Revival



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Preparation for Revival

"Can two walk together, except they be agreed!"

—Amos 3:3

Introduction

The believer is *agreed* with God. The war between the most holy God and His offending creatures is over in the case of bloodwashed sinners; not suspended by a truce, but ended forever by a peace which passeth all understanding. The believer is fully agreed with God concerning the divine Law: he confesses that "the law is holy…and just, and good" (Rom 7:12); he would not have it altered if he could. He rejoices in the way of God's testimonies more than in all riches; yea, in His precepts doth he take delight, praying evermore, "O let me not wander from thy commandments" (Psa 119:10). He joyfully acknowledges that the Judge of all the earth rules mankind by a law in which there is no injustice, by statutes that subserve the best interests of the governed, while they secure the glory of the great Governor. The Christian "consents unto the law that it is good" (Rom 7:16).

He is agreed with God, moreover, that a breach of the Law should be visited with penalty; he would be unwilling that sin should go unpunished. He feels that the sanctions of law, however terrible, are absolutely necessary and require to be severe.

Above all, he is agreed with God in that great atonement for sin which God Himself has ordained and provided in the person of Jesus Christ. Gazing upon the matchless sacrifice of Calvary, while the Lord is content, the believer is satisfied. Where God finds satisfaction for His injured honour, the believer finds the noblest object of admiration and adoration. Thou lovest Golgotha, O thou Judge of the earth; and thy people are perfectly agreed with Thee in this. Henceforth the Christian is at one with God in his love of holiness; he delights in the law of God after the inward man (Rom 7:22).

Sin, which is abhorrent to the Most High, is obnoxious to the Christian in that measure in which he is enlightened and conformed unto the image of Christ. Great God, Thou hast unsheathed Thy sword, and bathed it in heaven for the destruction of all evil, and Thy redeemed are on Thy side, abhorring that which

is evil (Rom 12:9), and resolving to fight under Thy command till the last sin shall be cut off (Col 3:5). Thou hast uplifted Thy banner because of the truth, and around Thy standard the soldiers of the cross are rallying—for Thy battle, O Most High, is the battle of the church; Thy foes are our foes, and Thy friends are the excellent of the earth, in whom is all our delight.

I trust that most of us, who are here met in the name of Jesus, feel a deep, sincere, and constant agreement with God. We have been guilty of murmuring at His will; but yet our newborn nature evermore at its core and center knoweth that the will of the Lord is wise and good; and we therefore bow our heads with reverent agreement, and say, “Not as I will, but as thou wilt” (Mat 26:39). “The will of the Lord be done” (Act 21:14). Our soul, when through infirmity she is tempted to rebellion, nevertheless struggles after complete resignation of her wishes and desires to the will of the Most High. We do not covet the life of self-will, but we sigh after the spirit of self-denial, yea, of self-annihilation, that Christ may live in us, and that the old Ego, the carnal “I,” may be altogether slain.

I would be as obedient to my God as are those firstborn sons of light, His messengers of flaming fire. As the mercury feels the mysterious changes of the air, and sensitively moves in accordance with the atmosphere, so would I, being surrounded by my God, evermore perceive His wish and will, and move at once in obedience thereto. Our strength shall be perfect when we have no independent will, but move and act only as we are moved and acted on by our gracious God. I hope that at this hour we can truly say that, notwithstanding our many sins, we do love the Lord our God; and if we could have our will this morning, we would follow His commands without the slightest departure from the narrow path. We are in heart agreed with God.

The text reminds us that this agreement gives us power to walk with God. May we be enabled to claim this privilege that divine grace has bestowed on us, power to walk with God in daily, habitual, friendly, intimate, joyous communion. Believer, you can walk with God this very day. He is as near to thee as He was to Abraham beneath the oak at Mamre (Gen 18), or Moses at the back of the desert (Exo 3). He is as willing to show thee His love as He was to reveal Himself to Daniel on the banks of Ulai (Dan 8), or to Ezekiel by the streams of Chebar (Eze 1). Thou hast no greater distance this day between thee and thy God, than Jacob had when he laid hold upon the angel and prevailed(Gen 32). He is thy father, as truly as He was the father of the people whom He covered by day with a cloud, and cheered by night with a pillar of fire (Exo 13:21); and though no Shekinah

lights up a golden mercy-seat, yet the throne of grace is quite as glorious and even more accessible than in the days of old. He shall hide thee in His pavilion, as He did his servant David; yea, in the secret of the tabernacle shall be thy hiding-place. Enoch's privilege was not peculiar to Him; it is thy birthright: claim it. Noah's high honour of walking with God was not reserved for him alone; it belongs to thee also, shut in as thou art in the ark of the covenant, and saved from the deluge of divine wrath. It should be the Christian's delight to be always with His God; walking with Him in unbroken fellowship. Enoch did not take a turn or two with God, as Matthew Henry observes, but he walked with him four hundred years.

O that we might cease to be with our God as wayfaring men who tarry but for a night: may we dwell in God, and may He dwell in us. Walking implies action; and our actions should always be in the Lord. The Christian, whatsoever he eateth, or drinketh, or doeth, should do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks unto God and the Father by Him. Walking has in it the thought of progress; but all our progress should be with God. As we are rooted and grounded in Christ, so we must ask to grow up in Him; ever abiding in our highest moments with God, and never imagining or conceiving any progress which shall remove us from humble confidence in Him. Beloved brother in the Lord, it may be that thy heart is agreed with God, and yet thou hast lost for a time thy walking with Him; be not at ease in thy soul till thou hast regained it. Search thine own heart by the light of the Word and of the Holy Spirit; and when thou knowest thyself to be agreed with God, through Him who is our peace, hesitate not to draw near with holy confidence to thy Father and thy God, notwithstanding all thy past wanderings; for He welcomes thee to walk with Him, seeing that thou art agreed.

At this season we, as a church, have had our hearts set upon a revival of religion in our midst. Many of us will be greatly and grievously disappointed if such a revival shall not take place. We have felt moved to cry for it; I think I may say we have been almost unanimously thus moved. Already there are signs that God is visiting us in a very remarkable manner, but our souls are set upon a greater work than we have ever seen. Now, dear friends, we need as the first and most essential thing in this matter, that God should walk with us. In vain we shall struggle after revival unless we have His presence. If, then, we desire to have His presence with us, we must see to it that we are perfectly agreed with Him both in the design of the work, and in the method of it; and I desire this morning to stir up your pure minds to heart-searching and vigilant self-

examination, that every false way may be purged from us, since God will not walk with us as a church, unless we be agreed with Him.

The first remark, then, of this morning, is simply this,—we desire in this matter to walk together with God; but, in the second place, if we would have Him with us we must be agreed with Him; and therefore, thirdly, we desire to purge ourselves of everything which would mar our perfect agreement with God, and so prevent His coming to our aid. I do ask the prayers of God's people that He may enable me to speak to profit this morning, for if ever I felt my own unfitness to edify the saints, I do so just now: I will even confess that if I could have had my own choice, I should have left it to someone else to address you this morning. My harp is out of tune, and the strings are all loosened, but the chief musician understands His instruments, and knows how to get music out of us, and in answer to prayer He will doubtless sustain us and give you a blessing.

1. Walk with God.

Let us, first, *avow our desire that in our present effort we may walk with God*; otherwise our strivings after revival will be very wearisome.

I know of nothing more saddening than to attend a prayer-meeting where the devotion is forced, and the fervour laborious; where brethren puff and strain like engines with a load behind them too heavy for them to drag. It is painful to detect an evident design to get up an excitement, and wind up the people to the proper pitch; when the addresses are adapted to foster hotheadedness, and the prayers to beget superstition. God's true saints cannot but feel that to gain the graces of the Spirit by fleshly vehemence is sad work. They retire from such a meeting, and they say, "How different is this from occasions when God's Spirit has been really at work with us!" Then, like a ship with her sails filled with a fair wind, floating majestically along without tugging and straining, the church, borne onward with the breath of the divine Spirit, with a full tide of heaven's grace, speeds on her glorious way. "If thy presence go not with me, carry us not up hence" (Exo 33:15), was the request of Moses; and I think we may rather deprecate than desire a revival if God's presence be not in it.

Lord, let us stay as we are, crying and groaning to see better days, rather than permit us to be puffed up with the notion of revival without Thine own power in it; let us have no special prayer-meetings merely for the sake of them; but let us, O let us receive special blessings as the result of prayer: if thou dost not intend to help us now let us weep in secret, but let us not rejoice in a mere name if the substance be lacking.

During a course of meetings by which we desire to excite the hearts of believers to a deeper interest in spiritual things; if there be not a gracious power in them, you will soon perceive a dulness, a flagging, a heaviness, a weariness stealing over the assembly; the numbers will decline, the prayers will become less fervent, and the whole thing will degenerate into a hollow sham or a mournful monotony. To come up from the wilderness is hard climbing unless we lean on our beloved. O thou who art our beloved and adorable Lord, lest our souls grow weary in well-doing, and faint for heaviness, be pleased to let us enjoy communion with Thyself.

Not only is there weariness in our own attempts, but they always end in disappointment, unless God walketh with us. Ye may pray, and pray, and pray, but there shall be no conversions, no sense of quickening, until the Spirit's

working be distinctly recognized. The minister shall be just as much a preacher of the mere letter as ever he was; the church officers shall be as formal and official as ever they were; the church members shall be as inconsistent and as indifferent as they were wont to be; the congregation shall be as uninterested and as unmoved as they were in the worst times, except the Spirit of God work with us. In this thing we may quote the words of the psalmist, “Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it: except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain. It is vain for you to rise up early, to sit up late, to eat the bread of sorrows: for so he giveth his beloved sleep” (Psa 127:1-2). O friends, it is well to have a holy industry and a devout perseverance; it is well to strain every nerve, and put forth every effort; but all this must end in the most sorry, heart-sickening failure, unless the Lord rend the heavens and come down. I am telling you what you all do know, and what I trust you feel, but it is what we are constantly forgetting; for many are they that go a warfare at their own charges, and so become both bankrupt and defeated; and many be they who would build God’s house simply by stress of human effort, but they fail, because God is not there to give them success.

Yet more; supposing that in this our attempt at revival, we should not be favoured with the presence of God; then prayer will be greatly dishonoured. I take it, that when a church draws near to God in special prayer, asking any mercy, if she does not receive that mercy on account of some disagreement with God, then her belief in prayer is, for the future, greatly weakened; and this is a most serious evil, for it loosens the girdle of the loins of God’s saints. Anything which makes men doubt the efficacy of prayer, is an injury to their spirituality; and thus upon the largest scale God’s church will suffer loss if her prayers shall remain unanswered. We must go on; it would be ruin to forbear or to turn our backs. As a church, we must now conquer or die. How can I again stir you up to supplication, if on this occasion your prayers should be in vain? I shall come into this pulpit with but a faint heart to speak of my Master’s faithfulness if He does not give you evidences of it.

Ah! my brethren, when you are lifting up your voices in intercession, I cannot expect to mark your earnestness nor to behold your faith, unless that faith shall be confirmed just now by a shower divine mercy. To the world at large the non-hearing of prayer would be a ready argument, either against the existence of God, or else against the reality of His promise. I hope such a thing as this will not occur. “Aha! aha!” saith the enemy, “see what has come of it all! The people cried, but they cried in vain. They met in large numbers; they approached the

mercy-seat with tears and groans, but no result has come of it; there have been no more conversions than before, and God's strength has not been put forth." Would you desire that such a calamity as this should occur. The true soldiers of the cross in our Israel would almost as soon lay down their necks, as that God's honour should thus be attainted in the presence of his foes.

Moreover, every attempt at revival of religion which proves a failure,—and fail it must without the presence of God,—leaves the church in a worse condition than it was before; because, if it should prove a failure, from the want of any stir at all; then God's people fall back into their former lethargy,[1] with an excuse for continuing in it; or if a false stir be made, a reaction follows of a most injurious character. I suppose the worst time in the Christian church is generally that which follows the excitement of a revival; and if that revival has had no reality in it, the mischief which is done is awful and incalulable. If no excitement shall come at all, the mischief is still as great; God's people, being disappointed, have little heart to listen to further exhortations to future zealous action, become contented with their Laodicean lukewarmness, and it becomes impossible to bestir them again. If a revival should apparently have success and yet God be not in it, perhaps this is even worse. The wild-fire and madness of some revivals have been a perfect disgrace to the common sense of the age, let alone the spirituality of the church.

I know, and speak not without book, when I declare that some churches have been seriously deteriorated and permanently injured by large admissions of excited but unconverted persons; so that the only thing a fresh pastor could do was to begin afresh, and purge the church book throughout, sweeping off scores of carnal persons; the beginning anew being almost hopeless, because, after the paroxysm[2] of passion about religion has passed, there follows a season in which religion is treated with indifference, if not with disdain. I had rather see a church asleep, than see it awake into the fever of fanaticism: better that she should lie still than do mischief. O dear friends, we have felt in our souls, not that we may have revival, but that we must have it; and when we think of the incalculable damage that shall be done to us all if the Lord does not visit us, I am sure we must again draw near to the angel and wrestle afresh, with this determination, that we will not let Him go unless He bless us.

We may be confirmed in our anxious desire to have the Lord walking with us in this thing, when we consider the blessings which are sure to flow from His presence. Ah! what holy quickening shall come upon every one of us. The preacher will not have to lament that he has so little power in prayer; both alone

and in your presence he shall be strengthened to intercede as an angel of God. You shall not have to mourn that the service lacks its former sweetness. You will feel the blessedness you knew when first you saw the Lord. You will not have to mourn that you are cold and dead, that your songs languish, and that your prayers expire; instead thereof, every action shall be fraught with vigour, every thought shall glow with earnestness, every word shall be clothed with divine power. Let God arise; and doubts and fears shall betake themselves to their hiding-places, as the bats conceal themselves at the rising of the dawn. Let the Lord visit you; and difficulties which frown like Alps, will sink to plains. Let Him arise; and all your enemies shall flee before you, as the smoke before the wind; the heavens shall drop with showers of mercy; and even your sins and all the guilt thereof, shall shake as Sinai shook at the presence of the God of Israel. A church with God's presence in it is holy, happy, united, earnest, laborious, successful; fair as the moon before the Lord, and clear as the sun in the eyes of men, she is terrible as an army with banners to her enemies.

If God shall be pleased to be with His church, then direct good shall visit our congregation. We used to say at Park Street, that there were not many seat-holders unconverted. The like is to a great extent true here. The immense increase of our church gives us the hope that the day will come when there will not be a single seat unoccupied by a believer: but it is not the case yet. I suppose the church is about half the congregation now. There are some, however, that from the very first have listened; but so far as salvation is concerned, they have listened in vain: they have been moved to tears, they have made good resolutions; but after ten or eleven years of ministry, they are just where they were, except that they have accumulated fresh guilt. Some desire to be Christians, but they harbour some darling lust. We know some who used to feel under the Word, but do not feel now. The voice which once was like a trumpet, now lulls them to sleep. Some have made a compromise; and one day they will serve God and another day they will serve their sins; like the Samaritans who feared the Lord and served other gods. Now let our cries be heard for the Master's presence, and we shall soon see these brought in; hearts of stone shall be turned to flesh; the iron of the Word shall break the northern iron and steel; Jehovah Jesus shall ride victoriously through those gates which have been barred against Him, and there shall be shouting in heaven because the Lord hath gotten Him the victory.

Wider blessings will follow. A church is never blessed alone. If any one church shall stand in the vigour of piety, other churches shall take example

therefrom, and make an advance towards a better state. Here we have around us many churches, hills which God has blessed; but they, like ourselves, have a tendency to slumber. Let God pour out His Spirit here, and the shower will not be confined to these fields, but will drop upon other pastures, and they shall rejoice on every side. Our testimony for God rings through this land; from one end of it to the other. Our ministry is not hidden under a bushel nor confined to a few. Tens of thousands listen every week to our word; and if the Lord shall be pleased to bless it, then shall it be as ointment poured forth, to load the moral atmosphere with a savour of Christ crucified. One nation cannot feel the power of God without communicating some of its blessing to another. The Atlantic cannot divide: no tongue or language can separate us. If God bless France or Switzerland, the influence shall be felt upon the Continent; if He should bless our island, all the whole earth must feel the power thereof. Therefore do we feel encouraged mightily to pray. O, my brethren, the world grows old; man's faith is getting weary of long waiting; the false prophets begin again to appear, and cry lo here, and lo there; but the Lord must come; of this are we confident: in such an hour as we think not, He may appear. How would we have Him find us at His coming? Would we have Him find His servants sleeping? His stewards wasting His goods? His vinedressers with neglected vines? His soldiers with swords rusted into their scabbards? No, we would have Him find us watching, standing upon the watch-tower, feeding His sheep, tending His lambs, succouring the needy, comforting the weary, helping the oppressed.

Gird up your loins then, I pray you, as men that watch for their Lord. If my words could have the power in them which I feel they lack, I would stir you up, dear brethren and sisters, to seek unto the mighty God of Jacob, that when the Son of Man cometh, if He find no faith upon the earth elsewhere, at least He may find it in you: if zeal shall be extinct in every other place, at least may He find one live coal yet glowing in your bosom. For this we want His presence, for without it we can do nothing.

2. Be Agreed with Him.

This brings me, in the second place, to observe, that if we would have the presence of God, it is necessary that we should be agreed with Him.

We must be agreed with God as to the end of our Christian existence. God hath formed us for Himself, that we may show forth His praise. The main end of a Christian man is, that having been bought with precious blood, he may live unto Christ, and not unto himself. O brethren! I am afraid we are not agreed with God in this. I must say it, painful though it be, there are many professors, and there are some in this church, who at least appear to believe that the main end of their Christian existence is to get to heaven, to get as much money as they can on earth, and to leave as much as they can to their children when they die; I say, "to get to heaven," for they selfishly include that as one of the designs of divine grace; but I question, if it were not for their happiness to go to heaven, whether they would care much about going, if it were only for God's glory; for their way of living upon earth is always thus: "What shall I eat? what shall I drink? wherewithal shall I be clothed?" Religion never calls out their thoughtfulness. They can judge, and weigh, and plot, and plan to get money, but they have no plans as to how they can serve God. The cause of God is scarcely in their thoughts. They will pinch and screw to see how little they can contribute in any way to the maintenance of the cause of truth, or to the spread of the Redeemer's kingdom; they will so far condescend to consider religion, as to think how they can profess it in the most economical manner, but nothing more. You will not hear me speak so foolishly and madly, as if I thought that it were not just and laudable in a man to seek to make money to supply the wants of his family, or even to provide for them on his own decease; such a thing is just and right: but whenever this gets to be the main thought; and I am persuaded it is the leading thought of too many professors, such men forget whose they are, and whom they serve; they are living to themselves; they have forgotten who it is that has said, "Ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as with silver and gold" (1Pe 1:18).

Oh! I pray God that I may feel that I am God's man, that I have not a hair on my head which is not consecrated, nor a drop of my blood which is not dedicated to His cause; and I pray, brethren and sisters, that you may feel the same; that selfishness may clean die out of you; that you may be able to say without any straining of the truth, "I have nothing to care for, nor to live for in this world, but

that I may glorify God, and spread forth the savour of my Saviour's name." We cannot expect the Master's blessing till we are agreed about this. This is God's will: is it our will today? I know I have around me many faithful hearts, who will say, "My desire is, that whether I live or die, Christ may be glorified in me": if we be all of that mind, God will walk with us; but every one who is of another mind, and of a divided heart, is a hindrance and an injury to us in our progress. It would be no loss to lose such persons, but a spiritual benefit to the entire cause, if this dead lumber were cast out. When the body gets a piece of rotten bone into it, it never rests, till, with pain, it casts out the dead thing: and so with the church; the church may be increased by dead members, but when she begins to get vigorous and full of life, her first effort is with much pain, perhaps with much marring of her present beauty, to cause the dead substance to come forth; and if this should be the case, though we shall pity those who are cast forth, yet for our own health's sake, we may thank God and take courage.

If we would have God with us we must be agreed as to the real desirableness and necessity of the conversion of souls. God thinks souls to be very precious, and His own words are, "As I live, saith the Lord, I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, but had rather that he should turn unto me and live." Are we agreed with God in that? Our God thinks souls to be so precious, that if a man could gain the whole world and lose his soul, he would be a loser. Are we agreed with Him there? In the person of Christ, our God wept over Jerusalem; watered with tears that city which must be given up to the flames. Have we tears, too? have we compassion, too? When God thinks of sinners it is in this wise: "How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? how shall I deliver thee, Israel? how shall I make thee as Admah? how shall I set thee as Zeboim" (Hos 11:8)? Can we bemoan sinners in that way? Do we stir our souls to an agony of grief because men will turn from God and will wilfully perish in their sin? If, on the contrary, you and I selfishly say, "We are safe, it does not matter to us whether others are brought to know Christ," we are not agreed, God will not work with us; and such of you as feel this indifferentism, this cursed lethargy, are our bane, our burden, our hindrance. God forgive you, and stir you up to feel that your heart will not rest unless poor sinners are plucked as brands from the burning. Are we agreed here?

If we would have the Lord with us, in the next place, we must be agreed as to the means to be used in revival. We are agreed that the first means is the preaching of Christ. We do not want any other doctrine than that we have received—Christ lifted up upon His cross, as the serpent was lifted up upon the pole. This is the remedy which we, in this house of prayer, believe in. Let others

choose sweet music, or pictures, or vestments, or baptismal water, or confirmation, or human rites; we abhor them, and pour contempt upon them; as for us, our only hope lies in the doctrine of a substitute for sinners, the great fact of the atonement, the glorious truth that Christ Jesus came into the world to seek and to save sinners. I think we are agreed with God in this, that the preaching of Christ is the way by which believers shall be saved.

God's great agency is the Holy Spirit. We are agreed, brethren, that we do not want sinners to be converted by our persuasion, we do not want them brought into the church by excitement; we want the Spirit's work, and the Spirit's work alone. I would not bend my knee once in prayer, much less day by day, to win a mere excitement; we have done without it, and we shall do without it by the grace of God; but I would give mine eyes, if I might but know that the Holy Spirit himself would come forth, and show what divinity can do in turning hearts of stone to flesh. In this thing, I think, that we are agreed with God.

But God's way of blessing the church is by the instrumentality of all her members. The multitude must be fed, but it must not be by Christ's hand alone, "He gave the loaves to his disciples, and the disciples, to the multitude" (Mat 14:19). Are you all agreed here? I am afraid not. Many of you are engaged in works of usefulness, and I will make this my boast this day, that I had never thought that I should meet with a people so apostolic in their zeal as the most of you have been. I have marvelled, and my heart has rejoiced when I have seen what self-sacrifice some of the poorest among you have made for Christ; what zeal, what enthusiasm you have manifested in the spreading abroad of the Saviour's name. But still there are some of you who are doing nothing whatever, you have a name to live, but I fear that you are dead; you are very seldom at a prayer-meeting—even some church members and persons whom I know are not kept at home by business, but by sheer indifference to the cause of God. Some of you are never provoked to zeal and to good works. That you come and listen to us, is something; and for what you do we are grateful; but for what you do not do, over this we mourn, because we fear that we are restrained in our efforts for the spread of the Saviour's kingdom, because as a church we are not agreed in God's plan; and we shall be restrained until every man in the church can say, "I will consecrate myself this day unto the Lord of hosts; if there is anything to be done, be it to be a door-keeper in the house of God, here am I.

