



By DON STANTON

CHAPTER ONE

THE NEED OF THE TIMES

TODAY, revival is not a very common word in the Christian's vocabulary, except for a remnant who thirst for "Rivers of Living Water." A few books on this topic will be found on the shelves of Christian bookstores, but you are more likely to find revival books in the second-hand shops, than in the new books section. Books about old time revivals can be blessing for believers who yearn for a deeper work of God than they are seeing at present.

This series of articles is seeking to encourage readers to ...

"seek the Lord until He comes and rains righteousness upon us." (Hosea 10:12)

It is the writer's deep conviction that we will not see great blessing on the Mission Field, and throughout the world, unless and until we have genuine spiritual revival. Gimmicks, heavy beat music, and bright lights will never produce the revival we need!

WHAT IS REVIVAL?

Firstly the negative: Revival is not great evangelistic crusades, or special meetings. Revival is not special programs, or entertainment in the pulpit. Revival is not emotionalism, or going into ecstatic experiences. Revival is not the special activity of some sect or ism.

But positively: Revival is a work of God that brings Christians and the church back to the normal New Testament standard. Revival is a work of the Holy Spirit in and amongst Christians. It is a work that convicts believers of their sin and shallow living. It convicts them of their pride, bitterness, complacency, selfishness and worldliness. It is a work that humbles Christians, and claims their full surrender to Christ. Revival is a time when Christians begin to really pray and witness. It is a time when Christians are truly filled with the Holy Spirit.

In 1745, DAVID BRAINARD wrote of revival amongst the American Indians: "The power of God seemed to descend upon the assembly 'like a rushing mighty wind,' and with it, an astonishing energy that broke down all before it. I stood amazed at the influence that seized the audience almost universally, and could compare it to nothing more aptly than the irresistible force of a mighty torrent ... almost all persons of all ages were bowed down with concern together, and scarcely any one was able to withstand the shock of this surprising operation."

There are two types of revival:

1. Individual or personal revival which is a rectifying work in one's own life.
2. Widespread revival - in a church, district, nation or continent. This grows out of individual revivals - it is personal revival spreading like a flame in the community.

Revival begins in Christians, but soon reaches to the world around. A genuine revival usually affects the whole community. The world at large is convicted of its sin of rejecting Christ. Sinners are drawn irresistibly to the Messiah, and into His saving experience. Hotels, theatres, clubs and dance halls very often close because of want of trade.

ARTHUR WALLIS has written: "It is characteristic of revivals that there have been seasons when sins that have long hindered blessing, are exposed, confessed and forgiven. Relationships, wrecked by pride, envy and evil-speaking are wonderfully restored when the hearts of the saints melt in the fires of revival."

Revival is a time when righteousness pervades the community. It is a time when men know there is a living God. It is a Divine work that exalts the Lord Jesus, and glorifies Yahweh, the Almighty God. I ask, what true Christian would not desire to see such a movement as this?

What is the purpose of revival? To counteract the spiritual decline in the church, and to bring it back to the New Testament standard of holiness and soul-winning. Revival is not an end in itself. It is simply the means of bringing the church back to its right sanctified walk. An individual who needs revival is one living a sub-normal Christian life. A church that needs revival is a sub-normal church.

Of the revival in Northampton, USA, in 1735, JONATHAN EDWARDS wrote: "There was scarcely a person in the town, old or young, left unconcerned about the great things of the eternal world. Those who were wont to be the vainest and loosest and those who had been most disposed to think and speak slightly of vital and experimental religion were now generally subject to great awakenings. And the work of conversion increased more and more. Souls did, as it were, come by flocks to Jesus Christ. From day to day for many months together might be seen evident instances of sinners brought out of darkness into marvellous light, delivered from the miry clay and set upon a rock, with a new song of praise to God in their mouths.

"This work of God, as it was carried on, and as the number of true saints multiplied, soon made a glorious alteration in the town. In the spring and summer following, 1735, the town seemed to be full of the presence of God. It never was so full of love or of joy, and yet so full of distress as it was then.

"There were remarkable tokens of God's Presence in almost every house. It was a time of joy in families on account of salvation being brought to them. Parents were rejoicing over their children as newborn, and husbands over their wives, and wives over their husbands."

CHARLES FINNEY was a revivalist whom God used greatly in the USA in the early 19th century. It was said that wherever Finney went, the fire fell.

Finney was born in the USA in 1792, and was mightily used to reach multitudes of men and women, so much so that it was estimated that he was instrumental in the conversion of 250,000 souls.

Once, entering a factory and walking around, he was recognised by many working there. Among the work people was a young lady who whispered a foolish remark to her companion, and laughed. Finney stopped and looked at her with grief. Instantly, she stopped; her thread

broke, and she was so agitated that she could not re-join it. She looked out of the window in an effort to compose herself, then tried again, striving to regain her self-command. At length she sat down overcome with her feelings. Finney then approached her, and soon she manifested a deep sense of sin.

The feeling of concern soon spread through the factory, and within a few hours almost every person employed there was under the convicting power of the Spirit, so much so that the owner, though a worldly man, was astounded and requested to have the factory work stopped, and a prayer meeting held. In a few days he and nearly all the employees there - about 3,000 - were converted.

Finney's solemn appearance, his compassion, and his rebuking of the levity of the young woman, brought her under conviction, with the consequent revival.

Concerning the revival which transformed the city of Rochester under Finney's ministry in 1830, the district attorney observed many years after, "I have been examining the records of the criminal courts, and I find that whereas our city has increased since the revival threefold, there are not one-third as many prosecutions as there had been up to that time. This is the wonderful influence the revival had upon the community."

Some Christians are sceptical of the subject of Revival, and of movements of the Holy Spirit. Extremism of some groups or movements has been to blame for much of the scepticism. On the other hand, some Christians just don't want to be revived. They are careless, complacent and contented.

Throughout Scripture, revival is a big topic. We see that revival is not presented as an alternate possibility, but as the essential requirement.

Before we study revival promises, and just in case there should be a doubt in the reader's mind about the possibility of revival, let us remember; it is God's direct will that His people should live on a Scriptural, New Testament level of holiness.

"Be ye holy; for I am holy." (I Peter 1:16)

"... that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love." (Ephesians 1:4)

When the Lord sees spiritual decline in an assembly, He calls that assembly to repentance. We see this strongly in His last words to the Church - the messages recorded in Revelation 2 & 3. His call is to repent, and do the first works. Y'shua calls people back to their first state - of love and zeal for Himself. In this light we see that revival is not an option, but a Divine imperative.

Surely the Love of Christ constrains us! Surely our love for Him, longs to see His name exalted! Surely we long that our own individual lives should be to the praise of His glory!

"You will seek Me and find *Me* when you search for Me with all your heart."
(Jeremiah 29:13)

To answer further, the question, What is revival? I enclose the following account of the tremendous revival that swept America in 1857, and which was felt all over the world.

THE 1857 REVIVAL

The conditions in 1857 were like those facing the Church today. The USA was much smaller than now, but the sins and the untoward conditions were about the same. During the time prior to that Divine visitation, Americans were living in idle luxury.

Wines were plentiful. The theatre and the dance halls gripped a pleasure-bent people. Divorce was easy in the new states. Feminine smokers were numerous. Free love, gambling, robbery, murder, and mob-administration were widespread everywhere. Sunday was a day of pleasure.

Cults like Spiritism and Mormonism captured the minds of thousands. The churches were torn with strife. Carnality prevailed in them. Preaching was largely of the letter and not in the Spirit.

The nation was generally prosperous. Railroads and water transportation expanded trade. New towns and cities sprang up everywhere. National and international trade greatly increased.

Buying, selling and money making occupied the minds of business men to the exclusion of better things.

Newspapers increased. Secular reading was sold cheaply. Large numbers of papers and books were brought by eager readers. English and American authors were enjoying great popularity. Infidelity and atheism were rampant. The writings of Tom Paine and of European infidels were read by multitudes.

Prosperity gave the people much leisure for reading and discussion. Multitudes turned from the churches and busied themselves in politics, education and amusements. The consciences of men became hardened, and indifference to spiritual religion generally prevailed.

These unfavorable conditions drove devout Christians to seek closer fellowship with one another in prayer. Tens of thousands met in stated places for noon-time prayer. God heard their united cry and gave them an astounding visitation of spiritual power, for which the people of God in our land in this generation, will do well to pray.

