

You are required to read all of chapter XV. of the book of II Chronicles while studying this lesson.

AN ANCIENT REVIVAL OF RELIGION.

When Asa heard these words, he took courage, and put away the abominable idols out of all the land, . . . and renewed the altar of the Lord. . . . And he gathered all Judah and Benjamin, and the strangers with them: . . . for they fell to him in abundance, when they saw that the Lord his God was with him. . . . And they entered into a covenant to seek the Lord God of their fathers, with all their heart and with all their soul. . . . And they swore unto the Lord with a loud voice, and with shouting, and with trumpets, and with cornets. And all Judah rejoiced at the oath: for they had sworn with all their heart, and sought him with their whole desire; and he was found of them: and the Lord gave them rest round about.—2 CHRON. xv. 8, 9, 12-15.

REVIVALS are supposed by many to be of modern origin; their opponents say, of modern invention. Not so; for here in the heart of the Old Testament we find a record of a revival which tallies, with singular accuracy, with similar works of divine grace in our own day.

As the narrative runs, there has been a long period of religious decline. Israel has been "without the true God, and without a teaching priest, and without law." The services of religion have been grossly neglected: idolatry has overspread the kingdom. Then trouble comes. As usual, God rebukes irreligion by calamity. War

ravages the land. No man's life or property is safe. "God did vex them with all adversity."

In their affliction they turn again to God. "They sought him, and he was found of them." God is never far off from men in trouble. An obscure prophet, nowhere else named in the Scriptures, rouses the king to attempt a general reformation of the people. The king sets to work with a will, and a wide-spread work of divine grace is the result. It is a clear case of deliberate seeking for and working for a revival of religion, and with success.

1. Varying somewhat the order of the narrative, we see first that *the heart of a revival lies in a renewal of the covenant of the Church with God.* "They entered into a covenant to seek the Lord God of their fathers, with all their heart and with all their soul." And again, "They had sworn with all their heart, and sought him with their whole desire." Clearly they mean to make a business of it. It is no half-way affair. With the stern zeal characteristic of a semi-civilized age and a theocratic government, they determine that opposers shall suffer for it. "Whosoever would not seek the Lord should be put to death." Yes, they are evidently in dead earnest. By their theory the whole nation is the Church; and the Church must be purified, cost what it may.

One of the laws of the working of the Holy Spirit is disclosed here. A revival of religion

begins in the Church of Christ. Rarely, if ever, does an exception occur. God does not work independently of his chosen people. The conversion of the world waits on the will of the Church.

The history of revivals emphasizes this law. A dead Church holds back from God the dead world. An awakened Church is the pioneer of an awakened world. A fragment of the Church vitalized by the Spirit of God will be felt by a godless community. Godly faith is a great power. It takes but little of it to set men thinking and asking what it means. Apply a little fire, in one small spot, to a block of marble, and you soon send a fissure rending through the whole. So the quickening of one small church by a new infusion of divine grace will break up the solidity of sin through a whole community. A little group of men who mean what they say, and who say the great truths of God and an eternal world, will always get a hearing. Crowds often follow one man who has received a new baptism from on high. There is a wonderful magnetism about such a man.

2. A second feature in this ancient revival of religion was *a public proclamation of a revived faith before the world*. It is often objected to modern revivals, that men make so much ado about them. Religion, it is said, is a still affair. It lies between a man's own soul and God. We are commanded to pray in secret chambers with the door shut.

Why all this noise about living to God and saving souls? Rid us of this cant. Give us rather the poetry of a silent faith. Let each man look after his own soul, and not annoy his neighbors. As one such wise man once expressed it, "Let each man have a snug little Zion of his own."

Not so thinks the awakened king of Judah and his subaltern chiefs. They make a great ado about the regeneration of the realm. They go through the land like the hot-headed reformers in the Netherlands; pulling down idols, and rebuilding desecrated altars, and putting a stop to ungodly rites of worship. Small chance is theirs if they try to keep the business secret. "They swear unto the Lord with a loud voice, and with shouting, and with trumpets, and with cornets." Camp-meetings and tent-preaching and tabernacles are a small matter compared with this uprising of a whole nation. It is more like the up-springing of our country when Sumter fell. We made no silent affair of that.

