

THE PRESBYTERIAN PREACHER.

VOL. V.

PITTSBURGH, MARCH, 1837.

No. 10.

SERMON LXXXII.

BY ELISHA P. SWIFT,

PASTOR OF THE FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, ALLEGHENY, PA.

THE NATURE AND IMPORTANCE OF A REVIVAL OF RELIGION.

PSALM 68:28. *Strengthen, O God, that which thou hast wrought for us.*

THIS Psalm contains internal evidence that it was originally composed for the occasion on which the ark of the covenant of the Lord was brought into the city of David. An uncommon sense of the divine presence appears to have pervaded the minds of the people on that interesting day, and the joys of the righteous and the notes of national thanksgiving and praise, attended the ascent of this hallowed symbol to its destined place, in the centre of the metropolis of the kingdom, and the high place of Zion. We are safe probably in numbering *this* among those happy seasons under the old dispensation when the solemn exercises of religion were attended with a gracious refreshing from the presence of the Lord.

This Psalm, as would be extremely natural on the occurrence of a great national festival, celebrates the past deliverances and the future glories of the church of God. It adverts to the signal mercies of former centuries, and with these are interspersed propheticallusions to the expected advent of Messiah—the extraordinary effusions of the Holy Spirit, and the goings forth of God in his sanctuary. Thus, whether we consider David as intending in the text, in connection with this memorable acknowledgment of a nation's and a church's gratitude to the God of Abraham, to implore the special blessing of Heaven upon the Zion of his own times, or whether we regard him as prophetically adopting the language and feeling which would exist when the time drew near that "Ethiopia should soon stretch out her hands unto God" (verse 31), and the kingdoms of the earth bring their presents unto Jerusalem (verse 29), and unite (verse 32) in the praises of her eternal King, *the sentiment* expressed must be in either case the same. The sentiment is this, that *when mankind, considered as individuals, churches, and nations, and portions of the human race at large, have experienced great favors from God, and are laid under peculiar obligations to Him, and have a great work to achieve, it becomes them, in view of the fact that these are likely to be suitably sustained in no other event, earnestly to implore the special effusions of the Holy*

Spirit; and the strengthening influence of revivals of religion. These were the circumstances of the Jewish people at the period at which this petition was offered. God had showered down upon them many blessings, and in their individual privileges and national and ecclesiastical pre-eminence, placed them in such a condition of great comfort and happiness, and possible usefulness to the world, as in a sort reduced them to the necessity, (in order to meet such a destiny,) of earnestly beseeching God to look in mercy upon those dangers in this respect to which they were exposed, and graciously to obviate them by powerfully strengthening that which he had already wrought for them. "Thou hast"—as though he had said—"thou hast done much for us, and much is now required of us, but our present situation and character is such as must lead us, (in despair of a hopeful issue in any other way,) to pray for the special dispensations of the Holy Spirit, to strengthen what thou hast wrought for us." In the application of the text to ourselves and to our own times, Christian brethren, it leads us to consider three things, viz. 1. *The necessity there would seem to be, in view of our great responsibilities and our present state, that we should experience a glorious revival of the work of God in this land:* 2. *The nature and genuine fruits of the blessing here indicated:* And 3. *The manner in which it is to be sought,* and the essential pre-requisites to a sincere presentation of the appeal, "*Strengthen, O God, that which thou hast wrought for us.*"

I. AND, IN CONSIDERING THE FIRST OF THESE TOPICS, WE SHOULD, (AS WE HAVE ALREADY SUGGESTED, AS TO THE JEWISH PEOPLE,) CONSIDER IT IN REFERENCE TO OURSELVES,

