

The Revival of Religion

by Joseph Parker

The speaker emphasizes the need for a genuine and permanent revival of religion, based on a clear and positive faith in Jesus Christ, and a thorough understanding of sin and redemption.

Scripture: Psalm 85:6, Isaiah 1:18, Matthew 5:16, Matthew 10:32, Mark 8:38, Romans 1:16, 1 Corinthians 1:18, Philippians 2:15, 2 Timothy 4:2, 1 Peter 3:15

Topics: "Church Revival", "Personal Sanctification"

Description

Joseph Parker preaches about the need for revival in the church, emphasizing the importance of a genuine revival rooted in clear doctrinal foundations and a true appreciation of sin and the work of Jesus Christ as the Savior. He highlights the necessity for a steady and penetrating glow of piety, fervor of love, and zealous affection in our Christian lives. Parker stresses the significance of faithful public ministry focused on preaching the Gospel and the need for sound, critical teaching to strengthen believers. He also encourages individual testimony to supplement the regular ministry and calls for influential individuals to boldly testify on behalf of Jesus Christ, rejecting the fear of sensationalism and emphasizing the urgency of living out our faith in all aspects of life.

Transcript

Wilt thou not revive us again: that thy people may rejoice in thee? - Psalm 85:6. IT IS WELL KNOWN that many Christians have come to have a distaste for the word "revival" when used with reference to religious work. To some extent I share that distaste. There has been so much exaggeration, so much fanatical excitement, and so much transient profession, that we cannot wonder at the revulsion which many soberminded Christians feel when they hear the very word "revival." We believe that all got-up revivals are bad.

You cannot organize a true revival; we cannot treat spiritual influences as fixed quantities; as the wind blows where it lists, so, often, is that sudden, profound, and irresistible impulse which rouses the church, and breaks in beneficently upon the deadly slumber and delusive security of the world. As a matter of fact, there have been extraordinary visitations of divine influence; there' have been seasons when the Holy Spirit has made the earthquake, the fire, the rending wind, and the stormy tempest His ministers, and when men have been shaken with a wholesome fear, not knowing the way, yet feeling the nearness of the Lord.

There have been great birthdays in the church, days on which thousands have been crucified with Jesus Christ, and multitudes have begun to sing loudly and lovingly His praise. There have been days of high festival in the sanctuary, when the silver trumpets have sounded, when prodigals have come back to sonship, when shepherds have returned with recovered flocks, when women have found the piece that was lost, and the dead have risen to immortal life. There have, too, been times when the people have realized with special vividness the personality and life-giving power of the Holy Spirit; when they have had the keys of interpretation wherewith to unlock the boundless treasures of the divine Word; when prayer was as the speech of love that never wearies; when the Sabbath shed its sacred glory over all the days of the week; when God's house shone with heavenly luster, and all life throbbled in joyful harmony with the purposes of God.

We refer to these things as to matters of fact, and in doing so we wish to know whether such delights cannot be more permanently secured. At the same time let it be clearly said that we could not bear the strain of an ecstatic life; we are not constituted for constant rapture; we have to contend with the deceitfulness of the flesh; we have to fight and suffer upon the earth when the spirit would gladly escape on the wings of the morning to untroubled and hallowed scenes. Still, there is danger in supposing that because we cannot always live at the highest point of spiritual enthusiasm, we may be content with low attainments, or with a neutrality which attracts no attention to itself.

Now there is something between the flame of a blazing ecstasy and the gray ashes of a formal profession; there is a steady and penetrating glow of piety, there is a fervor of love, there is an animated intelligence, a zealous affection, a godly yearning for personal progress and social evangelization, which, when found together, make up a life of delight in God and blessed service for men. To promote this realization we offer a few suggestions of whose value you can quickly form a sound opinion.

First of all, we are more and more assured that, as individual Christians, and as churches of Jesus Christ, we need to be very clear in our doctrinal foundations. Do let us get a distinct idea of the principal points in the Christian faith. Beginning with the doctrine of sin, let us strive after God's view of it. To Him sin is infinitely hateful; He cannot tolerate it with the least degree of allowance; it troubles His otherwise perfect and happy universe; it despoils human nature; it overthrows all that is divine in manhood; it calls into existence the worm that gnaws forever; it is the cause of death and the source of hell. To underestimate the heinousness of sin is to put ourselves out of the line of God's view; to understand sin is to understand redemption. Sin interprets the Cross; sin shows what is meant by God's love. Have we, as individuals and churches, lost the true notion of sin? Is it no longer infinitely abominable to us? Is it toned down to something almost indistinguishable? We cannot be right in our relation to Jesus Christ, we cannot be just to His holy Cross, until we regard sin with unutterable repugnance, until we rise against it in fiery indignation, fighting it with all the energy of wounded love, and bringing upon it the condemnation of concentrated and implacable anger. We are not speaking of what are called great sins; nor thinking of murder, of commercial plunder, of adultery, drunkenness, or theft; we are speaking of sin as sin, sin nestling secretly in the heart, sin rolled under the tongue as a sweet morsel, sin indulged in secret places, sin perverting the thought, sin poisoning the love, sin sucking out the lifeblood of the soul; thinking of sin, not of sins-of the fact, not of the details; we ask, with passionate yet well considered pointedness, Have we not been led to underestimate the guilt of sin?