Religious men in earnest are too much in earnest to be still about it. They are moved by a great power. It will express itself as becomes a great power. Out it will come in speech, in act, in prayer, in song, in great enterprise, and in glad achievement. It is the instinct of religious faith to bear its witness to the world. It is not ashamed. Why should it skulk? God has given a great deliverance: men must proclaim it to those who

need the same. The pearl is of great price: men will rejoice over it.

A certain degree of publicity, therefore, in a spiritual quickening of the Church, is inevitable. It is but natural. Other great awakenings work in the same way. We do not denounce the ardor of a political campaign as the hysteria of old women and sick folk. We do not call the rush to the gold-mines of California and the Black Hills cant. Why, then, judge by a different law the great awakenings of men to the realities of eternity? The Black Hills, with all their golden treasure, will one day burn to cinders in volcanic fire. The souls of the men now crowding there will then be still living somewhere, undying as God is. Where? That is the question the Church tries to answer in a great revival.

On one occasion Edmund Burke came upon the hustings to contest a seat in Parliament before an excited assembly. The people had come together with preparations for bonfires and illuminations, and processions marching to the sound of drum and fife. When he had just mounted the platform, the news came that his opponent, who was to have met him there that morning, had been just found dead in his bed. Both Burke and his hearers were so overwhelmed by that momentary opening of the eternal world to their dim vision that he could not speak, and they were in no mood to hear. He only lifted his voice for one solemn

moment, and exclaimed, "What shadows we are, and what shadows we pursue!" Was that cant? Yet a revival of religion is no other than just that awakening to the reality of eternal things, and a permanent setting of the current of popular thought in that channel. Why not?

3. This old Jewish revival developed a third feature. *It was attended with a great influx of converts from without.* "The strangers fell to him out of Israel in abundance, when they saw that *the Lord his God was with him.*" So commonly works a pure revival upon the world. Very rare is the exception in which the heart of the world does not respond to the heart of the Church. Growth is the law of all life. A tree expands from the life of its root. Double the vitality there, and you double the fruitage. So is it with the spiritual life, of which the Church of God is the centre.

"They saw that the Lord his God was with him." This is the conviction with which a pure revival impresses men of the world. A feeling of awe often becomes general in a community in which the Holy Spirit is moving with great power. The consciousness of God fills hearts unused to such convictions.

Many years ago an eminent officer in the government of Massachusetts returned from Europe to his home in an inland town in which a powerful work of divine grace was in progress. He had not heard of it. As he passed through the streets,

the look of things seemed strange to him. The countenances of those whom he met impressed him with a sense of something unusual. The church-bell was tolling at an unusual hour. "What has happened here?" was his inquiry. "Something is in the air. Things seem like the day of judgment." There was no mystery in this. It *was* like the day of judgment. God was there, deciding the eternal destiny of hundreds of souls. It proved so to that awe-struck man, for he was soon one of the rejoicing converts.

In the great awakening under President Edwards, men cried out in great assemblies under the overpowering sense of the reality of God's being. The same phenomenon occurred during the "Year of Grace" in Ireland. Under the preaching of the late Rev. Dr. Blackburn of Missouri, men were known to rush out of churches and off from camping-grounds, saying that they could not bear the terror of God's presence, which threatened to crush them.

Certain animals have a mysterious sense by which they discern the coming-on of an earthquake, or the presence of death, before the dull eyes and ears of humankind detect them. So there seems to be in man a spiritual sense which under certain conditions feels the presence of God as it cannot at other times. What are the pathological affections of the body, often witnessed in intense revivals, but the succumbing of the ner-

vous system to spiritual impressions which flesh and blood cannot bear with equanimity? They are hints of that awful majesty of God which shook Mount Sinai, and which God himself expressed in the law, "No man shall see me and live."

4. A fourth feature of a true revival of religion is a *thorough reformation of public and private morals*. "Asa took courage, and put away the abominable idols out of all the land." To put away idolatrous worship was what we should call a reformation in morals. Idolatry was immorality concentrated in most hideous forms. No religious zeal could have been genuine in a monarch which did not sweep the land clean of them.