1. *As individuals:* And the inquiry, *what hath God wrought for us?* opens of itself a boundless field of meditation. Some things are common to all, while others apply to us either as unconverted sinners or professing Christians. God has given us all an intelligent, an accountable, and an immortal existence; a nature capable of indefinite attainments in wisdom, knowledge, and felicity. We belong to a race, also, to which, in the ruins of its apostacy, he has opened the glorious scheme of redemption; and in his own word set life and death before us. We exist at a period of the world, also, when the useful arts, the means of knowledge, and the facilities for individual comfort and social improvement, have made great advances. God has cast our lot in a Christian country, and in a Protestant land, where we have liberty to use his own word, and draw from its unerring pages a correct idea of the only way of salvation. He has, amidst the unnumbered blessings of a clear revelation, and of civil and religious freedom, given us the offer of his mercy; and added thereto the strivings of his Spirit. Now, if any of you to whom so rare a measure of worldly comfort, and prosperity, and perhaps affluence, is granted; and whom God has so highly favored as to the knowledge of his will and the means of salvation, are yet unreconciled to Him; *though you know that to him unto whom much is given, of him the more will be required;* and if you are hourly in danger of having all these blessings taken from you and of being irrecoverably lost, amidst such means of recovery; and if, with ten thousand motives to repentance, you have withstood all the

calls and strivings of departed years; *is it not*—if you are ever to be saved—is it not time that you should consider with what a deep responsibility you are putting off the claims of God? If there are many such neglecters in this gospel land, should not prayer be offered for a day of God's power, that sinners may not go down to death under so aggravated a condemnation?

Others of us, my brethren, have to add to the long catalogue of temporal blessings, greater than ancient Israel knew, the favor, perhaps, of an early consecration to God; and, at all events, of the actual commencement of a work of salvation in our hearts, and the possession of a good hope through grace, that God has reconciled us unto himself by the death of his Son. We have the word of God—our domestic altars—our social meetings and concerts—our quiet Sabbaths—and our stated communion seasons, to enjoy in peace, and with none to molest us. Our children are early led to the Sabbath school and to the house of God, and he thus affords us every facility for training them up for heaven. Our opportunities for active usefulness are abundant, and all that mercy and loving-kindness can do to make us faithful to our Savior, is exerted upon us. Now, Christians, if we look into the state of our own hearts—if we ask what does God most reasonably require of us? and what we, as individuals and as a congregation, are doing for him? will not these inquiries afford evidence that *we need* and should most earnestly pray for a revival of religion? But,

2. We must attend to the text in its application to the *church at large, or rather that branch of the visible church of Christ to which we belong*. In this Psalm it is clearly intimated that the Jewish church had incurred great obligations, and there was much danger of a corresponding failure and criminality, unless God in mercy interposed. And is it not so of our's as well probably as some sister denominations?

To the Presbyterian church in this country God has given, in many respects, a most honorable, and interesting, and instructive history. It has always borne its testimony against public sin; the vices of the times; vain amusements, unchristian conduct, and all manner of unrighteousness; and it has, for upwards of fifty years, as the minutes of its General Assembly will show, given the weight of its influence in favor of sound doctrine, real piety, active benevolence, and every form of public improvement; and, in promoting these objects, it has cheerfully acted with any and all who were willing to co-operate. Its policy has been liberal and disinterested; and in the early and middle parts of its history, to say nothing of later times, it was united and harmonious in itself; and it numbered in its ministry and in its communion many men who would have been an honor to any society, and a blessing to any age. Nor can we refer these, or its great increase to any thing but the grace and goodness of God. Indeed it is refreshing to look back to the days of Finley, and Davis, and the Tennents, and to some years about the commencement of the present century, (when it was the privilege of the General Assembly to record numerous and powerful revivals of religion,) and see how God appears to have been loading it with the debt of gratitude; and preparing it to fulfil an important part in the upbuilding of his kingdom. But, my brethren, examine its present condition, and let the question be asked, what is to be the issue if the Holy Spirit does not return in power to its churches? We

enter into no discussion here as to the causes of this change, but wish simply to fasten your minds upon the painful reality. Discord and strife have entered into its ecclesiastical courts, and the affections of its ministry and people are divided and alienated from each other. On questions of doctrine, and policy, and ecclesiastical responsibility, conflicting opinions and unkind feelings are developed; and the times and places on which good men used to meet to take sweet counsel together, are turned into the occasions of warm debate and unbrotherly contention.

