

A.B. Simpson:

"Until the Spirit be poured out from on high and the wilderness become a fruitful field and the fruitful field be counted for a forest." (Is. 32: 15.)

The prophet Isaiah is not only a witness to the Messiah but also to the Holy Ghost. It was the touch of the heavenly fire upon his lips that called and consecrated him to his high vocation as we read in chapter 6. And it was by His anointing that the Messiah Himself was to be prepared for His greater ministry as we read in chapter 11. Here we have the picture of a great outpouring of the Holy Ghost upon Israel and the world, and the glorious result of this transforming the wilderness into a fruitful field and making the fruitful field seem to be a forest in contrast with the new scene of fertility and beauty which this great revival would bring.

The air is full of the tokens of revival. The hearts of God's people are going out in earnest prayer for a great outpouring of the Holy Spirit. We turn with intense interest to this picture of the necessity and the effects of such an awakening.

I. The need.

"Upon the land of My people shall come up thorns and briars until the Spirit be poured upon us from on high." These thorns and briars may well describe the character of every product of the soil of nature. All man's philosophies and religions are but weeds and only the Holy Spirit can transform the wilderness into a garden of the Lord. Man's culture and husbandry have failed. Social reform and ethical teaching will not regenerate society. Let us not waste our strength in second-class things, but work with God on His higher plane through the gospel of Jesus Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit.

But the thorns and briars are not all found in the wilderness of the world, but often in the hearts of Christians and in the enclosures of the church itself. Without the Holy Ghost our life and our work are filled with weeds and our best things run to waste. Our Lord has taught us in the parable of the sower what these thorns are. "Some fall among thorns and the thorns spring up and choke them." "He that receives seed among thorns is he that receives the Word and the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the Word, and you become unfruitful." Or as expressed in Luke 8: 14: "And that which fell among thorns are they which, when they have heard, go forth, and are choked with cares and riches and pleasures of this life and bring no fruit to perfection."

The version in Mark is also instructive. "The cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches and the lusts of other things entering in choke the Word and it becomes unfruitful." (Mark 4: 19.) What a picture of many of our heart and lives! The strength of our nature absorbed in seeking pleasure, pursuing ambition or amassing wealth, little time for God, the business of the week day encroaching even on God's Sabbath, the family altar pushed aside and both mind and body so worn with care and pleasure that there is little energy or leisure for private prayer, for the study of God's Word or for the work of winning souls. The writer met a young fellow one Sabbath morning lately who used to be an earnest Christian worker. He was on his way to business. "How are you getting on?" was asked. "Oh, very well." "Are you busy?" "Yes, very busy." And looking into his face earnestly the question was added, "Are you too busy?" A look of earnestness lighted up his countenance and with an expression of pain he answered, "Yes, too busy, for I am now on my way to business, and it seems as if I cannot help it without giving up my position altogether."

Ah, Christian brother, take care lest you get too busy. The lives of most Christians today, it is to be feared, are like the old garden grown up with weeds and thorns. Some day you will have to take time to meet the Master. Alas for you if you shall have nothing to bring but thorns!

II. The Pentecostal blessing.

"Until the Spirit be poured out upon us from on high." This is more than the coming of the Holy Spirit to our individual lives. This is a public outpouring of the Holy Ghost upon the church and a special visitation to the individual heart. This is one of the promises of the New Testament, "There shall be days of refreshing from the presence of the Lord." "There shall be showers of blessing." Such an outpouring came on the day of Pentecost and such seasons of revival were occasional features of the Apostolic church and have been among the richest blessings of the church of Christ in all ages. God is pouring out His Spirit at this time in a very wonderful way in the valleys of Wales and upon the great cities of England. Some of these seasons of blessing are quite phenomenal, having little human leadership or machinery about them and showing the mighty hand of God

alone.

Such an outpouring of the Holy Ghost is the best remedy for all the evils of our individual and church life. It will lead sinners to repentance. It will bring men to realize the presence and power of God. It will awaken Christians from their sleep of death. It will honor the Word of God and revive the work of the gospel in all the world and it will bring about a mighty uplift in the work of the world's evangelization. God is waiting to send us such a blessing. Let us earnestly desire it. Let us prayerfully seek it and let us put ourselves in line with it before it comes.

III. The great transformation.

"And the wilderness shall become a fruitful field." It is very beautiful to travel through the Western prairies and after hours of sweeping over the arid desert with nothing but the drifting sand and the scrubby sage brush, to suddenly come upon a little town lying like an island of beauty in a sea of desolation, the fields and gardens exquisitely green, streams flowing through every garden and along every highway, and the whole place literally blossoming like a rose. Ask some one for an explanation and he will tell you it is the very same desolate soil that you have been passing through all day, but in this case the only explanation is the single word, "irrigation." The waters have been brought down from the mountains and the wilderness has become a fruitful field.

Such a transformation takes place in the most wretched and sinful lives when God comes into them with His grace. How we have seen them in these years come from the street, from the saloon, from the depths of sin, haggard, unkempt, with hollow eyes and hopeless hearts, and at the feet of Jesus receive His cleansing touch, bathe in the living water and begin to drink of the fountain of life! How marvelously they have changed! In a few days you behold them clothed and in their right mind; happy-faced girls, manly men, transformed lives literally resurrected from the grave, and entering upon a career of happiness, usefulness and blessing to the world. Hundreds of such men and women today are leading our rescue missions at home and working on our mission fields abroad and passing on the blessing that has come to them to thousands more. When we think that the coming of the Holy Ghost will bring just such transformations to thousands of the wretched hearts and homes around us, oh, surely we should give ourselves no rest until we seek and gain these promised showers of blessings.

IV. Righteousness and peace.

"Then shall judgment dwell in the wilderness and righteousness remain in the fruitful valley; and the work of righteousness shall be peace; and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance forever. And My people shall dwell in peaceful habitations and in sure dwellings and in quiet resting places." (Is. 32: 16-18.)

The outpouring of the Holy Spirit will bring righteousness to the wilderness. Even in the social and secular world, conditions will be revolutionized, wickedness will be checked, intemperance, vice and misery will be restrained and the face of society will be transformed. So much is this the case in the recent revival in Wales that the very saloons have lost their business and the courts of justice are without occupation. We are not going to see this come to pass everywhere in the present age. These, however, are samples of what the Holy Ghost can do and what the coming of our Lord in a little while will do throughout the entire world. Oh let us realize it and seek it to the utmost possible extent even in this present mingled condition of human society. "Righteousness shall remain in the fruitful valley." This refers to the sanctification of believers and the higher standard of holiness in the church which the outpouring of the Holy Ghost will bring.

The final result of this blessing will be the reign of peace and joy in every heart and home. "The work of righteousness shall be peace." It is not designed that our life shall be occupied in the constant excitement of religious meetings, but in our hearts and homes and the normal current of duty, this beautiful picture will be realized and "the peace of God that passes all understanding shall keep our hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."

Through such awakenings thousands of God's happy children today at one time entered into the rest of faith and the deeper life which has not only satisfied their spiritual needs but multiplied a hundredfold their power to bless others. Such blessings are waiting the present generation through the coming of the Holy Ghost. Oh that we may seek and find that blessing in all its fulness!

V. The uplifting of our Christian life to higher ideals.

"The fruitful field shall be counted for a forest." This is a very remarkable expression and the obvious meaning

is that so great shall be the transformation of the church, hearts, and of the Christian life of the individual, that the vision we have hitherto known shall seem as nothing in comparison with the blessing that is to come. Even the fruitful valley will be so improved that it will seem as if it had only been a forest before.

One of the worst features of the private and public life even of the people of God is the tendency to sink into ruts and to grow rigid and frigid in the formal, conventional routine of life. The old proverb, "Good enough is never good," is in place here. No doubt the reason so little progress is made by very many persons is because they are measuring themselves by old standards and really never getting any further on. When the Holy Spirit comes, He lifts our minds to new ideals and gives us conceptions of things so much in advance of our present experiences that we long for higher ground; the saved become sanctified and the sanctified rise to a life of sacrifice and unselfish service. We see our own shortcomings, our sins of omission of duty, self life, our worries, anxieties and cares, our narrow sympathies, our low conceptions of God, our little faith and our unworthy standards and aims so that we cry out for all the fulness of God, and "forgetting the things that are behind, reach forward unto those things that are before." The promises of God rise before us with new vividness, the possibilities of a victorious Christian life allure us, and the voice of God is heard crying, "Whom shall we send, and who will go for us?" Sometimes God permits us to see in some other life the glorious possibilities that we are missing and we rise up to new planes, new ambitions, new visions and new commissions of service for God and man. It was the apostle's prayer for the Ephesians that they might know "the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe," and this was to come about through "the eyes of their understanding being enlightened." Again he declares in the second chapter of 1Corinthians, "Eye has not seen nor ear heard, nor has entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for them that love Him, but God has revealed them unto us by His Spirit." When this vision comes there rises before us the alluring prospect of that better country which Christ is waiting to bring us into:

"Rejoicing now in earnest hope,
We stand, and from the mountain top
See all the land below.
Rivers of milk and honey rise
And all the fruits of paradise
In endless plenty grow."

To the dull eyes which can appreciate only earthly things, the things of God are clothed with enchanting beauty. The sinner grows sick of his sin, the worldling turns from his elusive dreams, the discouraged and defeated saint takes heart again and our dull, cold Christian life becomes a romance of beauty and blessing.

There is a thrilling story told of a man of great wealth and brilliant genius who had become a leader in the industrial life of the land, and the master of an enormous fortune, but who had no taste for art or music or high things. One day he was called upon by an old schoolmate from the distant land where both were born and who in turn had become illustrious in his profession as a musician. He invited the merchant prince to come to one of his concerts and hear him play on his famous violin, but the millionaire laughed at him and said he had no time for such trifles; he was engaged in more practical things. At last the musician caught his friend by strategy. He took his violin one day to the factory of the rich man, and asked him to make some trifling repairs upon it, as he was a machinist while the other was only a musician. After the trifling work had been done, the musician began to play to see if it was all right, but before half a dozen bars of music had been rolled off, the millionaire was standing with the tears streaming down his face with undisguised admiration and delight. The music had broken his heart and the musician had conquered him by his wiles. Not only so, the whole factory became demoralized, and as he played on, the entrancing strains gathered clerks, foremen, porters, everybody, in crowds around the door, and at last the musician apologized for disturbing their business; but the great man, wiping the tears from his eyes, said, "Don't stop for the world. Play on; I never knew until this moment how much I had missed out of my life." Poor man, he found that day a new world of sweetness to which he had been a stranger, and his heart longed for more.

In a far higher sense that is what happens when the light of heaven falls upon the heart and we see the King in His beauty and a land that is very far off. Then earthly things pale before the vision of that better country and our hearts long for God and heaven. Oh, if we should go on in our blindness until it is too late! Oh, if some day we should wake to hear "the voice of harpers harping with their harps," and the new song they sing above, and discover at last that we have no part in it, but have thrown our lives away upon the barren, empty wilderness of life, ours would be the eternal sorrow and an irretrievable loss!

Let us ask God to open our vision, to awaken our hearts, to show us the things that are true and good and beautiful and everlasting, "the things which eye has not seen nor ear heard, nor entered into the heart of man,

Isaiah Chapter 14 PENTECOSTAL OUTPOURINGS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

but which God has prepared for them that love Him," and "which God has revealed unto us by His Spirit."

Oh, that the great Revealer might come to us and show us the vision! Oh, that the great Inspirer might come to us and lift our hearts to meet it! Oh, that the great Enabler might come and transform our lives and make the vision real even here as well as in the life everlasting!"