Out of a true knowledge of sin will come a true appreciation of Jesus Christ as the Savior. Apart from this, He will be a strange teacher; with it, He will be the Redeemer for whom our hearts have unconsciously longed when they have felt the soreness and agony of sin. We could sum up the Christian creed in a

sentence, yet that sentence contains more than all the libraries in the world. The short but all-including creed-the faith which bears us up above all temptation and all controversy, the faith in which we destroy the power of the world, and soar into the brightness of eternal day-is this: I believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God! The heart hungers for Him, our sin cries out for His mercy, our sorrow yearns for His coming, and when He does come He speaks just the word that the soul needs; He understands us; He knows us altogether; He can get down into the low, dark pit into which sin has thrown us; He draws us to His Cross; He hides our sins in His sacrifice; He shows us how God can be honored, yet the sinner forgiven; He destroys the Devil, and puts within us the Holy Spirit; He so fills us with life that death has no longer any terror with which to affright us. I believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God; His word is the best witness of its own power; it touches life at every point; it is most precious when most needed; it goes into our business, and lays down the golden rule; it follows us in our wanderings, and bids us return; it is always pure, noble, unselfish, unworldly; it gives us a staff for the journey, a sword for the battle, a shelter from the storm, and in the last darkening hour it gives us the triumph of immortality.

This is the witness of ten thousand times ten thousand histories. We do not wonder at worldly or dead-hearted men calling this declamation: to them it is declamation; to them, indeed, it is madness; yet can we, who have known what it is to have Christ coming to us through all our sin, say of a truth that, when we are most mad, we are most wise-the ecstasy of love is the reason of faith.

If we lay firmly hold of these two points-that is, the sinfulness of sin, and the work of Jesus Christ-we shall come to know what is meant by what we have ventured to call the glow of piety. Only the liberated slave can know the joy of freedom-only the recovered leper can appreciate fully the blessing of health. Let an emancipated slave tell of the joys of liberty, and the man who has never felt the grip of a shackle will at once pronounce him a declaimer; let a recovered leper say all he can of the delights of health, and the man who has never known a day's sickness will probably think him more or less of a fool. It is so with our preaching, or with our true Christian living; it is not set in the common key of the world; it cannot be judged by the rules of carnal criticism; when it is praised as regular, thoughtful, prudent, let us beware, lest under these flattering names be hidden a deep, yet almost unconscious apostasy. By these strong words we seek to point out as the only solid basis of a genuine revival of religion the need of being distinct and positive in our faith. Let us know what we believe. Let us be able to say with sureness and thankfulness what is the Rock on which we stand.

Do not say that this is clipping the wings of mental freedom; do not charge me with narrowness or sectarianism; only be on the Rock, and you shall have upward scope enough; only be sure about Jesus Christ as at once the Interpreter of sin, and the Savior of sinners, and you may fly far on the wings of fancy; you may bring gems from many a mine, and flowers from many a garden. You may have your own way of saying things, you may speculate, and suggest, and discuss, only never turn sin into a flippant riddle, and never set up the Savior as a mere conundrum in theology. Are we thoroughly at one on these two points? Do we know sin in its essential, unchangeable loathsomeness? Do we love Jesus Christ as the only, the Almighty, and the ever-blessed Savior? Then, out of this should come an intense fervor of piety. We should have strength here; we should come back to these points from all the wanderings of fancy, and all the bewilderments of temptation; we should hasten to these doctrines when the anxieties of religious thought are heavy upon us; we should publish these doctrines in explanation and defense of an enthusiasm which must appear as madness to those who have not seen the unseen or felt the power of an endless life. To have one strong point of faith is of more consequence than to enjoy the most splendid speculations, which vanish like an enchanted dream when touched by the realities of sorrow and death.