In the mean while spiritual slumber would seem to have settled down upon the churches. God's people are conformed to the world; and, to a great extent, interest themselves in matters of religion no farther than to talk about existing dissensions.

To the ministers of Christ and the elders of the churches, also, it may not be as in months past, when the candle of the Lord shone upon them, and those branches of Israel of which they are God's appointed watchmen, are like the vineyard whose hedges are broken down, or the daughter of Zion sitting in grief and solitude.

Religion dwells not in the daily thoughts and calls not forth the nightly intercessions of good men. Unconverted sinners, comprising in their list many of the baptized youth of the church, tread the downward path, unwarned of their danger, and unblessed with the effectual prayers of the children of God. The spirit of the world silently encroaches upon the church, and if vice and irreligion do not come in like a flood, they yield no ground to the ascending march of the kingdom of the Son of man. To this statement there may be, and I *would* fondly hope are, many exceptions, but that something like this is the humiliating and mournful state of things in our body, is declared by brethren of all parties, and in all sections; and it is of immense importance that we, as a people, should seriously consider what God has wrought for us, and how much we need to be aroused and awakened to pray for the return of his Holy Spirit.

3. But again, God's people, Israel, were to consider what He had wrought for their political and national usefulness and happiness, and the obligations which he had thence imposed upon them: and though *our* civil and ecclesiastical relations, unlike theirs, are entirely separate and distinct from each other, and though we are but one of the Christian denominations of this land, yet *we are not to forget our peculiar responsibilities as a portion of the American people*. God in his providence has not only cast our lot as Christians under a form of government, whose efficacy must depend upon the prevalence of religious principle, but where there is a great opportunity in the promotion of order and piety, not only of moulding and influencing the moral, and political, and spiritual destinies of this republic, but through the salutary influence of its institutions, of exerting a benign and powerful effect upon the course of events throughout the world. The early history of our country was strikingly providential, and its progress in population, wealth, and every public blessing, has been without a parallel. Here, on shores first sought by religious men from motives of religious freedom, God has established the rights of conscience; and planted down a system, which is to test both the efficacy of the plan of the voluntary support of the institutions of religion, and the

capacity of a people to maintain the privileges of self-government. On the results of this experiment, the events of the future history of this world, must, to human view, very much depend. The course of law and order here, must repose entirely in the will of the people at large, and that *will* reposes, for its safe and healthful character, upon a sound and wholesome public sentiment, sustained and influenced by the religion of the gospel. If the current of the national feeling finally goes in favor of immorality, irreligion, Sabbath-breaking, disorder, and political corruption, the question of the destiny of both will be speedily settled. If the result is otherwise, it is impossible to say what an amount of temporal and spiritual good it may be in the power of this nation, directly and indirectly, to impart to almost every portion of the globe. In the mean time, all forms of iniquity, and error, and disorganization, rush in, to try their fortunes in a land where they promise themselves present freedom and future ascendancy. The friends of God and the spirits of evil, plant themselves alike upon the banks of the stream of a nation's character, and the conflict has now begun in good earnest as to who shall direct its future course. Great and difficult questions, also, of common concernment, are arising to darken the prospect; and Europe, for the most part, is casting into the opposing scale, the multitudes of her emigrant population. The wrongs of the Indian, the desecration of the Sabbath, the prevalence of pride, and ungodliness, and corruption, and other things, would seem to lead some to think, that there are already general and national sins too great to be forgiven. These, my brethren, may be trite and familiar thoughts, but they present a subject of great responsibility, and they look to an issue, which must be contemplated both in heaven and in other portions of the earth, with the profoundest interest. Why should not the ransomed of the Lord in this land, by one united, and persevering, and holy effort, insure, by the grace of God, such a result as would form one of the most important events in the history of man? The great and merciful Lord of providence has set such an object before us, and we may trust that great as our sins have been, nothing has yet past that would imply its defeat, if the church of God were in good earnest to set herself to the work of repentance and reformation: and in doing so to carry her humble and fervent appeal to God for the shedding forth of his Holy Spirit in light and power, without which such a result would now seem to be impossible. