

~Other Speakers S-Z: Arthur Wallis:

“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?” (Isaiah 14:26, 27)

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. Many changes have taken place rapidly. Eden, the Flood, and the Exodus period 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 (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?” However, revival is God’s method to counteract spiritual decline and to create spiritual momentum in order that His redemptive purposes might be accomplished on earth.

Counteracting Spiritual Decline

If the work of God was maintained and extended down the centuries in steady spiritual power, revivals would be unnecessary as a counteracting agent. But this, as we know, has been far from the case. As Finney noted, “A revival of religion presupposes a declension.” Decline and decay are inherent in fallen human nature and not confined to the physical and moral realm, but invade and influence the spiritual as well.

This fact is evident 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. There is more connection between the manifestation of God’s power and spiritual steadiness than some have realized. The history of Israel during the time of the judges illustrates this vividly: “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 works of the LORD” (Judges 2:7).

It would not be good for displays of God’s power to be other than occasional. It would not make for spiritual health for the Lord’s people to live on them. Nevertheless, spiritual situations and conditions that seemed beyond recovery have been transformed repeatedly throughout history by a mighty working of the Spirit.

As D. M. Panton so aptly noted, “Revival is the inrush of the Spirit into a body that threatens to become a corpse!” If counteracting spiritual decline were the only purpose achieved by God in such seasons, His method would be abundantly justified. It is, after all, a sound military principle that the best method of defense is attack.

Creating Spiritual Momentum

There is another well-known military principle, known as concentration of force, in which a commander positions his troops at a strategic point for a vital blow at the crucial moment. He will thus hope to break through the enemy defenses 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 a reservoir in the hills that supplied a village community with water. It was fed by a mountain stream, and the overflow of the reservoir continued down the streambed to the valley below. There was nothing remarkable about this stream—it seldom overflowed its banks or gave the villagers any trouble.

One day, however, some large cracks appeared in one of the walls of the reservoir. The wall collapsed and the waters burst down the hillside, destroying all the houses and bridges that lay in its path. The streambed could no longer contain the volume of water, and the overflow inundated the countryside. What had before been ignored or taken for granted now became an object of awe, wonder, and fear.

This is a fitting picture of revival. Often in the period just preceding this kind of breakthrough, the stream of divine power and blessing has seemed 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 heaping the flood. Suddenly, when the majority has no expectation of it, God opens the windows of heaven and pours out his blessing in such abundance that the channels of organized religion cannot contain it.

The flood of life and blessing then becomes 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 and the pleadings and prayers of loved ones now bend and break before the irresistible flow of the Spirit, to be engulfed themselves and borne along in the stream of blessing.

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. However, in our zeal for revival, we must not 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” (Zechariah 4:10) is preparatory and supplementary to “the day of [God’s] power” (Psalm 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 evangelistic 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 restore to the church the light, the purity, and the power that are her birthright and that characterized her in the first century. The affairs of God’s house must be reestablished 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, and only when believers became more diligent in holding fast to the new truth than in holding fast to Christ, 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.