"There's not a lamb among His flock, I would disdain to feed;
There's not a foe before whose face I'd fear his cause to plead."

Yet again, dear friends, are we agreed this day as to our utter helplessness in this work? I caught a good sentence the other day. Speaking with a Wesleyan minister, I said to him, “Your denomination during the past year did not increase: you have usually had a large increase to your numbers. You were never so rich as now; your ministers were never so well educated; you never had such good chapels as now, and yet you never had so little success. What are you doing?—knowing this to be the fact, what are you doing? How are the minds of your brethren exercised with regard to this?” He comforted me much by the reply. He said, “It has driven us to our knees: we thank God that we know our state and are not content with it. We have had a day of humiliation, and I hope,” he said, “some of us have gone low enough to be blessed.” There is a great truth in that last sentence, “low enough to be blessed,” I do fear me that some of us never do go low enough to be blessed. When a man says, “Oh! yes, we are getting on very well, we do not want any revival that I know of,” I fear me, he is not low enough to be blessed; and when you and I pray to God with pride in us, with self-exaltation, with a confidence in our own zeal, or even in the prevalence of our own prayers of themselves, we have not come low enough to be blessed. An humble church will be a blessed church; a church that is willing to confess its own errors and failures, and to lie at the foot of Christ’s cross, is in a position to be favoured of the Lord. I hope we are agreed, then, with God, as to our utter unworthiness and helplessness, so that we look to Him alone.

I charge you all to be agreed with God in this thing, that if any good shall be done, any conversions shall occur, all the glory must be given to Him. Revivals have often been spoiled, either by persons boasting that such-and-such a minister was the means of them, or else, as in the case of the North of Ireland, by boasting that the work was done without ministers. That revival, mark you, was stopped in its very midst and seriously damaged by being made a kind of curiosity, and a thing to be gazed at and to be wondered at by persons both at home and abroad. God does not care to work for the honour of men, either of ministers or of laymen, or of churches either; and if we should say, “Ah! well, I should like to see the presence of God with us that we may have many conversions, and put it in the magazine, and say, that is how things are done at the Tabernacle,” why we should not have a blessing that way. Crowns! crowns! crowns! but all for Thy head Jesus! laurels and wreaths! but none for man, all for Him whose own right hand and whose holy arm hath gotten Him the victory. We must all be agreed on this point, and I hope we are.

3. Put Away All Things That Offend Our God.

And now to conclude. Let us put away all those things which offend our God.

Before God appeared upon Mount Sinai, the children of Israel had to cleanse themselves for three days. Before Israel could take possession of the promised rest of Canaan, Joshua had to see to it that they were purified by the rite of circumcision. Whenever God would visit His people, He always demands of them some preparatory purging, that they may be fit to behold His presence; for two cannot walk together, unless that which would make them disagree be purged out. A few suggestions then, as to whether there is anything in us with which God cannot agree. Here I cannot preach to you indiscriminately, but put the task into the hand of each man to preach to himself. In the days of the great weeping, we read that every man wept apart and his wife apart, the son apart, and the daughter apart, all the families apart. So it must be here.

Is there pride in me? Am I puffed up with my talent, my substance, my character, my success? Lord purge this out of me, or else thou canst not walk with me, for none shall ever say that God and the proud soul are friends: He giveth grace to the humble; as for the proud, He knoweth them afar off, and will not let them come near to Him.

Am I slothful? do I waste hours which I might usefully employ? Have I the levity of the butterfly, which flits from flower to flower, but drinks no honey from any of them? or have I the industry of the bee, which, wherever it lights, would find some sweet store for the hive? Lord, thou knowest my soul, thou understandest me. Am I doing little where I might do much? Hast thou had but little reaping for much sowing? Have I hid my talent in a napkin? Have I spent that talent for myself, instead of spending it for thee? Slothful souls cannot walk with God. “My Father worketh,” saith Jesus, “and I work”; and you who stand in the marketplace idle, may stand there with the devil, but you cannot stand there with God. Let every brother who is guilty of this, purge away his sloth.

Or am I guilty of worldliness. This is the crying sin of many in the Christian church. Do I put myself into association with men who cannot by any possibility profit me? Am I seen where my Master would not go? Do I love amusements which cannot afford me comfort when I reflect upon them; and which I would never indulge in, if I thought that Christ would come while I was at them? Am I worldly in spirit as to fashion? Am I as showy, as volatile, as frivolous as men

and women of the world? If so, if I love the world, the love of the Father is not in me; consequently He cannot walk with me, for we are not agreed.

Again, am I covetous? do I scrape and grind? is my first thought, not how I can honour God, but how I can accumulate wealth? When I gain wealth, do I forget to make use of it as a steward? If so, then God is not agreed with me; I am a thief with His substance; I have set myself up for a master instead of being a servant, and God will not walk with me till I begin to feel that this is not my own, but His; and that I must use it in His fear.

Again, am I of an angry spirit? Am I harsh towards my brethren? Do I cherish envy towards those who are better than myself, or contempt towards those who are worse off? If so, God cannot walk with me, for He hates envy, and all contempt of the poor is abhorrent to Him.

Is there any lust in me? Do I indulge the flesh? Am I fond of carnal indulgences by which my soul suffers? If so, God will not walk with me; for chambering, and wantonness, and gluttony, and drunkenness, separate between a believer and His God: these things are not convenient to a Christian. Before the great feast of unleavened bread, a Jewish parent would sweep out every piece of leaven from his house; and so anxious would he be, and so anxious is the Jew at the present day, that he take a candle and sweeps out every cupboard, no matter though there may have been no food put in there at any time, he is afraid lest by accident a crumb may be somewhere concealed in the house; and so, from the garret to the cellar, he clears the whole house through, to purge out the old leaven. Let us do so. I cannot think you will do so as the effect of such poor words as mine; but if my soul could speak to you, and God blessed the utterance, you would. For my own part, I cry unto my Master, that if there be anything that can make me more fit to be the messenger of God to you and to the sons of men, however painful might be the preparatory process, He would graciously be pleased not to spare me of it. If by sickness, if by serious calamities, if by slander and rebuke, more honour can be brought to Him, then hail! and welcome! all these things; they shall be my joy; and to receive them shall be delight. I pray you, utter the same desire: “Lord, make me fit to be the means of glorifying thee.”

“The dearest idol I have known, Whate’er that idol be;
Help me to tear it from its throne, And worship only thee.”

What! do you demur? Do you want forever to go on in the old dead-and-alive way in which the churches are just now? Do you feel no sacred passion

stirring your breast to anguish for the present, and to hope for the future? O ye cravens, who dread the battle, slink to your beds; but ye who have your Master's spirit in you, and would long to see brighter and better days, lift up your heads with confidence in Him who will walk with us if we be agreed.

My text has a main bearing upon the unconverted: I think of preaching from it this evening to those who are not agreed with God, and who cannot walk with Him. I pray that they may be reconciled unto God by the death of His Son; and the most likely means to accomplish this, will be by your earnest and fervent prayers. O Lord, hear and answer for Jesus' sake. Amen.

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Solemn Pleadings for Revival

“Keep silence before me, O islands; and let the people renew their strength: let them come near; then let them speak; let us come near together to judgment”

—Isaiah 41:1

Introduction

The text is a challenge to the heathen to enter into a debate with the living God. The Lord bids them argue at their best, and let the controversy be calmly carried out to its issues, so as to be decided once for all. He bids them be quiet, reflect, and consider, in order that with renewed strength they may come into the discussion and defend their gods if they can. He urges them not to bring flippant arguments, but such as have cost them thought, and have weight in them, if such arguments can be. He bids them be quiet till they are prepared to speak, and then, when they can produce their strong reasons and set their cause in the best possible light, He challenges them to enter the lists and see if they can maintain for a moment that their gods are gods, or anything better than deceit and falsehood.

I am not about to speak of that controversy at this time, but to use the text with quite another view. We also who worship the Lord God Most High have a controversy with Him. We have not seen His church and His cause prospering in the world for many a day as we could desire; as yet heathenism is not put to the rout by Christianity, neither does the truth everywhere trample down error. Nations are not born in a day; the kingdoms of the world have not become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ. We desire to reason with God about this, and He Himself instructs us how to prepare for this sacred debate. He bids us be silent; He bids us consider, and then draw near to Him with holy boldness and plead with Him, produce our cause and bring forth our strong reasons.

It seems to me that at the beginning of the year I cannot suggest to Christian people a more urgent topic than this, that we should plead with God that He would display among us greater works of grace than as yet our eyes have seen. We have read of wonderful revivals; history records the prodigies of the Reformation, and the marvellous way in which the gospel was spread during the first two centuries. We pine to see the like again, or to know the reason why it is

not so, and with holy boldness it is our desire to come before the Lord and plead with Him, as a man pleadeth with His friend. May God help us so to do in the power of the Holy Ghost.

1. Let Us Be Silent.

"Keep silence before me, O islands" (Isa 41:1). Before the controversy opens, let us be silent with solemn *awe*, for we have to speak with the Lord God Almighty! Let us not open our mouths to impugn His wisdom, nor allow our hearts to question His love. What if things do not look as bright as we could wish? The Lord reigneth. And what if He seems to delay? Is He not the Lord God with whom a thousand years are as one day, and who is not slack concerning His promise as some men count slackness? We are going to make bold to speak with Him, but still, He is the eternal God and we are dust and ashes. Whatever we may say with holy boldness, we would not utter a word in rash familiarity. He is our Father, but He is our Father *in heaven*. He is our Friend, but at the same time He is our Judge. We know that whatsoever He doeth is best. We would not say unto our Maker, "What makest thou?" nor to our Creator, "What hast thou done?" Shall the potter give account to the clay for the works of his hands (Isa 29:16)? It is the Lord; let Him do what seemeth Him good (Jdg 10:15).

When we look at what He doeth it may seem to our dim apprehension to be exceeding strange, and we may fail to read its meaning; but we need not wish to read it. It is the glory of God to conceal a thing, and if He chooses to conceal it, let it be concealed. Truly, God is good to Israel, and His mercy endureth forever. If this world's history is to drag on through another score of mournful centuries, it will only reveal so much the more matter for praise when the great hallelujahs of the ultimate victory shall peal forth.

Our silence of awe should deepen into that of *shame*; for, my brethren, though it is certainly true that the cause of God has not prospered, whose fault is this? If there has been straitening, it has not been in God. Where then has it been? If the seed has rotted under the clods, or if the cankerworm has eaten the green shoot, so that the reaper has not joyfully filled his arm, whence cometh it? Has there not been sin among us, ay, sin in the church of God? What if Israel has turned her back in the day of battle? Is there not an accursed thing in the camp, and an Achan who has hidden away the goodly Babylonish garment and the shekel of gold (Jos 7)? God saith, "Is there not a cause? Can two walk together, except they be agreed? (Amo 3:3). If ye walk contrary to me I also will walk contrary to you."

Truly, when I see how God has blessed us, I am not so much astonished that

He has not given more, as I am amazed that He has given so much. Does He bless such unworthy instruments, such laggards, such slothful workers? Does He do anything by tools so unfit? Does He place any treasure in vessels so impure? This is to be ascribed to His grace. But if He doth not use us to the highest point, let us take shame and confusion of face to ourselves, and before the throne of His glory let us sit down in silence. What, indeed, can we say? We have no charges to bring against Him, no accusations against the Most High, but we must silently confess that we ourselves are vile (Job 40:4). Unto us belongeth shame and confusion of face.

Go further than this, and keep the silence of *consideration*. This is a noisy age, and the church of Christ herself is too noisy. We have very little silent worship, I fear. I do not so much regret the absence of silence from the public assembly as from our private devotions, where it has a sacred hallowing influence, unspeakably valuable. Let us be silent, now, for a minute, and consider what is it that we desire of the Lord: the conversion of thousands, the overthrow of error, the spread of the Redeemer's kingdom. Think in your minds what the blessings are which your soul pants after. Get a correct idea of them, and then enquire whether you are prepared to receive them? Suppose they were to be now bestowed, are you ready? If thousands of converts were to be born unto this one church, are you prepared to teach them, instruct them, and comfort them? Are you doing it now, you Christian people? Are you acting in such a way that God knows you to be fit to have the charge of those converts that you are asking for? You pray for grace: are you using the grace you have? You want to see more power: how about the power you have? Are you employing it? If a mighty wave of revival sweeps over London, are your hearts ready? Are your hands ready? Are your purses ready? Are you altogether ready to be carried along on the crest of that blessed wave? Consider.

If you reflect, you will see that God is able to give His church the largest blessing, and to give it at any time. Keep silence and consider, and you will see that He can give the blessing by you or by me. He can make any one of us, weak as we are, mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds; can make our feeble hands, though we have but a few loaves and fishes, capable of feeding myriads with the bread of life. Consider this, and this morning ask yourselves in the quiet of your spirits: what can we do to get the blessing. Are we doing that? What is there in our temper, in our private prayer, in our acts for God that would be likely to bring down the blessing? Do we act as if we were sincere? Have we really a desire for these things, which we say we desire? Could we give up

worldly engagements to attend to the work of God? Could we spare time to look after the Lord's vineyard? Are we willing to do the Lord's work; and are we in the state of heart in which we can do it efficiently and acceptably? Keep silence and consider. I would suggest to every Christian that he should sit a while before God when he reaches his home, and worship with the silence of awe, with the silence of shame, and then with the silence of careful thought concerning these things.

Then we shall pass on to the silence of *attention*. "Keep silence before me, O islands"; keep silence that God may speak to you; that God's Word may be heard in your soul; not parts of it only, but all of it; that God's Spirit may be heard with His gentle monitions warning you, with His blessed enlightenments revealing to you yourself and your Lord, with His divine promptings urging you to greater consecration and superiour holiness, and with His divine assistances leading you onward in the path of a higher life than you have yet attained. Oh, it is well to sit still before the Lord, deaf to every voice but the divine. We cannot expect Him to hear us if we will not hear Him. "I will hear," says the prophet, "what God the Lord will speak" (Psa 85:8). Do you always do so? If you have heard the Lord speak to you, you will own that there is no voice like His. Be silent till you hear the Lord's word slaying all your pride and self-will and self-seeking, and proclaiming His sole glory in every part of your manhood.

If you have learned attention, be silent with *submission*. For this you will need the gracious aid of the Holy Ghost. It is not easy to attain to full submission of soul to whatsoever the Lord wills. We are often like hard brass, which will not take the impression from the seal; but if we were what we should be, we should be as melted wax, which at once takes the stamp that is put upon it. Oh, to have a heart that is quite silent as to any wish, or will, or opinion, or judgment of our own, so that God's mind shall be our mind, God's will shall be our will. The church would soon be healed of her sorrows and delivered from her divisions, if she would for a while be silent. But the voice of a favourite teacher is heard by some, and the voice of another master in Israel is listened to by others, and so God's voice is lost amid the clamour of sects and the uproar of parties. Oh, that the church would sit at Jesus' feet, lay aside her prejudices, and take the Word in its simplicity and intergrity, and accept what God the Lord, and He only, doth declare to be the truth. I invite the members of this church, and urge the members of all the churches to see to this, that we cry unto the Lord for a blessed silence in His presence, till we sit like servants waiting for their master's word, and stand like watchmen waiting for the master's coming, ourselves quiet,

restful, peaceful, resigned, nay, acquiescing in the divine will, all attent to hear each word that falls from Him, and resolved with humble resolution that whatever the Lord shall speak, that will we do; we will accept His Word as law, and light, and life to our souls, and nothing else beside. The Lord send that solemn silence over all His people now.

2. Let Us Renew Our Strength.

Noise wears us; silence feeds us. To run upon the Master's errands is always well, but to sit at the Master's feet is quite as necessary; for, like the angels which excel in strength, our power to do His commandments arises out of our hearkening to the voice of His Word. If even for a human controversy quiet thought is a fit preparation, how much more is it needful in solemn pleadings with the Eternal One? Now let the deep springs be unsealed; let the solemnities of eternity exercise their power while all is still within us.

But how happens it that such silence renews our strength? It does so, first, by giving space for *the strengthening Word to come* into the soul, and the energy of the Holy Spirit to be really felt. Words, words, words; we have so many words, and they are but chaff, but where is *the Word* that in the beginning was God and was with God? That Word is the living and incorruptible seed. "What is the chaff to the wheat? saith the Lord" (Jer 23:28). We want less of the words of man, and more of Him who is the very Word of God. Be quiet, be quiet, and let Jesus speak. Let His wounds speak to you; let His death speak to you; let His resurrection speak to you; let His ascension and His subsequent glory speak to you; and let the trumpet of second advent ring in your ears. You cannot hear the music of these glorious things because of the rattle of the wheels of care and the vain jangle of disputatious self-wisdom.

Be silent, that you may hear the voice of Jesus, for when He speaks you will renew your strength. The eternal Spirit is with His people, but we often miss His power because we give more ear to other voices than to His, and quite as often our own voice is an injury to us, for it is heard when we have received no message from the Lord, and therefore gives an uncertain sound (1Co 14:8). If we will wait upon the blessed Spirit, His mysterious influence will sway us most divinely, and we shall be filled with all the fulness of God. Even as we have seen the frost yield suddenly to the influence of the warm south wind, so shall our lethargy[3] melt before His sovereign energy. How often have I felt in a moment my ice-locked spirit yield to the breath of the Holy Ghost. You have seen a cloud on high flying, as you thought, against the wind, driven on by some upper current of air, which you did not feel below—even thus have we been carried on by upper currents that flesh and blood cannot understand. We sang as Dr. Watts does,

"Look how we grovel here below, Fond of these trifling toys;

Our souls can neither fly nor go To reach eternal joys."

But when the Holy Spirit came, the lightning itself could not overtake us; we rode upon a cherub and did fly, yea, we did ride upon the wings of the wind (Psa 18:10), for God the everlasting One had caught us up and filled us with His power. Be silent, then, that the Spirit may thus work upon you. Let other spirits be gone—let the spirit of the world, and the spirit of the flesh, and the spirit of self be banished, and let the Spirit of the Ever-Blessed be heard speaking in your soul. Thus shall you renew your strength.

We must be silent to renew our strength, next, by using silence for *consideration as to who* it is that we are dealing with. We are going to speak with God about the weakness of His church and the slowness of its progress. Be silent, that you may remember who He is with whom you are expostulating.[4] It is God the omnipotent who can make His church mighty if He will, and that at once. We are coming to plead now with one whose arm is not shortened and whose ear is not heavy. Renew your strength as you think of Him. If you have doubted the ultimate success of Christianity, renew you strength as you remember who it is that has sworn by Himself that surely all flesh shall see the salvation of God (Isa 40:5).

You are coming to plead with *Jesus Christ*. Be silent, and remember those wounds of His with which He has redeemed mankind! Can these fail of their reward? Shall Jesus be robbed of the power He has so dearly earned? The earth is the Lord's, and He will unswathe her of the mists which dimmed her lustre at the fall, and He will make this planet shine as brightly as when she first was rolled from between the palms of the omnipotent Creator. There shall be a new heaven and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness. Think of that, and renew your strength. Hath not the Lord said concerning His beloved Son, that He shall divide the spoil with the strong, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in His hands (Isa 53:12)? Shall it not be so?

Think, too, that you are about to appeal to *the Holy Spirit*; and there again you have the same divine attributes. What cannot the Spirit of God do? He sent the tongues of fire at Pentecost, and Parthians, Medes, and Elamites, and men of every nation heard the gospel at once. He turned three thousand hearts by one sermon to know the crucified Saviour to be the Messiah. He sent the apostles like flames of fire through the whole earth, till every nation felt their power. He can do the like again. He can bring the church out of darkness into noonday (Isa 58:10). Let us renew our strength as we think of this. The work we are going to plead about is not ours one-half so much as it is God's. It is not in our hands, but

in Hands that cannot fail; therefore let us renew our strength as we silently meditate upon the Triune Jehovah with whom we have to speak.

In silence, too, let us renew our strength by *remembering* His promises. We want to see the world converted to God, and He has said that "The earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea" (Hab 2:14). "The glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it" (Isa 40:5). "They that dwell in the wilderness shall bow before him; and his enemies shall lick the dust" (Psa 72:9). "The idols he shall utterly abolish" (Isa 2:18). There are a thousand promises. Let us think of that, and however difficult the enterprise may be, and however dark our present prospects, we shall not dare to doubt when Jehovah has spoken and pledged His word.

Our strength will be renewed, next, if in silence we *yield up to God* all our own wisdom and strength. Brethren, I never am so full as when I am empty; I have never been so strong as in the extremity of weakness. The source of our worst weakness is our homeborn strength, and the source of our worst folly is our personal wisdom. Lord, help us to be still, till we have abjured[5] ourselves, till we have said, "Lord, our ways of working cannot be compared with Thy ways of working; teach us how to work. Lord, our judgments are weak compared with Thy perfect judgment; we are fools, be Thou our teacher and guide in all things. Crush out of us our fancied strength, and make us like worms, for it is the worm Jacob that Thou wilt make into the new sharp threshing instrument, which shall thresh the mountain (Dan 2:35). After this sort shall you renew your strength."

Keep silence, then, ye saints, till ye have felt your folly and your weakness, and then renew your strength most gloriously by casting yourselves upon the strength of God. More than ever before let your inmost souls be filled with trust in the arm that never fails, the hand that never loses its cunning, the eye that is never closed, the heart that never wavers. Jehovah works everywhere, and all things are His servants. He works in the light, and we see His glory; but He equally works in the darkness, where we cannot perceive Him. His wisdom is too profound to be at all times understood of mortal men. Let us be patient, and wait His time, for as surely as God lives, the idols must go down, the crescent of Mohammed must wane forever, and the harlot of the Seven Hills must be devoured with fire, for the Lord hath said it, and so must it be; Jehovah hath declared it, and who shall say Him nay? With no more doubt of our Father's power than the child at its mother's breast has of its mother's love; with no more

doubt than an angel before the throne can have of Jehovah's majesty, let us commit ourselves, each one after his own fashion, to suffering and to labour for the grand cause of God, feeling well assured that neither labour nor suffering can be in vain in the Lord.

Thus much, then, concerning the renewing of our strength. I wish we could have had a quarter of an hour's silence that you might reflect upon these topics, but I leave them with you, trusting that you will seek that silence at home, and so renew your strength.

3. Then Let Them Draw Near.

Beloved, you that know the Lord, I would urge upon you to *draw near*. You are silent, you have renewed your strength, now enjoy access with boldness. The condition in which to intercede for others is not that of distance from God, but that of great nearness to Him. Even thus did Abraham draw nigh when he pleaded for Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 18:23). May God the Holy Spirit draw us near even now; perhaps the following five considerations may help us in so doing.

