase" (Daniel 4:37).

3. The crooked ways of dishonesty must be straightened.

"The crooked shall be made straight." The Bible says, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (I John 1:9).

4. The rough places of dislocation must be made smooth.

"The rough ways shall be made smooth." The word "dislocation" means "to make the strata discontinuous," or "to be out of place." Are you out of place or out of adjustment to the will of God in relation to your personal life? Both God and you know about this. It is the kind of life you live behind closed doors when you are away from the crowd or your own people. Are you out of adjustment to the will of God in relation to your family life? Are you out of adjustment to the will of God in relation to your church life? Are you out of adjustment to the will of God in relation to your social life? Are you out of adjustment to the will of God in relation to your business affairs? Until you get right with God, He will not answer your prayers or bless you. There is only one way back into adjustment with the will of God. It is summed up for us in the words of our risen Lord in His address to the church at Ephesus: "Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works" (Revelation 2:5).

These are certainly four heavy demands, but they constitute what is entailing in preparing the way of the Lord. This is the way of revival. Nothing else will make it possible.

III. What Is Expected.

"All flesh shall see the salvation of God" (Luke 3:6). The salvation of God is embodied in a Person, even the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. When the godly Simeon lifted the infant Jesus Christ into his arms, he declared, "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: For mine eyes have seen thy salvation" (Luke 2:29-30). Revival is ultimately Christ Himself, seen, felt, and heard in and through His body on earth. He can only be seen by all flesh when the conditions are fulfilled. The way must be prepared and all flesh shall see the salvation of God. Notice what this means.

1. Unlimited blessing.

"All flesh."

2. Unmistakable blessing.

"All flesh shall see." There are always "signs following" when the risen Saviour has the right of way through individuals of a church.

3. Unspeakable blessing.

"All flesh shall see the salvation of God." This is the Lord Jesus Christ Himself glorified and magnified amongst men.

Accept what is enjoined, fulfill what is entailed, and you will have what is expected. Prepare and you will see.