

"TIMES OF REFRESHING"

"Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord" (Acts 3:19).

Because the term "revival" is so grossly misunderstood, we need to answer the question, "What is revival?" In answer to this query, William B. Sprague had this to say: "Wherever you see religion rising up from a state of comparative depression to a tone of increased vigor and strength; wherever you see professing Christians becoming more faithful to their obligations, and behold the strength of the church increased by fresh accessions of piety from the world; there is a state of things which you need not hesitate to denominate a revival of religion." Charles G. Finney defined revival as "...nothing else than a new beginning of obedience to God. ...the first step is a deep repentance, a breaking down of heart, a getting down into the dust before God, with deep humility, and a forsaking of sin."

Arthur Wallis said: "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 programs 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." J. Edwin Orr said: "The best definition of revival is the phrase, "...Times of refreshing...from the presence of the Lord." Joseph W. Kemp, in a presidential address to the Baptist Union of New Zealand, declared: "Revival, strictly speaking means the reanimating of that which is already living but in a state of declension."

From these and various other definitions we gather that a revival is that strange and sovereign work of God in which He visits His own people, restoring, reanimating, and releasing them into the fullness of His blessing. It is a work of God in the church and among individual believers. Once we understand the nature of a heaven-sent revival, we shall be able to think, pray, and speak intelligently of such "...times of refreshing... from the presence of the Lord" (Acts 3:19).

It is doubtful that there has previously been a period of difficulty so complex in character and so widespread in effect as that through which we are passing. A feeling of uncertainty and instability prevails in every circle, and the future does not seem to hold any sure promise of either peace or prosperity. It was never more true that there is "upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; ...men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth."

In the midst of change and unreliability, spiritual values alone remain unchangeable, and there has never been a greater need for the reminder of their reality, security, and stability. Yet the churches seem totally inadequate to meet the need. Generally speaking, the lives of professing Christians do not differ, to any great extent, from the lives of those who are not. They share the same fears, express the same doubts, feel the same uncertainty, and show the same disconcertion. The peace of God and the joy of Christ are little in evidence. The dynamic power of the Holy Spirit is not appropriated.

If there is to be a revival of spiritual life and power, it must originate with the individual believer, and there is a great need for a personal searching of heart and exercise of soul in this matter. The sin, which is spoiling the life of the Christian, must be judged, and put away. The selfishness, which is robbing Christ of the love and

devotion which are His due, must be confessed and removed. The ambitions and desires, which are hindering the work of God, must be uprooted and thrown on the refuse heap. A renewal of blessing is dependent upon the restoration of communion and the dedication of heart and life.

When we use the term "revival", we mean the sovereign act of God, in which He restores His own backslidden children to repentance, faith, and obedience. Why does God withhold revival if it is entirely His prerogative to send it? The answer is simple. God can never fill capacities that are not open to His revival fullness. While it is God Who alone visits men in revival, He must have room in which to work. Whom, then, does God revive?

I. Those Prepared To Confess Spiritual Failure In Their Lives.

It is only those who admit failure and fainting whom God truly revives. In the physical realm, when a man faints and is weak, he needs reviving. In the New Testament we find certain words which are the spiritual expression of a fainting man. Among them are the following:

1. Prayerlessness.

Christ said, "Men ought always to pray, and not to faint" (Luke 18:1).

If a man does not pray, he faints. The word "to faint" here is "to cave in" or "to break down." Does that describe your prayer life? Has it caved in or broken down? Is that why you need revival? Prayerlessness is the outstanding sin in the lives of church members today. What about prayerlessness in your life?

We need a revival of intercessory prayer among God's children. We do not pray enough. God save us from trying to set the wheels of revival in motion, or to try to turn these wheels by our own efforts. It cannot be done. Let us ask God to straighten out every tangle and to meet every need in our lives. After we will do so and mean it, then God will be seen in our lives. His power will flow through us in blessing to others. Our needs will be met, and Satan will be defeated.

2. Fearfulness.

Fainting in the spiritual life is an evidence of fearfulness. The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews challenged the sin of fearfulness in these words: "Consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds" (Hebrews 12:3). The word "faint" means "to relax," and "to let out rope." How many Christians are relaxing instead of fighting against sin; letting out rope with evil instead of coming to grips with it and slaying it in the name of the Lord! Can you honestly say, "I am not afraid of holiness; I am not fearful of going through with God, cost me what it will; I am not going to hesitate because of being thought spiritual?"

3. Barrenness.

"Let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not" (Galatians 6:9). This term "faint" also carries the thought of "relaxing" or letting out rope;" and Paul points out that to faint or relax in

this sense is to be barren, to miss the joy of harvest.

"We shall reap, if we faint not." Is the need of revival in your life a confession that you are barren in life and service? Then face up to it, and be honest in your confession of failure.

