

The Hope For Revival By W. Vernon Higham

Classic Christian Writings:

"But now, O Lord, Thou art our Father; we are the clay, and Thou our potter; and we all are the work of Thy hand. Be not wroth very sore, O Lord, neither remember iniquity for ever: behold, see, we beseech Thee, we are all Thy people. Thy holy cities are a wilderness, Zion is a wilderness, Jerusalem a desolation. Our holy and our beautiful house, where our fathers praised Thee, is burned up with fire: and all our pleasant things are laid waste. Wilt Thou refrain Thyself for these things, O Lord? wilt Thou hold Thy peace, and afflict us very sore?" (Isaiah 64:8-12).

At first glance, the concluding verse of Isaiah sixty-four seems to suggest a rather negative end to an otherwise tremendous chapter. The real conclusion, of course, is quite the opposite. What we have here is what is termed a rhetorical question, the answer to which we ourselves are left to supply. There is an implied response: the prophet is actually rising to his climax, as he begins verse twelve-- "Wilt Thou refrain Thyself for these things?" The implied answer obviously being-- "No!" He goes on immediately to use the same literary device again: "Wilt Thou hold Thy peace and afflict us very sore?" The prophet feels in the very depths of his heart that it would be inconceivable that the answer could be anything but a glorious "No!"

Hope is a very wonderful thing. I am not talking about ordinary earthly hope. The Christian hope is quite different. In his first letter, chapter one verse three, the apostle Peter presents the peculiarly Christian hope as "a lively hope," pertaining to and providing us with "an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven." This Christian hope is solid, a hope that does not doubt. Such is the hope for heaven.

I want us also to hope for great things for the Church, to have a large vision; not to have a trembling or a fearful hope, but a certain hope. Do you realize that there is a need in this country as well as in your own heart? Do you recognize that there should be a cry, that there is perhaps the tiny beginnings of one in your own soul? Have you ever considered asking God for a burden?

Are you at that place where you can say, "From henceforth I will be committed"? Committed to what? "Committed to the work of God." Can you say, "I want God's best for my generation, and no matter how enticing and interesting other things may be, I shall pursue God's best in this matter."

That does not mean to say that you are not vitally interested also in sanctification, godliness, and growing in grace. Of course you are; yet all the time you have this overriding concern for the glory of God in this age and generation in our land. The vast majority of people do not have the slightest idea that we Christians meet on Sunday to worship God.

If revival, however, were to really happen, there could come again times of transformation, times when the churches would be full even before we arrived! What a glorious problem that would be! Then how about thinking now in a big way? Is He not a great and immense God? God is not limited in any way whatsoever in the scale of the work that He is able to perform. It would be but a small thing for Him to set the whole world alight with praise and worship if He but willed it so.

In Isaiah, chapter sixty-four, there is a deep concern in the prophet's heart for God's glory, the pursuit of which has become his whole life's passion. Do not we also need a similar passionate concern for the glory of Christ in His Church? I believe something is on the way--a very wonderful something if we could only comprehend it. We must believe in the wonderful works of God in revival, and though we may not all be equally persuaded of it, it surely behooves us all to at least give our attention to these things in our generation.

I would desire to see a spark kindled in your heart, flaming up into something that will influence your church and perhaps even spread out to engulf many other churches and individuals, until together we all begin to look to God for greater things than those which we now know. A work of God is always a wonderful work, and even before revival starts, men begin to glorify God in Jesus Christ, having a longing to prove His love. Charles Wesley's hymn begins to put us in that frame:

Oh Love divine, how sweet Thou art!
When shall I find my willing heart
All taken up by Thee?
I thirst, I faint, I die to prove
The greatness of redeeming love,

The love of Christ to me.

Stronger His love than death or hell;
Its riches are unsearchable;
The first-born sons of light
Desire in vain its depths to see;
They cannot reach the mystery,
The length, and breadth, and height.

God only knows the love of God;
O that it now were shed abroad
In this poor stony heart!
For love I sigh, for love I pine;
This only portion, Lord, be mine,
Be mine this better part!

O that I could forever sit
With Mary at the Master's feet!
Be this my happy choice:
My only care, delight, and bliss,
My joy, my heaven on earth, be this--
To hear the Bridegroom's voice!

