

Revivals And Church History :: What is a Revival?

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Lectures on Revival: What is a Revival?

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TEXT: - "O Lord, revive thy work in the midst of the years, in the midst of the years make it known; in wrath remember mercy" (Habakkuk 3:2).

It is supposed that the prophet Habakkuk was contemporary with Jeremiah, and that this prophecy was uttered in anticipation of the Babylonish activity. Looking at the judgments which were speedily to come upon his nation, the soul of the prophet was wrought up to an agony, and he cries out in his distress, "O Lord, revive thy work." As if he had said, "O Lord, grant that thy judgments may not make Israel desolate. In the midst of these awful years, let the judgments of God be made the means of reviving religion among us. In wrath remember mercy."

A need for revival presupposes that the church is sunk down in a backslidden state, and revival consists in the return of God's Church from her backslidings, and in the conversion of sinners.

A revival always includes the conviction of sin on the part of the Church. Backslidden professors cannot wake up and begin right away in the service of God, without deep searchings of the heart. The fountains of sin need to be broken up. In a true revival, Christians are always brought under such convictions; they see their sins in such a light, that they often find it impossible to maintain a hope of their acceptance with God. It does not always go to that extent; but there are always, in a genuine revival, deep convictions of sin, and often cases of abandoning all hope.

During a revival, backsliders will be brought to repentance. A revival is nothing else than a new beginning of obedience to God. Just as in the case of a converted sinner, the first step is a deep repentance, a breaking down of the heart, a getting down into the dust before God, with deep humility, and forsaking of sin.

During a revival, Christians will have their faith renewed. While they are in their backslidden state they are blind to the state of sinners. Their hearts are as hard as marble. The truths of the Bible only appear like a dream. They admit it to be a truth; their conscience and their judgment assent to it; but their faith does not see it standing out in bold relief, in all the burning realities of eternity.

But when they enter into a revival, they no longer see men as trees walking (Mark 8:22-26), but they see things in that strong light which will renew the love of God in their hearts. This will lead them to labor zealously to bring others to Him. They will feel grieved that others do not love God, when they love Him so much. And they will set themselves feelingly to persuade their neighbors to give Him their hearts.

So their love to men will be renewed. They will be filled with a tender and burning love for souls. They will have a longing desire for the salvation of the whole world. They will be in agony for individuals whom they want to have saved; their friends, relations, enemies. They will not only be urging them to give their hearts to God, but they will carry in the arms of faith, and with strong crying and tears beseech God to have mercy on them, and save their souls from endless burnings.

A revival breaks the power of the world and of sin over Christians. It brings them to such a vantage ground that they get a fresh impulse towards heaven. They have a foretaste of heaven, and new desire after union with God; and the charm of the world is broken, and the power of sin overcome.

When the churches are thus awakened and reformed, the reformation and salvation of sinners will follow, going through the same stages of conviction, repentance, and reformation. Their hearts will be broken down and changed. Very often the most abandoned profligates are among the subjects. Harlots, and drunkards, and infidels, and all sorts of abandoned characters, are awakened and converted. The worst part of human society are softened, and reclaimed, and made to appear lovely specimens of the beauty of holiness.