II. Those Professing Practical Faith In Their Lives.

The Psalmist said: "Though I walk in the midst of trouble, thou wilt revive me" (138:7). James said: "But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?" (2:20). A working faith in one which believes in the ability of God to do anything that is in the divine purpose and for the glory of God.

1. Faith in a God of personal revival.

"Thou wilt revive me." All through the Bible we have instances of the divine and human encounter. So often we dodge the real issue of revival by praying for it generally, not recognizing that before God can bless others He wants to bless us personally. Mrs. Elizabeth Codner sensed this personal need when she wrote her hymn, "Even Me." This was in 1860, when revival was taking place in Ulster and Wales, and she longed that the blessing might visit her and spread through England. Weigh her words carefully:

Lord! I hear of showers of blessing
Thou art scattering full and free--
Showers the thirsty soul refreshing;
Let some drops now fall on me,
Even me.

Pass me not, O gracious Father!
Lost and sinful though I be;
Thou might'st curse me, but the rather
Let Thy mercy light on me,
Even me.

Pass me not, O tender Saviour!
Let me love and cling to Thee:
Fain I'm longing for Thy favour;
When Thou callest, call for me,
Even me.

Pass me not, O mighty Spirit!
Thou canst make the blind to see;
Testify of Jesus' merit,
Speak the word of peace to me,
Even me.

Have I long in sin been sleeping,
Long been slighting, grieving Thee?
Has the world my heart been keeping?
Oh! forgive and rescue me,
Even me.

Love of God! so pure and changeless;
Love of Christ! so rich and free;
Grace of God! so strong and boundless,
Magnify it all in me,
Even me.

Pass me not, Almighty Spirit!
Draw this lifeless heart to Thee;
Impute to me the Saviour's merits;
Blessing others, oh! bless me,
Even me.

2. Faith in a God of purposeful revival.

"The Lord will perfect that which concerneth me: thy mercy, O Lord, endureth for ever: forsake not the works of thine own hands" (Psalm 138:8). God's supreme purpose for your life and mine is perfection. Christ said: "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect" (Matthew 5:48).

Paul declared that his object in preaching the gospel was that he might be able to present "every man perfect in Christ Jesus" (Colossians 1:28). God's purpose in revival is that He might perfect us in His blessed Son, by the power of the Holy Spirit.

3. Faith in a God of powerful revival.

* "Thou wilt revive me." The word "revive" means to "reanimate." In the great activities of God we read of His work in the realms of creation, recreation, and reanimation. When He created, He brought the first man into existence. When He recreates, He brings the new man into being. But, when there is backsliding, He sends revival to reanimate or revitalize.

III. Those Proving Biblical Foresight By Their Lives.

"Thou I walk in the midst of trouble, thou wilt revive me: thou shalt stretch forth thine hand against the wrath of mine enemies, and thy right hand shall save me" (Psalm 138:7). Anyone who knows his Bible recognizes that life for the Christians here upon earth is going to be confronted with tribulation and opposition. Christ promised such times of testing and trial right through to the end of the journey. In the light of this, how important it is that the believer should face life in a state of spiritual revival.

1. There is the tribulation in the world.

Christ said: "In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). David is saying the same thing when he affirms, "Though I walk in the midst of trouble, thou wilt revive me." The child of God can be revived out of trouble, revived in trouble, and revived through trouble. Conquest amidst the tribulations of life is the hallmark of genuine Christianity. The Christian is a man who acts victoriously and redemptively in every stress and strain of life. Oh, that the Lord would revive you and me until we triumph in the midst of trouble!

2. There is the opposition of the world.

Christ said: "Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you" (Matthew 5:11-12).

And this is virtually what David is telling us in Psalm 138:7: "Thou shalt stretch forth thine hand against...mine enemies, and thy right hand shall save me." There was a day in the life of David when he waxed faint and would have been slain by one of the sons of the giant, but Abishai came to his aid and smote the Philistine and saved David. (II Samuel 21:15-17). Are you waxing faint in the battle against the Philistines? Is the opposition of the world too hot for you? Then ask the Lord to revive you in order that you may be able to conquer the enemies of your soul. The truly revived Christian can truly say, "I am more than conqueror through him that loved me" (Romans 8:37).

So, we have seen the kind of people whom God is prepared to revive. They are the men and women, the boys and girls, who are ready to confess spiritual failure in their lives, whether it be prayerlessness, fearfulness, or barrenness; people who are ready to profess practical faith in their lives in a God Who revives personally, purposefully, and powerfully; people who are prepared to express biblical foresight in their lives so as to be ready for tribulation or opposition when it comes.

Will you pray, "Revive me," and then open your being to the Holy Spirit, and refuse to rest until you have been restored to the fullness of the blessing that God is waiting to vouchsafe to you?