

## Revivals And Church History :: Believing For Revival by James A. Stewart

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There are many sincere saints of God who believe that the days of revival are past. They base their assertions on the fact that the Word of God predicts that "in the last days perilous times shall come" (2 Tim. 3:1), when there will be a wholesale departure from the faith. They admit that the Gospel has lost none of its ancient power to save, and that here and there a few souls will be gathered in, but they believe that there will be no outpourings of the Holy Spirit before the rapture of the church. This being so, they argue that it is completely out of the plans and purposes of God for the church to pray for and expect a mighty revival. Such teaching has wrought incalculable harm to a subnormal church and encouraged the sleeping saints in their indolence when they ought to be claiming the promises of God for awakening in their midst.

It is true that one sees evidences of the denial of the faith all about him. The majority of our large denominations are preaching "another Gospel," as spoken of by Paul in Galatians 1:8. Too many Protestant pastors deny the fundamentals of our historic Christian faith. Yet, in spite of all this, we assert that the day of miracles is not past. As long as the blessed Holy Spirit, Himself the great standing miracle, abides and works on the earth, the church's potential is the same as it was in the apostolic days. Our divine Paraclete has never been withdrawn, and He still waits to work gloriously through clean, obedient vessels.

Dr. Robert C. McQuilkin has left us this warning: "Let us not limit God in His working, and let us not fail to be ready for new and great outpourings of the Holy Spirit in the closing days of this age. For the days are upon us when nothing will avail to break through the overwhelming power of the enemy, except supernatural power beyond what most Christians have known anything about. If the church was supernaturally blessed of God at its birth, who will say that, in the closing days of its witness here on earth before its translation, it will not be blessed in even a mightier way?"

### Local Revivals

The very fact that God is sending local revivals in different parts of the world in answer to the heart-longing of His people surely renders false the doctrine that He does not purpose to send revival in these last days. If God is reviving His work and His people in other places, then why not in your church, your city, your town, your country?

It is the Holy Spirit of God who inspires the saints of God to long for and claim revival in their midst. The very fact that one sees individuals and small groups in every place whose hearts have been burdened with the low spiritual condition of the church and who are crying to Him for His supernatural working in their midst is proof enough that the days of His miraculous workings have not passed. Even as God is not mocked, so He does not mock His own. Jonathan Edwards has said, "When God is about to do a mighty new thing He always sets His people praying."

### God's Promises

The pages of Holy Writ are flooded with challenging verses direct from the Throne, which ought to drive us to our knees in prayer and expectation, that they may become real in our own lives. And when God answers such prayers of faith and fulfils His Word to those who claim them, revival has come! Among such challenging calls are:

"Call unto Me, and I will answer thee, and show thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not" (Jer. 33:3).

"Sanctify yourselves: for to morrow the Lord will do wonders among you" (Josh. 3:5).

"Prove Me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it. And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, and he shall not destroy the fruits of your ground; neither shall your vine cast her fruit before the time in the field, saith the Lord of hosts" (Mal. 3:10-11).

"He that believeth on Me, as the Scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water" (John 7:38).

Some, of course, will object that the above-mentioned portions from the Old Testament are not really challenges and

promises for us today. As one wonderfully answers such objections: "I could go from one end of the Bible to another, and produce an astonishing variety of texts that are applicable as promises; enough to prove that in whatever circumstances a child of God may be placed, God has provided in the Bible some promise, either general or particular, which he can apply, that is precisely suited to his case. Many of God's promises are very broad on purpose to cover much ground. What can be broader than the promise 'What things soever ye desire, when ye pray...' (Mark 11:24)? What praying Christian is there who has not been surprised at the length and breadth and the fullness of the promises of God when the Spirit has applied them to his heart? Who that lives the life of prayer has not wondered at his own blindness, at not having before seen and felt the extent of meaning and richness of these promises, when viewed under the light of the Spirit of God?"