1. Let us remember how near we really are. We have been washed from every sin in the precious blood of Jesus; we are covered from head to foot at this moment with the spotless righteousness of Immanuel, God with us. We are accepted in the Beloved; yea, we are at this moment one with Christ and members of His body. How could we be nearer? How near is Christ to God? So near are we! Come near, then, in your personal pleadings, for you are near in your covenant Representative. The Lord Jesus has taken manhood into union with the divine nature, and now between God and man there exists a special and unparalleled relationship, the like of which the universe cannot present. No actual blood relationship exists between God and any other creature but man, "for verily he took not up angels, but he took up the seed of Abraham" (Heb 2:16). "Unto which of the angels said he at any time, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee?" (Heb 1:5). And yet hath He said this first and chiefly to the Lord Jesus Christ; and next, in a true but secondary sense, to each regenerate one whom He has of His own will begotten by the Word of truth. Come near, then, O ye sons of God, come near, for you *are* near. Stand where your sonship places you, where your Representative stands on your behalf. Let the slaves of the flesh, and the bondservants of the law, stand afar off from the Lord who speaks to them from Sinai; but as for us, it is our joy to come very near, for the voice of love calls to us from Calvary.

2. The next consideration which may help you to draw near is that you are coming to a Father. That was a blessed word of our Lord: "The Father himself loveth you" (Joh 16:27). God forbid I should say a word to make you think less of the splendour and majesty of God; but I pray you remember that, however great and terrible He is, He is our Father. I delight in those words of our poet:

"The God that rules on high, And thunders when he please,
That rides upon the stormy sky, And manages the seas:

This awful God is ours, Our Father and our love."

As surely as my earthly father is near akin to me, and I may come to him with loving familiarity, so may I approach the Lord, who hath begotten me again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and I may say to him, "Abba, Father," and He will not disregard the cry (Rom 8:15). Hath He not given us the spirit of adoption? How can He despise that which He gives? Come, then, and speak in your Father's ear. O child of God, you are not talking to a stranger; you are not about to hold a debate with an enemy; you are not seeking to wring a blessing from an unwilling hand. It is to your Father that you speak. Come near to Him, I pray you, and plead this day.

3. Remember next, that the desire which is in our heart for God's glory and the extension of His church, is a desire written there by the Holy Spirit. Now, if the Holy Spirit Himself indites the prayer, and He knows the mind of God, if He makes intercession in our hearts according to the will of God, we need have no hesitation to express our desires, because our desires are simply the shadow of the eternal purpose; and that which always was in the mind of God to give, the Spirit of God has inclined us to ask. True prayer is the intimation of God to man that He intends to bless Him. It is the herald of mercy. Plead, then, O child of God, for the Spirit of God is pleading in you. Come and speak out that which He speaks within. He Himself helpeth your infirmities, making intercession in you according to the will of God (Rom 8:27). When the Spirit prompts, what cause can there be for hesitation? We must speed when He inspires.

4. Remember next, that what we ask, if we are now about to plead with God concerning His kingdom, is according to His own mind. We are at one with God in this matter. If it were not for God's glory for sinners to be converted, we would not pray for it. We desire to see thousands of sinners turn to Christ, but it is with this view, that the infinite mercy, wisdom, power, and love of God may be manifested towards them, and so God may be praised. Verily, much as our heart is set upon the prosperity of the church of God, if it were conceivable that such prosperity would not glorify God, we would not ask for it. We desire to see, not our notions, but God's truth prevail. I do not want you to believe as I believe except so far as that belief is according to the mind of God. I pray every believer here to search his heart and see whether his desire be a pure one, having God's glory as its Alpha and Omega. It is God's truth, God's kingdom, God's glory that we want to see promoted. If this be the case, may we not come very boldly? We have not only the King's ear but His heart also, and we may open our mouths wide. When we have a question as to the Lord's will, we are bound to go no

further than “nevertheless, not as I will” (Mat 26:39); but when there is no ground for hesitancy, with what sacred ardour may we press our suit!

5. Moreover, there is this further consideration; the Lord loves to be pleaded with. He might have given all the covenant blessings without prayer; wherefore does He compel us to use entreaties, unless it be that He loves to hear the voices of His children? God has given to the church untold mercies in answer to intercession, for He delights to bless His people at the mercy seat. In this our own beloved church prayer has been more glorious and excellent than all the mountains of prey. Its bow has not returned empty, neither has its shield been cast away. Prayer has been bolder than the lion, swifter than the eagle, and has overthrown all her adversaries, treading them beneath her feet as straw is trodden for the dunghill. To this day we live by prayer. The church of God has never gained a victory but in answer to prayer. Her whole history is to the praise of the glory of a prayer-hearing God. Come, then brethren, if we have sped so well before, and if God invites us now, yea, if He delights in our petitions, let us not be slack, but enlarge our requests before Him. Oh for grace that we may now this day and henceforward draw very near to God!

I may want a few minutes over the allotted time this morning while I now come to the fourth and last point, which is,

4. Let Us Speak.

Be silent, renew your strength, draw near, and then speak. What have we to say upon the matter that concerns us? Let us first speak in the spirit of *adoring gratitude*. How sweet to think that there should be a Saviour at all; to think that the project of rescuing this poor world from her ruin should ever have been entertained in the courts of heaven; to think that the Spirit should be given to reside among men, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the rebels to obedience to the truth! To think that there should be a heavenly kingdom set up, as it is set up; that it should have made such advances as it has made, and should still grow mightily! That Jesus Christ should be seen of angels is put down as a wonder, but it is mentioned next to it that He was "believed on in the world" (1Ti 3:16). He has been believed on by millions, and however gloomy the prospects of the church may appear, the kingdom of Christ is not an insignificant kingdom, even now. Those who deride her laugh too soon.

She is in her twilight, as Voltaire[6] said, but it is the twilight of her morning, and not of her evening. Brighter times are coming; but even now, up to this moment, the history of the church cannot be told without adoring gratitude to God. She has been foolish, and has lost her strength, but like Samson's, it will return. Deceived and deluded in the days of Constantine,[7] she suffered that baptised heathen to proclaim an adulterous connection between the church and the State, and from that day her glory has departed and her power has fled. When will she repent? The nominal church goes after her lovers, seeking her corn and her wine at their hands, and she says to kings and queens of the earth, "Be ye my head, and let your senators rule me." While she does this, God cannot and will not bless her in any great degree. When was the ark taken? Never till it was defended by the carnal sword. When did the ark triumph? Was it not when left alone in its own glory it smote Dagon to the ground (1Sa 5)? When the visible church gets back to her chastity to Christ, she will say, "We have nothing to do with parliaments and kings, except to convert them; ours is a spiritual kingdom, and state-craft is foreign to her. We ask not your endowments; we care not for your persecutions; let us alone; all we ask is a clear stage and no favour."

The bride of Christ comes not into the world to toy with the politics of princes; hers is a higher work. She leans upon the Lord alone, and yields allegiance to none else. Remove worldliness and you will see bright days; but the grand impediment of the church now is the arm of flesh, the lofty, high-

sounding titles of her prelates, the palaces of her bishops (be amazed, ye heavens, that the successors of the apostles should be owners of palaces!), the priestliness of her ministers and the lack of gospel simplicity. This hampers her; but cut the church clear of this, and God's bare arm will soon win victory unto the truth in this land. I for my part bless and magnify the Lord that, though a great section of the visible church has played the harlot so sadly in the midst of the nations, yet He has not quite cast her away. He keeps a chosen company who follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth; on whose banner is written, "One Lord, one faith, one baptism"; and whose watchword is, "One is our Master, even Christ, and all we are brethren." As to the world, we will seek its conversion, but we will never enter into alliance with it, much less bow down our necks before its kings and princes. May God grant us grace as we draw near to Him, to speak out in adoration of Him.

Next, let us speak in humble expostulation. I would earnestly urge upon my brethren in Christ to expostulate thus with the Lord. "O Lord, Thy truth does not prosper in the land, yet Thou hast said, 'My word shall not return unto me void' (Isa 55:11). Lord, Thou art every day blasphemed, and yet Thou hast said that Thy glory shall be seen of all flesh. Lord, they set up the idols; even in this land, where Thy martyrs burned, they are setting up the graven images again. Lord, tear them down, for Thy name's sake; for Thine honour's sake, we beseech Thee, do it! Dost Thou not hear the enemy triumph? They say the gospel is worn out. They tell us that we are the relics of an antiquated race; that modern progress has swept the old faith away. Wilt Thou have it so, good Lord? Shall the gospel be accounted a worn-out almanack, and shall they set up their new gospels in its stead? Souls are being lost, O God of mercy! Hell is being filled, O God of infinite compassion! Jesus sees but few brought to Himself and washed in His precious blood. Time is flying, and every year increases the number of the lost! How long, O God, how long? Wherefore tarriest Thou?" In this manner order your case before the Lord, and He will hearken unto you.

When you have spoken by way of expostulation, then turn to pleading. Plead with all your skill in argument. "There is Thy promise, O Jehovah; wilt Thou not keep it? Thou hast said unto Thy Son, Ask of me, and I will give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession (Psa 2:8)! We do ask in Jesus' name. Do it for Thy promise sake! Lord, Thou hast done great things and unspeakable in times gone by; we have heard with our ears, and our fathers have told us the wondrous things that Thou didst in their days and in the old time before them. Thou art the same Lord,

therefore glorify Thyself again. By all the past, we beseech Thee, reveal Thyself at this present." Plead with the Lord and lay stress upon His glory. Tell Him that it glorifies His mercy to save sinners, and glorifies His wisdom and His power, yea, every attribute of His divine nature. Then plead the merit of His Son. Oh brethren, plead the blood, plead the wounds, plead the bloody sweat in Gethsemane, plead the cross, plead the death and resurrection—and come not away from the mercy-seat till with this mighty plea you have won the victory!

I scarcely need remind you at how many points you may get a grip of the covenant angel; for when wrestling with him, if you have but the will to do it, you may seize him anywhere and hold him fast, and say, "I will not let thee go except thou bless me" (Gen 32:26). I wish I could preach like John Knox,[8] but I wish ten times more that I could pray like him—a man who would not take "no" for an answer, but won Scotland for Christ, and she remains Christ's still through John Knox's prayer. It is not possible for prelacy[9] to flourish where Knox has prayed. Oh for prayer such as that again. King of kings, wilt Thou not stretch out Thy sceptre and save men? Wilt Thou not pluck Thy sword out of its scabbard, and smite Thy foes? There be some men to whom God would almost say, as He did to Moses, "Let me alone." They are favoured to use such forcible arguments and cogent pleas that wrath forbears, and mercy yields the blessing. If we can push on as Moses did with renewed pleadings and entreaties, the blessing will come. This is what England, yea, the world, wants—men who can plead with God, men who can draw near and then speak.

Again, dear brethren, after we have been silent, after we have renewed our strength, and after we have drawn near to God, let us speak today in the way of dedication. Now, here I cannot suggest to any man what he in particular may speak. I charge you before the living God lie not unto Him, but if you can say this, I pray you say it—"I give to God this day my whole being, absolutely and forever, my body, my soul, my spirit. I have asked that His kingdom may come: I pledge myself in His sight to extend that kingdom by every power I possess or may be able to gain, by every opportunity He may put in my way, and by every means which I am able to use." I do not think Jesus ought to have less than that from us, but I know He gets far less. Perhaps the Lord may move some of you young men to say, "Lord, I want to see Thy kingdom spread, and therefore I will give myself up to preach the gospel." Perhaps some of you good women here may say, "I will undertake a work of usefulness of some kind or other for Jesus; I am resolved I will." And you who have this world's goods, I hope you will say, "I know that this good work always needs money: I have it: it shall be freely

given. When I see that the gospel does not spread, I will not have the reflection on my mind that it is retarded by deficiency of pecuniary means, while I have gold stored up." I will not suggest to any of you more than this—whatever the Lord moves you to do, do it; but I do think when we come to plead with the Lord after this fashion we ought to be able to say, "Lord, do spread Thy kingdom; it is not my fault if it does not spread. I do for thee all I can. I boast not of it, for all I do I ought to do, and I wish I could do a thousand times as much; but still, Lord, during this year of grace I hope to do much for thee which I may have forgotten hitherto."

