

"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).

In our previous study of this subject and text, we observed the kind of people whom God is prepared to revive. We learned that they are the ones who are ready to confess spiritual failure in their lives, whether in prayerlessness, fearfulness, or barrenness; those who are ready to profess practical faith in their lives in a God Who revives personally, purposefully, and powerfully; and those who are prepared to express biblical foresight in their lives so as to be ready for tribulation or opposition when it comes.

Continuing this study, we are interested in learning why God's children need a revival. For a splendid answer to the question, "Why do we need a revival?" the Psalmist gave an arresting answer in Psalm 85:6, namely, "That thy people may rejoice in thee."

In the first three verses of the eighty-fifth psalm, the writer refers to a previous revival. He recalls the time when God delivered Israel from captivity, forgave the iniquity of the people, and in sovereign grace restrained the fierceness of His anger. As to why God's people need a revival, there are some things to which we must give careful and prayerful attention. A revival is necessary to:

I. Restrain The Righteous Anger Of God.

"Turn us, O God of our salvation, and cause thine anger toward us to cease. Wilt thou be angry with us for ever? wilt thou draw out thine anger to all generations? Wilt thou not revive us again: that thy people may rejoice in thee?" (Psalm 85:4-6). From these verses it is evident that God reveals His righteous anger against those of His people who live in:

1. An unrevived state.

This unrevived state is described in three words:

(1) Iniquity.

"Thou hast forgiven the iniquity of thy people" (Verse 2). Iniquity denotes wickedness, and the tragedy is that such wickedness can be found in the hearts of Christians. Every Christian has two natures-- the old and the new. If he is living in the fullness of the Holy Spirit, then the new nature is dominant and the old is dormant. If he is living in an unrevived state, then this wickedness finds expression in subtle forms of iniquity. The Psalmist said: "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me" (Psalm 66:18). In other words, if adjustment with the will of God, the Lord will not hear me. This explains why so many prayers are never answered, so much service is not blessed, and so many lives are barren of spiritual fruit.

Think of the sin of non-attendance at church services on the part of church members, the sin of unreliability in Christian service, and the lack of godliness in everyday life. God does not condemn sin in the life of the lost person and condone it in the life of the Christian. Peter said: "For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God" (I Peter 4:17).

(2) Lawlessness.

"Sin is the transgression of the law" (I John 3:4). Lawlessness is an arrogant violation of the will of God. How prevalent is this sin in the lives of church members today!

(3) Carelessness.

"I will hear what God the Lord will speak: for he will speak peace unto his people, and to his saints; but let them not turn again to folly" (Psalm 85:8). How often we hear the expression, "I couldn't care less." Iniquity and lawlessness have produced an insensibility to evil and therefore a cold, calculated carelessness.

When I look into the faces of people who laugh and mock when God is speaking to them about iniquity and sin, I can understand why God's righteous anger is revealed from heaven.

2. An unrepentant state.

"Turn us, O God of our salvation, and cause thine anger toward us to cease" (Psalm 85:4). It is one thing to be unrevived, but it is even worse to be unrepentant. For too long we have thought of the message of repentance only in terms of the unregenerate sinner, but we must remember that God calls His own people to repentance also. "Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent" (Revelation 2:5). "Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth" (Revelation 2:16). "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent" (Revelation 3:19). Yes, revival is needed to restrain the righteous anger of God.

II. Restore The Conscious Awareness Of God.

When God comes into a life, the thing that really matters is the will and glory of Christ. Revival is not some worked-up excitement, but it is an invasion from heaven which brings a conscious awareness of God. The conscious awareness of God means:

1. The smiling of His face.

"Wilt thou not revive us again?" "Wilt thou not return and revive us again?" It was an accepted fact among God's ancient people that when He was angry He turned His face away. On the other hand, when God met with a penitent and restored people, in their minds there was a picture of a smiling deity. This is the significance behind the threefold blessing pronounced by the priests upon the children of Israel in Numbers 6:24-26, namely, "The Lord bless thee, and keep thee: The Lord make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: The Lord lift up His countenance upon thee, and give thee peace."