#### Unbelief

One great obstacle that hinders the working of God is the fact that so many pastors and other Christian workers do not believe in the power of God to fulfil His precious promises. Such Christians are defeated before they begin their campaign. They do not believe that God can win the victory because of the great odds against them. No wonder their prayers are never answered, as they pray without faith. The Apostle James says, "He that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord" (Jas. 1:6-7).

Nazareth was the most privileged place in our Saviour's lifetime. He spent nearly thirty-three years of His life here on earth in that town. One would think that in no place would the mighty God want to manifest His power as in Nazareth. But the people of Nazareth are known the world over for their unbelief. The evangelist Mark says, "And He could there do no mighty work, save that He laid His hands on a few sick folk, and healed them" (Mark 6:5). To lay His hands on a few sick folk and heal them was not accounted as any mighty thing. Christ longed to do greater things for them. What was wrong? A chilling fog of unbelief had swept over the whole community. "He marvelled because of their unbelief" (Mark 6:6). They saw no mighty works because the necessary conditions for their performance were lacking.

#### Abraham

In the life of Abraham we have a striking illustration of the power of faith claiming the promises of God in an impossible situation. He had received a direct promise from the living God that he would have a son. He knew it was a human impossibility for him and Sarah to have a son at their age. Yet, under hopeless circumstances he hopefully believed. He kept on believing in spite of all the Satanic assaults on his faith. "And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sarah's womb: He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; And being fully persuaded that, what He had promised, He was able also to perform" (Rom. 4:19-21).

His faith never quailed. There was no feebleness in his faith. Under utterly hopeless circumstances he hopefully believed, being absolutely certain that whatever God had promised, He was bound by, and He was able also to make it good. So mighty was his faith that "he gave glory to God." He gave glory to God before the promise was fulfilled. It would have been easy to give glory to God after the child was born; it is easy to give the shout of faith after prayer is answered. We remember that the children of Israel had to give the triumphant shout of faith before the walls of Jericho would fall flat before them.

Faith, mighty faith, the promise sees,  
And looks to God alone;  
Laughs at impossibilities,  
And cries, "It shall be done!"

The Holy Spirit would never have recorded this incident in the life of Abraham if it were not fraught with great spiritual import. "For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope" (Rom. 15:4).

#### The Promises of God

We sing in our gatherings, "Standing on the promises of Christ, my King," but, my dear brother and sister, we cannot stand on the promises until we have fallen on our knees and claimed them before God's face. And once we have claimed them at the Throne of Grace for ourselves, and asked God to make them real in our experience, we must arise and virtually walk over all the unoccupied, unclaimed, untrodden territory of God's promises until they are truly performed in us

Remember the Word of the Lord to Joshua: "Every place that the sole of your foot shall tread upon, that have I given unto you" (Josh. 1:3). Before the Land of Promise could become theirs, the children of Israel had to walk through the length and breadth of it and measure it off foot by foot (by their own feet). It is interesting to note that they only measured off one-third of the territory God had given them, and consequently they never possessed more than that. They possessed only that which they measured off, and no more.

How glorious are the precious promises of God to His people! They are as true in these apostate days as they were in the days in which they were spoken. How very few of us have ever conceived the wealth and extent of the land, and how very few of us have ever taken possession of the promises of God in the all-conquering Name of the Lord Jesus!

#### Revival in Kilsyth, Scotland

William C. Burns, who was mightily used of God in Scotland and in China, lived in the constant expectation of a coming revival to his beloved land of Scotland. As a young man of only twenty-three years, he had read the Scriptures on his knees, and pleaded on his knees, and believed on his knees, that God was going to open the windows of heaven and pour out such a blessing that there would not be enough room to receive it.