Last of all, brethren, let us speak still in the way of confidence. However we may complain of the spread of error, the deaths of good men, and the fewness of able ministers to take their places; however we may think the times to be dark and dreary, let us never speak as if God were dead. I walked some time ago with one of the most earnest Christians I know of, a very devout man, and he told me he was afraid one day the streets of London would run with blood. He was afraid of an educated democracy that, being uneducated in religion in School Board schools, would become clever Atheists, and cast off all reverence for God and law; and he gave me an awful picture of what was going to happen. But I touched him on the arm and said, "There is one thing you have forgotten, dear friend: God is not dead yet. What you are dreading will never occur in this land, I am sure. We have an open Bible, we have still some who preach the gospel with all their hearts, and there is still a salt and leaven in the city of London that God will bless to keep down the rottenness and corruption. In spite of all His foes, the Lord reigneth."

What, my friends, the devil conquer our God? Never! Rome triumphant over Zion? Never! Rome has been very cunning; the devil has done his best in Roman Catholicism; there is no more wisdom left in the devil than he has put into that concern, and if that is confounded he has lost all. That is his ultimatum, the course of hellish craft can go no further. He has staked all his power on the church of Rome, and to a certainty she will be driven before the church of Christ like chaff before the wind. They shall ask and say, "Where is this harlot city that made the nations drunk with the wine of her fornication, that rode upon the scarlet beast up and down upon the earth, and had written upon her brow, 'Mystery, Babylon the Great, the Mother of Harlots'? (Rev 17:2, 5)." Vain will it be to ask where is she? for they shall answer, "Did you not hear the splash of the millstone as the angel hurled it into the flood, and said, 'Thus terribly shall Babylon fall, and thus no more be found at all'?" Then shall go up the shout,

“Hallelujah, Hallelujah, the Lord God Omnipotent reigneth (Rev 19:6).” Let us anticipate the hour. Even now let every heart shout, “Hallelujah, Hallelujah,” and yet again let us say, “Hallelujah, the Lord reigneth, and all must be well.”

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Revival

“We have heard with our ears, O God, our fathers have told us, what work thou didst in their days, in the times of old”

—Psalm 44:1

Introduction

Perhaps there are no stories that stick by us so long as those which we hear in our childhood, those tales which are told us by our fathers and in our nurseries. It is a sad reflection that too many of these stories are idle and vain, so that our minds in early infancy are tinctured with fables and inoculated with strange and lying narratives.

Now, among the early Christians and the old believers in the far-off times, nursery tales were far different from what they are now, and the stories with which their children were amused were of a far different class from those that fascinated us in the days of our babyhood. No doubt, Abraham would talk to young children about the flood, and tell them how the waters overspread the earth, and how Noah alone was saved in the ark. The ancient Israelites, when they dwelt in their own land, would all of them tell their children about the Red Sea, and the plagues that God wrought in Egypt when He brought His people out of the house of bondage. Among the early Christians we know that it was the custom of parents to recount to their children everything concerning the life of Christ, the acts of the apostles and the like interesting narratives. Nay, among our Puritan ancestors such were the stories that regaled their childhood. Sitting down by the fireside, before those old Dutch tiles with the quaint eccentric drawings upon them of the history of Christ, mothers would teach their children about Jesus walking on the water, or of His multiplying the loaves of bread, or of His marvellous transfiguration, or of the crucifixion of Jesus.

Oh how I would that the like were the tales of the present age, that the stories of our childhood would be again the stories of Christ, and that we would each of us believe that, after all, there can be nothing so interesting as that which is true, and nothing more striking than those stories that are written in sacred writ; nothing that can more truly move the heart of a child than the marvellous works of God that He did in the olden times. Now, it seems that the psalmist who wrote

this most musical ode had heard from his father, handed to him by tradition, the stories of the wondrous things that God had done in his day. And afterwards, this sweet singer in Israel taught it to his children, and so was one generation after another led to call God blessed, remembering His mighty acts.

Now, my dear friends, this morning I intend to recall to your minds some of the wondrous things that God has done in the olden time. My aim and object will be to excite your minds to seek after the like, that looking back upon what God has done, you may be induced to look forward with the eye of expectation, hoping that He will again stretch forth His potent hand and His holy arm, and repeat those might acts He performed in ancient days.

First I shall speak of the marvellous stories that our fathers have told us, and that we have heard of the olden time; secondly, I shall mention some disadvantages under which these old stories labour with regard to the effect upon our minds; and, then, I shall draw the proper inferences from those marvellous things that we have heard, that the Lord did in days of yore.

1. The Wonderful Stories of the Lord’s Ancient Doings

We have heard that God has at times done very might acts. The plain every day course of the world hath been disturbed with wonders at which men have been exceedingly amazed. God hath not always permitted His church to go on climbing by slow degrees to victory, but He hath been pleased at times to smite one terrible blow, and lay His enemies down upon the earth, and bid His children march over their prostrate bodies.

Turn ye back then, to ancient records, and remember what God hath done. Will ye not remember what He did at the Red Sea, how He smote Egypt and all its chivalry,[10] and covered Pharaoh’s chariot and horse in the Red Sea? Have ye not heard told how God smote Og, king of Bashan, and Sihon, king of the Amorites, because they withstood the progress of His people? Have ye not learned how He proved that His mercy endureth forever when He slew those great kings and cast the mighty ones down from their thrones? Have you not read, too, how God smote the children of Canaan and drove out the inhabitants thereof, and gave the land to His people, to be a possession by lot forever? Have you not heard how when the hosts of Jabin came against them, the stars in their courses fought against Sisera? The river of Kishon swept them away, “that ancient river, the river Kishon,” and there was none of them left. Hath it not been told you, too, how by the hand of David God smote the Philistines, and how by His right hand He smote the children of Ammon? Have you not heard how Midian was put to confusion, and the myriads of Arabia were scattered by Asa in the day of his faith? And have you not heard, too, how the Lord sent a blast upon the hosts of Sennacherib, so that in the morning they were all dead men? Tell, tell ye these, His wonders! Speak of them in your streets. Teach them to your children. Let them not be forgotten, for the right hand of the Lord hath done marvellous things; His name is known in all the earth.

The wonders, however, which most concern us, are those of the Christian era; and surely these are not second to those under the Old Testament. Have you never read how God won to Himself great renown on the day of Pentecost? Turn ye to this book of the record of the wonders of the Lord and read. Peter the fisherman stood up and preached in the name of the Lord his God. A multitude assembled and the Spirit of God fell upon them, and it came to pass that three thousand in one day were pricked in their heart by the hand of God and believed

on the Lord Jesus Christ. And know you not how the twelve apostles with the disciples went everywhere preaching the Word, and the idols fell from their thrones? The cities opened wide their gates, and the messenger of Christ walked through the street and preached.

It is true that at first they were driven hither and thither, and hunted like partridges upon the mountains; but do ye not remember how the Lord did get unto Himself a victory, so that in a hundred years after the nailing of Christ to the cross, the gospel had been preached in every nation, and the isles of the sea had heard the sound thereof? And have ye yet forgotten how the heathen were baptized, thousands at a time, in every river? What stream is there in Europe that cannot testify to the majesty of the gospel? What city is there in the land that cannot tell how God's truth has triumphed, and how the heathen has forsaken his false gods, and bowed his knee to Jesus the crucified? The first spread of the gospel is a miracle never to be eclipsed. Whatever God may have done at the Red Sea, He hath done still more within a hundred years after the time when Christ first came into the world. It seemed as if a fire from heaven ran along the ground. Nothing could resist its force. The lightning shaft of truth shivered every pinnacle of the idol temple, and Jesus was worshipped from the rising of the sun to the going down of the same. This is one of the things we have heard of the olden times.

And have you never heard of the mighty things that God did by preachers some hundred of years from that date? Hath it not been told you concerning Chrysostom,[11] the golden-mouthed, how, whenever he preached, the church was thronged with attentive hearers; and there, standing and lifting up holy hands, he spake with a majesty unparalleled, the Word of God in truth and righteousness; the people listening, hanging forward to catch every word, and anon breaking the silence with the clapping of their hands and the stamping of their feet; then silent again for awhile, spell-bound by the mighty orator; and anon carried away with enthusiasm, springing to their feet, clapping their hands, and shouting for joy again? Numberless were the conversions in his day; God was exceedingly magnified, for sinners were abundantly saved.

And have your fathers never told you of the wondrous things that were done afterwards when the black darkness of superstition covered the earth, when Popery sat upon her ebon throne and stretched her iron rod across the nations and shut the windows of heaven, and quenched the very stars of God and made thick darkness cover the people? Have ye never heard how Martin Luther[12] arose and preached the gospel of the grace of God, and how the nations

trembled, and the world heard the voice of God and lived? Have ye not heard of Zwingli[13] among the Swiss, and of Calvin[14] in the holy city of Geneva, and of the mighty works that God did by them?

Nay, as Britons have ye forgotten the mighty preacher of the truth, have your ears ceased to tingle with the wondrous tale of the preachers that Wickliffe (1384) sent forth into every market town and every hamlet of England, preaching the gospel of God? Oh, doth not history tell us that these men were like fire-brands in the midst of the dry stubble; that their voice was as the roaring of a lion, and their going forth like the springing of a young lion. Their glory was as the firstling of a bullock; they did push the nation before them, and as for the enemies, they said, “Destroy them.” None could stand before them, for the Lord their God had girded them with might.

To come down a little nearer to our own times, truly our fathers have told us the wondrous things that God did in the days of Wesley (1791) and of Whitefield (1770). The churches were all asleep. Irreligion was the rule of the day. The very streets seemed to run with iniquity, and the gutters were filled full with the iniquity of sin. Up rose Whitefield and Wesley, men whose hearts the Lord had touched, and they dared to preach the gospel of the grace of God. Suddenly, as in a moment, there was heard the rush as of wings, and the church said, “Who are these that fly as a cloud, and as the doves to their windows?” (Isa 60:8). They come! they come! numberless as the birds of heaven, with a rushing, like mighty winds that are not to be withstood.

Within a few years, from the preaching of these two men, England was permeated with evangelical truth. The Word of God was known in every town, and there was scarcely a hamlet into which the Methodists had not penetrated. In those days of the slow-coach, when Christianity seemed to have bought up the old waggons in which our fathers once travelled—where business runs with steam, there oftentimes religion creeps along with its belly on the earth—we are astonished at these tales, and we think them wonders. Yet let us believe them; they come to us as substantial matters of history. And the wondrous things that God did in the olden times, by His grace He will yet do again. He that is mighty hath done great things and holy is His name!

There is a special feature to which I would call your attention with regard to the works of God in the olden time; they derive increasing interest and wonder from the fact that they were all sudden things. The old stagers in our churches believe that things must grow gently, by degrees; we must go step by step onward. Concentrated action and continued labour, they say, will ultimately

bring success. But the marvel is, all God's works have been sudden. When Peter stood up to preach, it did not take six weeks to convert the three thousand. They were converted at once and baptised that very day; they were that hour turned to God, and became as truly disciples of Christ as they could have been if their conversion had taken seventy years.

So was it in the day of Martin Luther: it did not take Luther centuries to break through the thick darkness of Rome. God lit the candle and the candle burned, and there was the light in an instant. God works suddenly. If anyone could have stood in Wurtemburg and have said, "Can Popery be made to quail; can the Vatican be made to shake?"—the answer would have been: "No; it will take at least a thousand years to do it. Popery, the great serpent, hath so twisted itself about the nations, and bound them so fast in its coil, that they cannot be delivered except by a long process." "Not so," however, did God say. He smote the dragon sorely, and the nations went free; He cut the gates of brass, and broke in sunder the bars of iron, and the people were delivered in an hour. Freedom came not in the course of years, but in an instant. The people that walked in darkness saw a great light, and upon them that dwelt in the land of the shadow of death, did the light shine (Isa 9:2).

So was it in Whitefield's day. The rebuking of a slumbering church was not the work of ages; it was done at once. Have ye never heard of the great revival under Whitefield? Take as an instance that at Camslang. He was preaching in the church-yard to a great congregation that could not get into any edifice; and while preaching, the power of God came upon the people, and one after another fell down as if they were smitten; and at least it was estimated that not less than three thousand persons were crying out at one time under the conviction of sin. He preached on, now thundering like Boanerges, and then comforting like Barnabas, [15] and the work spread, and no tongue can tell the great things that God did under that one sermon of Whitefield. Not even the sermon of Peter on the day of Pentecost was equal to it.

So has it been in all revivals; God's work has been done suddenly. As with a clap of thunder has God descended from on high, not slowly, but on cherubim right royally doth He ride; on the wings of the mighty wind does He fly. Sudden has been the work; men could scarce believe it true, it was done in so short a space of time.

Witness the great revival that is going on in and around Belfast. After carefully looking at the matter, and after seeing some trusty and well-beloved brother who lived in that neighborhood, I am convinced notwithstanding what

enemies may say, that it is a genuine work of grace, and that God is doing wonders there. A friend who called to see me yesterday, tells me, that the lowest and vilest men, the most depraved females in Belfast have been visited with this extraordinary epilepsy, as the world calls it; but with this strange rushing of the Spirit, as we have it. Men who have been drunkards have suddenly felt an impulse compelling them to pray. They have resisted; they have sought to their cups in order to put it out; but when they have been swearing, seeking to quench the Spirit by their blasphemy, God has at last brought them on their knees, and they have been compelled to cry for mercy with piercing shrieks, and to agonize in prayer. And then after a time, the evil one seems to have been cast out of them, and in a quiet, holy, happy frame of mind, they have made a profession of their faith in Christ, and have walked in His fear and love.

Roman Catholics have been converted. I thought that an extraordinary thing; but they have been converted very frequently indeed in Ballymena and in Belfast. In fact, I am told the priests are now selling small bottles of holy water for people to take, in order that they may be preserved from this desperate contagion of the Holy Spirit. This holy water is said to have such efficacy, that those who do not attend any of the meetings are not likely to be meddled with by the Holy Spirit—so the priests tell them. But if they go to the meetings, even this holy water cannot preserve them—they are as liable to fall a prey to the divine influence. I think they are just as likely to do so without as with it.

All this has been brought about suddenly, and although we may expect to find some portion of natural excitement, yet I am persuaded it is in the main a real, spiritual, and an abiding work. There is a little froth on the surface, but there is a deep running current that is not to be resisted, sweeping underneath, and carrying everything before it. At least there is something to awaken our interest, when we understand that in the small town of Ballymena on market day, the publicans have always taken one hundred pounds for whiskey, and now they cannot take a sovereign all day long in all the public houses. Men who were once drunkards now meet for prayer, and people after hearing one sermon will not go until the minister has preached another, and sometimes a third; and at last he is obliged to say, “You must go; I am exhausted.” Then they will break up into groups in their streets and in their houses, crying out to God to let this mighty work spread, that sinners may be converted unto Him. “Well” says one, “we cannot believe it.” Very likely you cannot, but some of us can, for we have heard it with our ears, and our fathers have told us the mighty works that God did in their days, and we are prepared to believe that God can do the like works now.

I must here remark again, in all these old stories there is one very plain feature. Whenever God has done a mighty work, it has been by some *very insignificant instrument*. When He slew Goliath it was by little David, who was but a ruddy youth (1Sa 17). Lay not up the sword of Goliath—I always thought that a mistake of David—lay up, not Goliath's sword, but lay up the stone and treasure up the sling in God's armoury forever. When God would slay Sisera, it was a woman that must do it with a hammer and a nail (Jdg 4). God has done His mightiest works by the meanest instruments; that is a fact most true of all God's works. Peter the fisherman at Pentecost, Luther the humble monk at the Reformation, Whitefield the potboy of the Old Bell Inn at Gloucester in the time of the last century's revival—and so it must be to the end. God works not by Pharaoh's horses or chariot, but He works by Moses' rod; He doth not His wonders with the whirlwind and the storm, He doth them by the still small voice—that the glory may be His and the honour all His own. Doth not this open a field of encouragement to you and to me? Why may not we be employed in doing some mighty work for God here?

Moreover, we have noticed in all these stories of God's mighty works in the olden time, that wherever He has done any great thing it has been by some one who has had *very great faith*. I do verily believe at this moment that, if God willed it, every soul in this hall would be converted now. If God chose to put out the operations of His own mighty Spirit, not the most obdurate heart would be able to stand against it. "I will have mercy upon whom I will have mercy" (Rom 9:15). He will do as He pleases; none can stay His hand. "Well" says one, "but I do not expect to see any great things." Then, my dear friend, you will not be disappointed, for you will not see them; but those that expect them shall see them. Men of great faith do great things. It was Elijah's faith that slew the priests of Baal. If he had had the little heart that some of you have, Baal's priests had still ruled over the people, and would never have been smitten with the sword. It was Elijah's faith that bade him say, "If the Lord be God, follow him, but if Baal, then follow him" (1Ki 18:21). And again, "Choose one bullock for yourselves, cut it in pieces, lay it on wood and put no fire under, call ye on the name of your gods, and I will call on the name of Jehovah" (1Ki 18:23-24). It was his noble faith that bade him say, "Take the prophets of Baal; let not one of them escape" (1Ki 18:40); and he brought them down to the brook Kishon, and slew them there—a holocaust to God. The reason why God's name was so magnified was because Elijah's faith in God was so mighty and heroic.

When the Pope sent his bull to Luther, Luther burned it. Standing up in the

midst of the crowd with the blazing paper in his hand he said, “See here, this is the Pope’s bull.” What cared he for all the popes that were ever in or out of hell? And when he went to Worms to meet the grand Diet, his followers said, “You are in danger, stand back.” “No,” said Luther, “if there were as many devils in Worms as there are tiles on the roofs of the houses, I would not fear; I will go”—and into Worms he went, confident in the Lord his God.

It was the same with Whitefield; he believed and he expected that God would do great things. When he went into his pulpit he believed that God would bless the people, and God did do so. Little faith may do little things, but great faith shall be greatly honoured. O God! our fathers have told us this, that whenever they had great faith Thou hast always honoured it by doing mighty works.

I will detain you no longer on this point, except to make one observation. All the mighty works of God have been attended with *great prayer*, as well as with great faith. Have ye ever heard of the commencement of the great American revival? A man unknown and obscure laid it up in his heart to pray that God would bless his country. After praying and wrestling and making the soul-stirring enquiry, “Lord what wilt thou have me to do? Lord what wilt thou have me to do?” he hired a room, and put up an announcement that there would be a prayer-meeting held there at such-and-such an hour of the day. He went at the proper hour, and there was not a single person there; he began to pray, and prayed for half-an-hour alone. One came in at the end of the half-hour, and then two more, and I think he closed with six. The next week came round, and there might have been fifty dropped in at different times. At last the prayer-meeting grew to a hundred, then others began to start prayer-meetings; at last there was scarcely a street in New York that was without a prayer-meeting. Merchants found time to run in, in the middle of the day, to pray. The prayer-meetings became daily ones, lasting for about an hour; petitions and requests were sent up, these were simply asked and offered before God, and the answers came; and many were the happy hearts that stood up and testified that the prayer offered last week had been already fulfilled. Then it was when they were all earnest in prayer, suddenly the Spirit of God fell upon the people, and it was rumoured that in a certain village a preacher had been preaching in thorough earnest, and there had been hundreds converted in a week. The matter spread into and through the northern states—these revivals of religion became universal, and it has been sometimes said, that a quarter of a million of people were converted to God through the short space of two or three months.

Now the same effect was produced in Ballymena and Belfast by the same means. The brother thought that it lay at his heart to pray, and he did pray, then he held a regular prayer-meeting, day after day they met together to entreat the blessing, and the fire descended and the work was done. Sinners were converted, not by ones or twos, but by hundreds and thousands, and the Lord’s name was greatly magnified by the progress of His gospel. Beloved, I am only telling you facts. Make each of you your own estimate of them if you please.

Agreeably to my division, I have now to make a few observations upon,

2. The Disadvantages under Which These Old Stories Frequently Labour

When people hear about what God used to do, one of the things they say is, “Oh, that was *a very long while ago*.” They imagine that times have altered since then. Says one, “I can believe anything about the Reformation—the largest accounts that can possibly be given, I can take in.” “And so could I concerning Whitefield and Wesley,” says another, “all that is quite true; they did labour vigorously and successfully, but that was many years ago. Things were in a different state then from what they are now.” Granted; but I want to know what the things have to do with it. I thought it was God that did it. Has God changed? Is He not an immutable God, the same yesterday, today, and forever (Heb 13:8)? Does not that furnish an argument to prove that what God has done at one time, He can do at another? Nay, I think I may push it a little further, and say what He has done once, is a prophecy of what He intends to do again—that the mighty works which have been accomplished in the olden time shall all be repeated, and the Lord’s song shall be sung again in Zion, and He shall again be greatly glorified.

Others among you say, “Oh, well I look upon these things as great prodigies —miracles. We are *not to expect them every day*.” That is the very reason why we do not get them. If we had learnt to expect them, we should no doubt obtain them, but we put them up on the shelf, as being out of the common order of our moderate religion, as being mere curiosities of Scripture history. We imagine such things, however true, to be prodigies of providence; we cannot imagine them to be according to the ordinary working of His mighty power. I beseech you, my friends, abjure that idea, put it out of your mind. Whatever God has done in the way of converting sinners is to be looked upon as a precedent, for “his arm is not shortened that he cannot save, nor is his ear heavy that he cannot hear” (Isa 59:1). If we are straitened[16] at all, we are not straitened in Him, we are staitened in our own bowels. Let us take the blame of it ourselves, and with earnestness seek that God would restore to us the faith of the men of old, that we may richly enjoy His grace as in the days of old.

Yet there is another disadvantage under which these old stories labour. The fact is, we have *not seen them*. Why I may talk to you ever so long about revivals, but you won’t believe them half so much, nor half so truly, as if one were to occur in your very midst. If you saw it with your own eyes, then you

would see the power of it. If you had lived in Whitefield's day, or had heard Grimshaw preach, you would believe anything. Grimshaw would preach twenty-four times a week; he would preach many times in the course of a sultry day, going from place to place on horseback. That man did preach. It seemed as if heaven would come down to earth to listen to him. He spoke with a real earnestness, with all the fire of zeal that ever burned in mortal breast, and the people trembled while they listened to him, and said, "Certainly this is the voice of God." It was the same with Whitefield. The people would seem to move to and fro while he spoke, even as the harvest field is moved with the wind. So mighty was the energy of God that after hearing such a sermon the hardest-hearted men would go away and say, "There must be something in it; I never heard the like."

Can you not realise these as literal facts? Do they stand up in all their brightness before your eyes? Then I think the stories you have heard with your ears should have a true and proper effect upon your own lives.

This brings me in the third place to the,

3. Proper Inferences That Are to Be Drawn from the Old Stories of God's Mighty Deeds

I would that I could speak with the fire of some of those men whose names I have mentioned. Pray for me, that the Spirit of God may rest upon me, that I may plead with you for a little time with all my might, seeking to exhort and stir you up, that you may get a like revival in your midst.