To the young and ardent let me particularly, and with most anxious love, give a word of caution. There are not wanting men who will tell you that it is of little or no consequence what you believe. To the young mind this is very pleasant: it saves trouble, it leaves conscience untouched, it looks like liberty. Let me speak strongly yet soberly about this teaching. Having examined it, seen its effects on many men, and watched its general results, I am prepared to characterize it as a lie. I do not hesitate to teach that faith is the very root of life. What a man most deeply believes, that he most truly is. All earnest life is but a working out of earnest conviction. No man can live a deep, true, great life who lives upon the chances of the day, without convictions, without purposes, without principles on which he is prepared to risk the whole issue and destiny of his life. You will, after all, leave much unsettled; you will not encroach one iota upon the liberty of any man; you will still hold your mind open to receive new impressions, new visions of truth, new aspects of duty; yet you will have no standing place, no home, no rest, until you can say with the love and fire of your heart, I believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

In the next place, having a distinct idea of what we truly believe, we must have a public ministry which is faithful to the spirit and demands of Jesus Christ. We would speak with great caution upon this point, so far as personal methods of ministry are concerned. Every man must preach in the way that to him is best, most powerful, and most useful. What we wish to say is, that all Christian ministers are called to be faithful to Jesus Christ in seeking the salvation of men. In my view of ministerial life, there is too much attention paid in the pulpit to controversial subjects.

We have a great positive work to do. We have affirmative truths to teach. We have to cast out devils, not by controversy, but by divinely-revealed and authoritative truths. If we wish to take our part in the controversies of the world, the press is at our service; in the pulpit let us preach the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ, and mightily plead with men to repent and believe the Gospel. There is scope enough for all our powers. We shall have to acquaint ourselves deeply with human nature; we shall have to read the heart until we know its devices, imaginations, and cunning deceits; we shall have to study the power of sin in the soul; we shall have to suffer with Jesus Christ; we shall have to inquire diligently into God's righteousness, mercy, and love; night and day we shall have to study the mystery of Redemption, and in doing all these things our every power will be absorbed and exhausted.

If now and again, specially for the benefit of young men, we may have occasion to refer to controversies, let the reference be made with the lofty earnestness of men who are intent upon the salvation of those who hear us. We must not throw off the old words; Repentance, Faith, Salvation; and the things that they signify must be the very life-blood of our ministry. In any genuine revival of interest in Christianity there must be a revived interest in a preached Gospel. The sanctuary will be thronged, and the thronging listeners will be justly impatient of everything that does not bear immediately and intensely upon the salvation of men.

We sometimes talk of adapting our preaching to the age in which we live, of keeping it abreast with contemporary culture, and addressing ourselves to the habits of men of taste. In all this there may be truth enough barely to save it from the charge of insanity. My deepening impression is that, however we may modify our manner, the doctrine which is adapted to all ages, to all tastes, to all circumstances, is that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners. Then must we be made to feel that the doctrines of the Gospel are humbling doctrines; that they smite down our natural pride and self-trustfulness, that they kill before they make alive that out of our utter impoverishment and nothingness they bring all that is distinctive and enduring in Christian manhood.

Black will be the day, disastrous the hour, in which the Gospel is pared down to meet the notions of any men. The Gospel is less than nothing, if it be not the grandest revelation of the heart of God to the heart of man; and being, a revelation, it must of necessity be clothed with an authority peculiarly emphatic and decisive. We believe the Gospel to be God's answer to human sin and human sorrow; and if any man ask where is its authority, we answer, "The blind do see, the deaf hear, the dumb speak, the lame walk, the lepers cleansed, and the dead are raised to life." Christian living is the best explanation of Christian believing; Christianity is the best explanation of Christianity; and more preaching is the best answer to all opposition.

While there should be full and bold proclamation of evangelical doctrine in the pulpit, there should also be a system of teaching proceeding more privately. We believe thoroughly in sound, critical, extensive teaching. Some men have a peculiar gift in biblical teaching; those men should be encouraged to pursue their laborious but most necessary vocation. The preacher and teacher should be fellow-laborers. The preacher should collect men into great companies, arrest their attention by earnest and convincing statements of Christian truth, and then pass them on, so to speak, to the critical and patient teacher. Thus the man of God will become thoroughly furnished having received deep instruction, he will be able to give a reason for the faith and hope that are in him, and he will be strong to resist the importunities of those who are driven about by every wind of doctrine. We have had unjust and unreasonable expectations respecting the ministry. We have looked for all sorts of work from ministers; they have been expected to be eloquent preachers, popular lecturers, learned writers, acceptable visitors, skilled controversialists, untiring evangelists, and many other important and influential characters. This is the covetousness that tends to poverty. Let a man be one thing, and let him excel in it. I wish the Christian pulpit to be my world; in it I would work as a willing servant, and in it I would die like a soldier sword in hand. Another brother is a teacher, learned, critical, and patient with slow scholars; another is blessed with a high pastoral gift, by which he can make himself as an angel of God in the family; another is a ready writer, who can fascinate the eye of taste, or convince the stubborn minded: be it so; it is right, it is best. When Christian truth and Christian feeling revive among us, we shall be as the heart of one man, each magnifying God in the other. We shall all be wanted; the trumpet, the flute, the organ, the stringed instrument-the soldier, the physician, the teacher-the orator, the scholar, the poet-the strong man, the gentle woman, the tender child-all will be wanted; and the only strife among us will be who can do most and do it best for the Lamb that was slain!