Thus in every so-called revival, the critical test of its genuineness is the inquiry, "How does it affect the real life of converts?" It is in perfect keeping with such an awakening that a temperance revival should accompany it. The most valuable fruit of Mr. Moody's work in Boston during the winter of 1876-77 was believed by sage observers to be the reformation of hundreds of inebriates and many abandoned women,—reformed because religiously converted. They attribute their reformation to no other cause than their new-found religion. The metropolitan police remarked a perceptible diminution of the crimes usually caused by rum. Rumsellers complained that their business was interrupted. There are localities in New York and Boston where once a

man could not safely go unarmed after nightfall, but where now a woman can go safely at midnight; and the power which has wrought the change is the work of a few Christian women in mission-schools.

That dishonest men become honest; that false men become true; that drunkards become temperate; that vile men become pure; that lost women recover the purity of their childhood; that men of intrigue and sharp dealing become guileless in act and speech; that profane men become reverent; that sabbath-breakers are found in the house of God,—these are among the legitimate tokens of a great and general revival, which are to be reasonably looked for if it is a work of God. One of the most significant evidences of conversion was given by a poor and ignorant man to a committee of examination for his admission to the church when he said, “I don’t know what religion has done for me in my business, except that I have burned my bushel-measure.”

An apparent religious awakening which does *not* result in making converts more honest, more truthful, more pure in private morals, is not worthy of trust. God is not in it. The payment of honest debts; dealing in trade by equity rather than by law; the giving-up of tricks of trade; a living price for slop-work; the sale of pure milk; the surrender of trades which are inimical to public morals; the destruction of distilleries; the refusal to lease

houses for immoral uses, and hotels for the sale of alcoholic liquors; care not to be ignorant of such leases; suffering loss of dividends for the observance of the Lord's Day; the honest report of property to assessors; a fair day's work when working for the Government; refusing to cheat the post-office; truthful invoices of imported goods; honest oaths at the custom-house; in a word, *freedom from guile* in transactions of business, — these are among the proper fruits of a revival of religion. The world has a right to look for them. The world is right in heaping its indignation and contempt on any religious epidemic which does not prove its right to exist by these plain signs of a live conscience in worldly affairs. Shall a man be a smooth and smiling communicant in God's Church, doing service, it may be, at the Lord's table, and at same time a fit candidate for the penitentiary? God is on the side of the world in its indignant protest. "Your new moons and sabbaths, and calling of assemblies, I cannot away with; incense is an abomination unto me; when ye make many prayers, I will not hear."

Of all compounds of human weakness and depravity, the most repulsive is a bonfire of religious cant, which is all feeling and no principle, all talk and no character, all prayer and no life, all Sunday and no week-day. Ye whited sepulchres! Ye generation of vipers! The holiest of men join the indignant outcry of the world against such

nauseating hypocrisy. That is a wise and always timely petition of the Church of England: "From the *deceits* of the world, from the *crafts* of the Devil, good Lord, deliver us!"

5. One other fact suggested by this ancient model of a revival is, that *often such awakenings are followed by periods of temporal prosperity*. "The Lord gave them rest round about." In that semi-civilized age the symbol of all temporal calamities was a state of chronic war, and the symbol of all temporal blessings was a state of peace. Rest from civil and foreign discord meant the prosperity of the arts of peace. The encouragement of industry, the increase of property, the unity of families, the preservation of young life, the growth of the able-bodied population, the increase of the comforts of civilization, and the advance of the general culture, all attended long-continued peace. This was the blessing which God gave as a sequence of the quickening of the national conscience.

Not always do all forms of temporal blessing attend repentance and holy living. But such is the *tendency* of a godly life. The promises of God have never yet been tested by the spiritual conversion of an entire nation. That test the Christian religion is to receive in the golden age which prophecy promises to the Church. The cessation of war and intemperance alone would double the property of the globe in a single generation.

All that facts bear witness to at present is that the *drift* of religious living is to better a man's worldly condition. Many a country village has been improved in its physical condition—in the comfort of families; in the lessening of poverty; in the peace of neighborhoods; in the charitable-ness of conversation; in the obedience of children; in the fidelity of parents; in the refinement of amusements; in the adornment of streets; in the beautifying of cemeteries; in aspirations toward literature, art, and general culture—by a thorough renovation of its society through a powerful revival of religion. No other civilizing power equals that of pure religion. It never hurts a man, for any of the right uses of this world, to make a Christian of him.