My dear friends, the first effect that the reading of the history of God's mighty works should have upon us, is that of *gratitude and praise*. Have we nothing to sing about today?—then let us sing concerning days of yore. If we cannot sing to our Well-beloved a song concerning what He is doing in our midst, let us, nevertheless, take down our harps from the willows, and sing an old song, and bless and praise His holy name for the things which He did to His ancient church, for the wonders which He wrought in Egypt, and in all the lands wherein He led His people, and brought them out with a high hand and with an outstretched arm.

When we have thus begun to praise God for what He has done, I think I may venture to impress upon you one other great duty. Let what God has done suggest to you the *prayer*, that He would repeat the like signs and wonders among us. Oh! men and brethren, what would this heart feel if I could but believe that there were some among you who would go home and pray for a revival of religion—men whose faith is large enough, and their love fiery enough to lead them from this moment to exercise unceasing intercessions that God would appear among us and do wondrous things here, as in the times of former generations.

Why, look you here in this present assembly what objects there are for our compassion. Glancing round, I observe one and another whose history I may happen to know, but how many are there still unconverted—men who have trembled and who know they have, but have shaken off their fears, and once more are daring their destiny, determined to be suicides to their own souls, and put away from them that grace which once seemed as if it were striving in their hearts. They are turning away from the gates of heaven, and running post-haste to the doors of hell; and will not you stretch out your hands to God to stop them in this desperate resolve? If out of this congregation there were but one unconverted man and I could point him out and say, "There he sits, one soul that has never felt the love of God, and never has been moved to repentance," with

what anxious curiosity would every eye regard him. I think out of the thousands of Christians here, there is not one who would refuse to go home and pray for that solitary unconverted individual. But, oh! my brethren, it is not one that is in danger of hell fire; here are hundreds and thousands of our fellow-creatures.

Shall I give you yet another reason why you should pray? Hitherto all other means have been used without effect. God is my witness how often I have striven in this pulpit to be the means of the conversion of men. I have preached my very heart out. I could say no more than I have said, and I hope the secrecy of my chamber is a witness to the fact that I do not cease to feel when I cease to speak; but I have a heart to pray for those of you who are never affected, or who if affected still quench the Spirit of God.

My hearers, I have done my utmost. Will not you come to the help of the Lord against the mighty? Will not your prayers accomplish that which my preaching fails to do? Here they are; I commend them to you. Men and women whose hearts refuse to melt, whose stubborn knees will not bend; I give them up to you and ask you to pray for them. Carry their cases on your knees before God. Wife! never cease to pray for your unconverted husband. Husband! never stay your supplication till you see your wife converted. And O fathers and mothers! have you no unconverted children? have you not brought them here many and many a Sunday, and they remain just as they have been? You have sent them first to one chapel and then to another, and they are just what they were. The wrath of God abideth on them. Die they must; and should they die now, to a certainty you are aware that the flames of hell must engulf them. And do you refuse to pray for them? Hard hearts, brutish souls, if knowing Christ yourself ye will not pray for those who come of your own loins—your children according to the flesh.

Dear friends, we do not know what God may do for us if we do but pray for a blessing. Look at the movement we have already seen; we have witnessed Exeter Hall, St. Paul’s Cathedral, and Westminster Abbey crammed to the doors, but we have seen no effect as yet of all these mighty gatherings. Have we not tried to preach without trying to pray? Is it not likely that the church has been putting forth its preaching hand but not its praying hand? O dear friends! let us agonise in prayer, and it shall come to pass that this Music Hall shall witness the sighs and groans of the penitent and the songs of the converted. It shall yet happen that this vast host shall not come and go as now it does, but little the better; but men shall go out of this hall praising God and saying: “It was good to be there; it was none other than the house of God, and the very gate of heaven.” Thus much to stir you up to prayer.

Another inference we should draw is that all the stories we have heard should *correct any self-dependence* that may have crept into our treacherous hearts. Perhaps we as a congregation have begun to depend upon our numbers and so forth. We may have thought, "Surely God must bless us through the ministry." Now let the stories that our fathers have told us remind you, and remind me, that God saved not by many nor by few; that it is not in us to do this but God must do it all. It may be that some hidden preacher, whose name has never been known, some obscure denizen of St. Giles, will yet start up in this city of London and preach the Word with greater power than bishops or ministers have ever known before. I will welcome him; God be with him. Let him come from where he may, only let God speed him, and let the work be done.

Mayhap, however, God intends to bless the agency used in this place for your good and for your conversion. If so, I am thrice happy to think such should be the case. But place no dependence upon the instrument. No, when men laughed at us and mocked us most, God blessed us most; and now it is not a disreputable thing to attend the Music Hall. We are not so much despised as we once were, but I question whether we have so great a blessing as once we had. We would be willing to endure another pelting in the pillory, to go through another ordeal with every newspaper against us, and with every man hissing and abusing us, if God so pleases, if He will but give us a blessing. Only let Him cast out of us any idea that our own bow and our own sword will get us the victory. We shall never get a revival here, unless we believe that it is the Lord, and the Lord alone, that can do it.

Having made this statement, I will endeavour to stir you up with confidence that the result may be obtained that I have pictured, and that the stories we have heard of the olden time, may become true in our day. Why should not every one of my hearers be converted? Is there any limitation in the Spirit of God? Why should not the feeblest minister become the means of salvation to thousands? Is God's arm shortened? My brethren, when I bid you pray that God would make the ministry quick and powerful, like a two-edged sword (Heb 4:12), for the salvation of sinners, I am not setting you a hard, much less an impossible task. We have but to ask and to get. Before we call, God will answer; and while we are yet speaking, He will hear (Isa 65:24).

God alone can know what may come of this morning's sermon, if He chooses to bless it. From this moment you may pray more; from this moment God may bless the ministry more. From this hour other pulpits may become more full of life and vigour than before. From this same moment the Word of

God may flow, and run, and rush, and get to itself an amazing and boundless victory.

Only wrestle in prayer, meet together in your houses, go to your closets, be instant, be earnest in season and out of season, agonise for souls, and all that you have heard shall be forgotten in what ye shall see; and all that others have told you shall be as nothing compared with what ye shall hear with your ears, and behold with your eyes in your own midst.

Oh ye, to whom all this is as an idle tale, who love not God, neither serve Him, I beseech you stop and think for a moment. Oh, Spirit of God, rest on Thy servant while a few sentences are uttered, and make them mighty. God has striven with some of you. You have had your times of conviction. You are trying now, perhaps, to be infidels. You are trying to say now, "There is no hell; there is no hereafter." It will not do! You know there is a hell, and all the laughter of those who seek to ruin your souls cannot make you believe that there is not. You sometimes try to think so, but you know that God is true. I do not argue with you now. Conscience tells you that God will punish you for sin. Depend upon it: you will find no happiness in trying to stifle God's Spirit. This is not the path to bliss, to quench those thoughts that would lead you to Christ. I beseech you, take off your hands from God's arm; resist not still His Spirit. Bow the knee and lay hold of Christ and believe on Him. It will come to this yet. God the Holy Spirit will have you. I do trust that in answer to many prayers He intends to save you yet. Give way now, but oh, remember: if you are successful in quenching the Spirit, your success will be the most awful disaster that can ever occur to you, for if the Spirit forsake you, you are lost! It may be that this is the last warning you will ever have. The conviction you are now trying to put down and stifle may be the last you will ever have, and the angel standing with the black seal and the wax may be now about to drop it upon your destiny, and say, "Let him alone. He chooses drunkenness; he chooses lust. Let him have them, and let him reap the wages in the everlasting fires of hell."

Sinners, believe on the Lord Jesus; repent and be converted every one of you. I am bold to say what Peter did. Breaking through every bond of every kind that could bind my lip, I exhort you in God's name repent and escape from damnation. A few more months and years, and ye shall know what damnation means, except ye repent. Oh! fly to Christ while yet the lamp holds out and burns, and mercy is still preached to you. Grace is still presented. Accept Christ; resist Him no longer; come to Him now. The gates of mercy are wide open today; come now, poor sinner, and have thy sins forgiven.

When the old Romans used to attack a city, it was sometimes their custom to set up at the gate a white flag, and if the garrison surrendered while that white flag was there, their lives were spared. After that, the black flag was put up, and then every man was put to the sword. The white flag is up today; perhaps tomorrow the black flag will be elevated upon the pole of the Law, and then there is no repentance or salvation, either in this world or in that which is to come.

An old eastern conqueror when he came to a city used to light a brazier of coals, and setting it high upon a pole, he would with sound of trumpet proclaim that if they surrendered while the lamp held out and burned, he would have mercy upon them, but that when the coals were out he would storm the city, pull it stone from stone, sow it with salt, and put men, and women, and children, to a bloody death.

Today the thunders of God bid you to take the like warning. There is your light, the lamp, the brazier of coals. Year after year the fire is dying out, nevertheless there is coal left. Even now the wind of death is trying to blow out the last live coal. Oh sinner! turn while the lamp continues to blaze. Turn now, for when the last coal is dead, thy repentance cannot avail thee. Thy everlasting yelling in torment cannot move the heart of God; thy groans and briny tears cannot move Him to pity thee. Today if ye will hear His voice, harden not your hearts as in the provocation (Heb 3:15). Oh, today lay hold on Christ, “Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in him” (Psa 2:12)!

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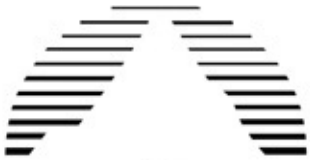
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[1] **lethargy** – a great lack of energy; sluggishness; dullness.
[2] **paroxysm** – a sudden outburst.
[3] **lethargy** – a great lack of energy; sluggishness; dullness
[4] **expostulating** – to reason earnestly.
[5] **abjured** – renounced.
[6] **Voltaire** (1694-1778) – French writer and poet; a leading figure of the Enlightenment.
[7] **Constantine the Great** (Latin: Flavius Valerius Aurelius Constantinus Augustus) (c. 272-337) – Roman Emperor from 306 to 337. Well known for being the first Roman emperor to convert to Christianity, Constantine issued the Edict of Milan in 313, which proclaimed religious tolerance of all religions throughout the empire.
[8] **John Knox** (c.1510-1572) – Scottish clergyman and a founder of Presbyterianism. Learned from John Calvin at Geneva while in exile, and, on his return to Scotland, led the Protestant Reformation there.
[9] **prelacy** – various ranks of hierarchical offices in the episcopalian churches.
[10] **chivalry** – a group of knights or gallant men.
[11] **Chrysostom** (c. 347-407) – Bishop of Constantinople and an important Early Church Father. He is known for his eloquence in preaching and public speaking, and his denunciation of abuse of authority by both ecclesiastical and political leaders. (Greek: "golden mouthed")
[12] **Martin Luther** (1483-1546) –a German Roman Catholic monk, theologian, university professor and church reformer whose ideas inspired the Protestant Reformation and changed the course of Western civilization.
[13] **Huldrych Zwingli** (1484-1531) – a leader of the Reformation in Switzerland.
[14] **John Calvin** (1509-1564) – the father of Reformed and Presbyterian theology. During the course of his ministry in Geneva, lasting nearly twenty-five years, Calvin lectured to theological students and preached an average of five sermons a week in addition to writing a commentary on nearly every book of the Bible as well as numerous treatises on theological topics. His correspondence fills eleven volumes. Born in Noyon, Picardie, France.
[15] **Boanerges…Barnabas** – *Boanerges* means “sons of thunder” (Mar 3:17); *Barnabas* means “son of consolation,” he was Paul’s beloved companion in missions (Act 4:36; 9:27).
[16] **straitened** – reduced to hardship or poverty.