We have heard of a great musical composer who was conducting a rehearsal by four thousand performers; all manner of instruments were being played, all parts of music were being sung. In one of the grand choruses which sounded through the vast building like a wind from heaven, the keen-eared conductor suddenly threw up his baton and exclaimed, "Flageolet!" In an instant the performance ceased. One of the flageolet players had stopped; something was wanting to the completeness of the performance, and the conductor would not go on. It shall be so in the church. Jesus Christ is conducting His own music. There is indeed a vast volume of resounding harmony rolling upward toward the anthems which fill the heavens; yet if one voice is missing He knows it; if the voice of a little child has ceased He notes the omission; He cannot be satisfied with the mightiest billow which breaks in thunder around His throne, so long as the tiniest wavelet falls elsewhere. Flageolet, where is your tribute? Pealing trumpet, He awaits your blast; sweet cymbals, He desires to hear your silvery chime; mighty organ, unite your many voices in deepening the thunder of the Savior's praise! And if there be one poor sinner who thinks his coarse tones would be out of harmony with such music, let him know that Jesus Christ refines every tribute that is offered in love, and harmonizes the discords of our broken life in the music of His own perfection.

There is one feature in our public Christian life which we should like more fully brought out, and that is the bearing of individual testimony on behalf of Jesus Christ. By no means let us seek to supplant what is known as the regular ministry, but rather supplement it; and at all costs destroy the impression that nobody has a good word to say for Christianity except its paid teachers. Such an impression is, of course, at all times utterly and most cruelly false; yet there is a possibility of so enlarging and strengthening our testimony as to secure the happiest results. Why should not the banker, the great merchant, and the eminent lawyer say publicly what God has done for their souls? If the Prime Minister of England, if the Lord Chancellor, if the judge upon the bench, if the wellknown senators would openly testify on behalf of Jesus Christ, they might produce the deepest possible impression for good. Such testimony would destroy the slanderous and blasphemous notion that Christianity is not adapted to the strength, the culture, and the advancement of the present day. It would arrest the attention of genius; it would infuse a new tone into the conversation of the highest circles; it would supply novel material for newspaper comment. We shall be told that this would be "sensationalism"; but let us beware lest the Devil find in that alarming word one of his easiest victories over Christian duty and Christian courage. Is it not high time that there should be sensationalism? Have we not been troubled with indifference long enough? Has not Jesus Christ become a merely historical name in many quarters? Terrified by the impotent bugbear of sensationalism; hushed into criminal silence by the possible charge of sensationalism; frightened into holes and corners lest anybody should cry "Sensationalism"; living tamely, dastardly, shamefacedly, because there is such a word as sensationalism! Is this manly on our part, or true, or just, or grateful? If this be sensationalism, how comes it to be so? Is it not by contrast with long-continued indifference, with cruel silence, with unholy self-indulgence? Could we not soon put an end to the charge of sensationalism, by the strength, the constancy, the ardor of our consecration? Sensationalism is a momentary cry-we may silence it by lifelong continuance in well-doing.

Let those who have social, political, literary, and commercial influence throw it boldly and earnestly into the cause of Jesus Christ; it is but common justice; having received much they owe much; and as the time of payment is brief-alas, how brief a shadow, a hurrying wind-let them be prompt if they would be just. Will you who are full of sin and sorrow throw yourselves at the Savior's Cross and cry mightily, "God be merciful to me a sinner"? Wait there until you receive the forgiveness of your sins. Do not yield to any suggestions to go elsewhere. You will know that you have received the answer when your hearts are filled with a deep, joyful, unspeakable peace. Will you who have long born the Savior's name carry the banner of your profession more loftily, more steadily, and more humbly? Will you who preach the Gospel give your nights and days to deeper, tenderer communion with Jesus Christ, desiring of Him the allincluding gift of the Holy Spirit? Will you who are in business live in the spirit of the golden rule? Will you who are heads of houses walk before your families in the fear and love of God? Are you forming the holy vow? In your heart of hearts are you renewing your covenant with the Savior? May the word of the Lord prosper; may we know that Christ is gathering many spoils, and realize that the Cross of the Savior is still able to draw men's hearts, and to hold them forever by the omnipotence of love.

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