2. The showing of His grace.

"Shew us thy mercy, O Lord, and grant us thy salvation" (Psalm 85:7). The conscious awareness of God in the life of the believer is a guarantee of victory. "For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace" (Romans 6:14). It is the divine intention that each believer know this divine mercy and deliverance daily.

3. The sounding of His voice.

"I will hear what God the Lord will speak: for he will speak peace unto his people, and to his saints: but let them not turn again to folly" (Psalm 85:8). Every revival has been accompanied by a new recognition of the voice of God.

III. Reveal The Gracious Activities Of God.

Because Christians are not living as God wants them to live, He is not able to work through them as He desires. At the present God is at work, like a trickle of water, but when revival comes He works in a great way, like a downpour of water.

1. His saving activity.

"Surely his salvation is nigh them that fear him; that glory may dwell in our land" (Psalm 85:9). God is saving some now and then, but if His children were truly revived He would save more.

2. His sanctifying activity.

(1) In personal life.

"Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other" (Psalm 85:10). What a delightful description of a sanctified life! When Christ dwells in us in revival fullness, we can see the glory of God. God wants men and women in whom mercy, truth, righteousness, and peace are found.

(2) In general life.

"Truth shall spring out of the earth; and righteousness shall look down from heaven" (Psalm 85:11). Every great revival effects outstanding reforms.

(3) In material life.

"Yea, the Lord shall give that which is good; and our land shall yield her increase" (Psalm 85:12). Material advancement and the health of the people are fruits of times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord. When God moves among a people in revival blessing, He lays out a pathway in which He expects His people to travel.

Along with a genuine longing for a revival, we must have the knowledge of the way of revival. Yes, there is a way of revival and it is costly. That great revivalist, John the Baptist, expressed 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). These words sum up the conditions which determine the opportunity for God to work. Let us give attention, then, to:

I. What Is Enjoined.

The challenge is: "Prepare ye the way of the Lord." In eastern lands, when an emperor or king was due to pass through the country, men were sent to prepare a

highway for him. 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 of us are obstacles or obstructions to Christ, and not ways. Concerning Paul and Silas a demon-possessed girl had to exclaim: "These men are the servants of the most high God which show us the way of salvation." Can this be said of you? Is your life a way of:

1. Triumphant prayer.

When people encounter you, are they ushered at once into the presence of God?

2. Abundant life.

It is one thing to have life; it is quite another to enjoy abundant life. May the Lord deliver us from merely existing and bring us into the joy of really living.

3. Consistent holiness.

We have not been called unto uncleanness, but unto holiness. Robert Murray McCheyne said the greatest ambition of his life was that he might be a holy man.

4. Transcendent love.

Paul called it the "more excellent way." To have everything else but to be void of love is to be and to do nothing.

II. What Is Entailed.

John the Baptist'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. 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.

There are the inward depressions. Some of the well-known ones are anger, jealousy, bitterness, resentment, slavish fear and the inferiority complex.

2. The mountains of disbelief must be leveled.

"Every mountain and hill shall be brought low." The mountains are not the objective material ones, but the subjective and moral ones--the ones that are holding back the blessing. The mountains of disbelief and pride must be leveled.

3. The crooked ways of dishonesty must be straightened.

There is the dishonesty of hypocrisy--pretending to be what you are not in your prayers, confessions, testimony and life. These crooked ways must be straightened, and the time to do it is now.

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

Are you out of place or out of adjustment to the will of God in your personal

life? In your church life, are you fulfilling your obligations in terms of attendance, service, giving and witness? Until you are right with God, He will not hear you and bless you. The way back into adjustment to the will of God is summarized in the words of our risen Lord: "Remember from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works."

III. What Is Expected.

"All flesh shall see the salvation of God. What does this mean?"

1. Unlimited blessing. "All flesh."
2. Unmistakable blessing. "All flesh shall see."
3. Unspeakable blessing. "All flesh shall see the salvation of God." Accept what is enjoined, fulfill what is entailed, and you will receive what is expected.