These are the longings which become so very real when we move into that area of special grace in the prelude to revival, longings that Christ may be uplifted and glorified in our hearts. We may have thought that we had good and generous hearts, but then we begin to see that "God only knows the love of God; O that it now were shed abroad in this poor stony heart!" We soon discover that there is so much further to go, so much more to be had and expressed. What must it then be like to enter into that dimension of revival when He Himself descends to flood our hearts with joy unspeakable? Only then shall we be able to love in such a way that will fulfill our heart's desire.

Unity

Unity is hard, yet God desires that there might be unity--a unity which is deeper than mere conformity whereby we believe all the correct doctrines. An agreement on the fundamentals of our Faith is a wonderful thing to have and is, indeed, a necessary basis for unity. We have a basis for unity when we are able to say that we believe in God--Father, Son and Holy Spirit--and in Jesus Christ as our Saviour; in the second coming of our blessed Lord, in the Day of Judgment, in hell and in heaven, and so on. But there is something more substantial to be had in Psalm 133: "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!"

When describing what a wonderful thing it is to see believers dwelling together, heart to heart, one in their purpose, with an openness of mind and affinity of spirit, he also tells us what the outcome of such unity has always been: "For there the Lord commanded the blessing, even life for evermore" (verse 2).

Will we ever get ourselves into this blessed position? On the day of Pentecost, do we not read in Acts 2:1 that "they were all with one accord in one place"? They were a people who had unity! Slowly, perhaps, the significance and importance of this unity becomes more apparent to us, and we begin to ask a few more questions in prayer: "Is this something that we have to learn? And if so, Lord, teach us then what this unity is."

God may well answer our prayers by showing us our own hearts, their degrees of enmity and sources of disunity. We are shocked, and we justify ourselves. But at last, God begins to deal with us, perhaps through words like this from the hymn quoted earlier: "God only knows the love of God." We cannot be united without this love: "O that it now were shed abroad in this poor stony heart!"

Only then do we begin to understand the meaning of spiritual unity; only then are we able to know something of what it means to be one, in heart, mind, and spirit, and delight in the things of God. If it were granted to us, it would be really as an entrance into revival.

Nothing Without God

Have we understood that we are nothing and can do nothing without God? Do you think yourself to be anything? Whether you are a preacher, church officer, or a member of a church--whatever position you may have--do you really consider yourself anything or to be anybody of note? Rather, should it not be that even though we have come into that lovely area of grace where we know Jesus Christ as our Saviour and have peace with God, we should always be very much aware of our own unworthiness.

I remember discovering to my delight, amongst the congregation of my second church, a Welsh church at Llanddewi Brefi in Cardiganshire, a few people who had experienced and lived through the revival of 1904. At first I found that I was a little irritated by them, not in a nasty way at all, but I felt somehow as if I wanted to correct them all the while. They would pray, thanking God for salvation, for the forgiveness of sins, for peace with God, and then they would say, "Lord, we are miserable offenders. Lord, we do not please Thee, and we do not love Thee as we ought."

I would find myself saying, "They have got it wrong. Where is their assurance?" They were wise enough to be gentle with me in their response, for they were people who had known revival. They were people who knew that when God draws near, even though it may be right to have confidence in the grace of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, that still does not prevent you from trembling in His presence. Rather, a reverential fear of God is always one of the major hallmarks denoting an authentic visitation from above.

These revival people would sing the words of How Great Thou Art and mean them! They had understood the immensity, the purity, and the greatness of God, so that always in their assurance there was a note of astonishment and an awareness of their unworthiness. They were right in their view of things, and I was wrong.

Passionate Love For Christ

We all know that there is such a thing as a Christian going on with the Lord, that there is such a thing as pursuing God but then, there is also such a thing as having a passionate love for Christ. Such are the people who have it that when they turn to God they are not afraid to say, "We are but clay," because they know that He has had mercy upon clay.

Our hope is eventually to come to that place where we can say, "Lord, I am clay, but I am willing, arrogant as I have been, to be broken, to have a broken and contrite heart which Thou wilt not despise. Lord, I am willing to let Thee melt my hard heart." We have little hard areas we want to keep for certain enemies, but we must be able to say, "Break me, melt me. Lord, what can you make of me? Mould me! Make something of me! Make me a vessel and then Lord, do not leave me empty, but fill me with the love and the grace and the joy of God!"

In John seventeen, our Lord Jesus Christ's high priestly prayer, we can see listed the blessings that He undertakes to give to us. There, also, He prays for us, entreating His Father, reminding Him as it were of the position of all Christian believers that "they are Thine" and that "they are Mine." He further asks that His Father may see fit also to keep His own--to keep them in this world, in all the difficulties that they have, to keep them from evil and Satan and to sanctify them in His truth.

Then what is in many ways the climax comes in verse twenty-two: "And the glory which Thou gavest Me I have given them; that they may be one, even as We are one." What a request! Unity is prayed for. Unity is achieved already in essence, though not always, perhaps, in outward practice, yet precisely, because of this request even practical unity does now become a realistic possibility! God can now take hold of Psalm 133 and make it a living reality, all because the Man in heaven, our blessed Saviour, our Advocate on the right hand of the Majesty on High, has prayed His high priestly prayer.

We are one; all of God's people are one, "even as we are one." This is the unity already established, but with the help of the Spirit, this unity can be discovered, nurtured, and secured, also, in the practical everyday life of the Church. The present reality is very different. It is both sad and tragic.

What Is Revival?

Dr. Sprague gave us a description of revival in saying that it is a revival of scriptural knowledge--you will hear people weaving Scripture into their prayers for they will know their Scriptures and apply them in life; that it is also a revival of true piety, where God's people will worship Him with reverence and respect, in Spirit and in truth; that it is, lastly, a revival of practical obedience--God's people will not be backward in helping the poor and those in need.

But there is yet more. This is what revival is to me: it is above all else a vision of Christ, a vision of His person. Oh! to be immersed in the glory of Christ, with the Holy Spirit turning my gaze constantly upon my beautiful, beautiful Saviour! An understanding, rather an experience, a comprehension of His wonderful being and His inestimable saving power--is not this the meaning of revival? He is the God who shakes prisons and shakes and saves prisoners and jailers alike.

Think of what this God could still do yet again! Think of Psalm 126:4, a prayer that actually asks Him to do it: "Turn again our captivity, O Lord, as the streams in the south." This is a truly remarkable thing to ask for since deserts have no streams! So it will be just as remarkable and just as miraculous when God revives His Church. It will be just as unexpected as it would be to see streams suddenly bursting forth in that vast, southern Judean desert. We need to be turned from the captivity of our apathy and indolence, from our carelessness and laxity in the things of God. What a miracle it would be to see these streams of grace, beauty, and joy spreading throughout the land!

Yet there is still an important question for us to answer--do we really want it? We read in Psalm 110:3, "Thy people shall be willing in the day of Thy power." Can you say, "Yes, Lord. I do want it." You may be a little fearful, a little bit uncertain and perhaps rightly so, saying, "But Lord, do You think I will actually be willing for all the things that are going to come in revival? It may be that I will not like everything that happens during revival."

We may be full of hesitation, we may be clinging to besetting sins, we may be possessed with inordinate affections for various things, but nevertheless He is still willing to deal with us. God made even Jonah to be willing. We know of Jonah because of his disobedience, but God brought him back and put him where he was supposed to be.

Then there are also "the years that the locust hath eaten" (Joel 2:25). How many years have you wasted? Young people, are you wasting your best years by chasing after trivial, worldly entertainments, trying perhaps to drag all this into your Christianity and calling it holy? Be honest now, you know it should never and can never be so. You go by the name Christian, are you fooling around with unnecessary, worthless things? Are the locusts even now devouring precious time, the time in which you should be making great decisions in your walk with God, when you should be saying, "Take my life and let it be consecrated, Lord, to Thee?" Are you willing to be brought there? He is willing to make you willing!

Those of you who are middle-aged and growing old, how many years have you wasted? There have been long periods when I have not prayed for revival as I ought, and when I look at those years, it is only too apparent in conclusion that the locusts have been at it again, eating up and destroying precious, precious opportunities.

However, the wonderful thing is this: when we at last realize and recognize the problem, God is a God who can restore the years that the locusts have eaten, as if they had never been. He is a God who can compensate and reimburse past failures as well as bless the future. Are you then willing to heed this tremendously generous proposition? Are you willing to come to that place whereby He will make you willing in the day of His power? You will find no other than lasting joy in the dealings of God. His power is indeed always remarkable.

The mighty, irresistible power of God in the salvation of souls during revival is a most awesome thing to contemplate. What we want is God in the midst of us, mighty to save! How can we presume that He might even come Himself? It is because we know that He loves us with the same quality and measure of love that matches His love for His own dear Son. We belong to God, and so when we call in this way, we know that He will indeed come.

Gentle Jesus, when on others Thou art smiling, do not, do not pass us by!