In a time of general forgetfulness of God, a series of unfavorable providences paved the way for a general repentance.

First, there came a time of economic instability. Banks failed everywhere. Those that did remain open closed once a week for examination. Wealthy people became paupers overnight. Everyone came into financial distress. Unemployment became general. Thousands who had been accustomed to comfort or luxury suffered appalling privations.

Prayer meetings sprang up everywhere. One prayer meeting in New York City had a regular attendance of over five thousand. Ministers had special gatherings for waiting upon God.

So, by economic failure and unemployment, God turned the hearts of the people back again to Himself.

Answers to prayer were astounding. God took men and matters in hand. The supernatural was pre-eminent. A spiritual epidemic of conviction of sin broke out, first in New England, then in adjacent states. It spread over the land and crossed the ocean.

The work of God appeared in most unlikely places. Passengers on ships at sea were struck with a sense of guiltiness and sought the grace of a forgiving God. Upon arrival at port they learned what God was doing in America.

Aged sinners, hardened sceptics, and whole families, even of Jews, were being brought to Christ. The deaf and dumb were being dealt with in like manner by the Spirit of God. New churches were springing up everywhere. Theological errors were straightened out.

Scarcely any books would sell but books of religion. Spurgeon tells us in very temperate language that upon the most reliable authority he could say that "in some New England towns you can scarce find one unconverted person." Tidings of the heavenly visitation spread far and wide, and everywhere Christians were aroused to seek from God a similar visitation.

IRELAND - 1859

Tidings of the work of God in America reached Ireland. The reports stirred in saints there the spirit of expectancy and prayer. They began to realize that God had in mind for His people greater blessing than they had ever imagined. As they prayed, revival fires began to break out in all places of intercession.

Dr. H. Grattan Guinness authenticated reports of this spreading work of grace by securing from a goodly number of highly respected ministers, reports of its progress. These accounts made it evident that Ireland was experiencing in 1859, demonstrations of the Spirit similar to those being witnessed in America.

God was dealing with multitudes there. The Spirit of grace and supplication was mightily poured out upon the people of God. Meetings for prayer in some places were called as many as ten times every week. The largest places were soon filled with anxious souls.

Nothing like its spread and power had been witnessed in Ireland in over a century. Great numbers were added to the various congregations. The Lord seemed to descend in a rich shower of blessing. In their homes, on the street, at work, as well as in the churches, people were smitten with an unshakeable conviction of sin.

Some were utterly prostrated physically; but in the majority of cases it was found that this was evidently the work of the Holy Spirit rather than any bodily weakness or undue emotion.

Out of distress, souls were lifted into calm. A deep solemnity, earnestness, and diligence possessed the converts. In all of them, conscience was awakened quietly, but the stirring of the heart was deep and abiding.

Everywhere there was a decided increase of Christian love, a respect for ministers, a holy regard for the observance of the Lord's Day, and an enlarged attendance at the services of the church. Worship, the ordinances, Bible study and prayer - social and public - were the food for these newly awakened souls.

Ministers were busier with souls than doctors are with patients in time of epidemic diseases. They were reaping a mighty harvest of precious souls, and were deeply solemnized by what they saw and heard. Thousands were brought face to face with God, and seemed to stand at His bar for their numerous and forgotten sins.

The general effect upon the public mind was such as to strike terror in in different souls, and to awaken them thoroughly and lead them to repentance. Able-bodied men got a sight of their sins, and discovered them-selves under the just condemnation of God.

The most healthy and vigorous women, whom you would least expect to come under revival influence, were commonly among the first to feel the convicting power of the Spirit of God. Converts were numbered by groups instead of individuals. All ages were affected. It mattered not whether the subjects were nine or ninety.

This remarkable movement was both healthy and encouraging. The Divine influence came upon some as a mighty rushing wind; and upon others as rain upon newly-cut lawns.

Everywhere family 'altars' were 'erected.' Taverns were neglected. Reconciliations were effected, and a spirit of love and unity prevailed among ministers and members of different religious communions.

The Lord had done great things!

Next Chapter: THE PROMISE OF REVIVAL

(TO BE ADDED SOON)