His brother relates of him, "He had indeed, as I distinctly remember, very exalted views of what might be expected, even in these latter days, from the outpouring of the Spirit, in answer to the earnest prayers of a revived church. His mind had dwelt much in common with many others at that time on the divine promises to that effect, and on the grand typical fulfillment of them on the Day of Pentecost. That memorable scene he regarded not as an isolated event but as a pattern of what the church might hope in any age to see. It might even be more glorious. Even some of the most startling outward manifestations of the Spirit's working then displayed he regarded not as exceptional circumstances but as what might be repeated any day before our eyes."

At this time Burns was supplying for Robert Murray McCheyne in Dundee during the latter's absence to the Holy Land. It was under his preaching on the 23rd day of July 1839 that the great revival of Kilsyth took place. He had gone from Dundee on a weekday to his father's church in Kilsyth to preach with him, when suddenly "the Holy Ghost fell." All Scotland heard the glad news that the sky was no longer brass; the windows of heaven had opened!

In my own ministry, covering a period of thirty-four years, I have known individuals, or a group of believers, to search the Scriptures diligently to see if there was any bright hope which would enlighten their spiritual darkness of defeat and discouragement. Again and again they have been led by the Spirit to see that all God's promises are "Yea and Amen in Christ Jesus," and that these promises are for them today, even though they may have been addressed to God's people in bygone days; that the whole body of Scripture had set down a divine set of principles which govern all God's dealings with His people. These believers did not have a mutilated Bible, where there is little left for the believers in these last days. They embraced all the promises. They stood on them, and modestly yet fearlessly proclaimed in faith that God was going to send a mighty spiritual awakening. They believed that the moral lessons taught by the Lord to His disciples in olden days had a deep spiritual significance for them in these later times. Over and over I have seen the Lord work mightily in answer to the believing prayers of these dear saints in many lands.

#### A Mighty Band

Whenever revival has broken out during the course of our own ministry we have always searched quietly and reverently to discover what individual or group of believers had been embracing the promises. We know that revival does not come because of the eloquence of great preachers, or because of the power of a great organization. It is the supernatural, spontaneous work of God, which commences in the secret place of intercession, because some believers dare to believe that God can fulfil His Word even today. I could give countless illustrations of this blessed fact. I have known of whole groups of churches lifted up to a high standard of holiness and thousands of souls saved as the result of a few believers who held on to God to do a "new thing" (Isa. 43:19).

One day in a northern city of Eastern Europe I was concerned because, for no apparent reason, God had suddenly sent revival. In other cities and countries it usually comes after several weeks or even months of Throne ministry. But here on the fifth day, the heavens were rent asunder, and we were deluged with heaven-sent blessing. One thousand believers packed the church building each morning for Bible study. Thousands heard the Gospel in the evening in a larger auditorium.

So great was the hunger for the Word among the unsaved that there was no room for the believers in the evening service. I asked them to go to their own churches and pray and not take up the seats which should be occupied with unsaved. The spiritual distress among the unsaved was great, as the Sword of the Spirit stabbed their hearts night after night. It was midnight or after before I could leave the building. I was greatly disturbed in my mind and could not sleep, being at a loss to explain the "open windows" (Mal. 3:10). I had arrived unheralded and unknown, only by invitation of the Holy Spirit. The meetings had commenced on a Friday night with some seven people at a prayer meeting!

One evening the Lord very kindly allowed me to discover the secret of the blessing. Being afraid that I would not have sufficient power of the Spirit to proclaim the Evangel to the thousands who had gathered, I made my way to the basement of the auditorium in order to have a few minutes more of prayer. I began to pray in the darkness, but it was not long before I felt an overwhelming sense of the majesty of God. I knew right away there was someone else in the large basement, praying. I quietly put on the light, and there I saw at the extreme end of the basement some twelve sisters, flat on their faces before God! They were totally unaware of my presence. They were "inside the veil," touching the Throne, by the power of the Spirit, while upstairs God was working mightily among the unsaved.

Oh, for God to raise up a mighty band who will dare to believe God for revival!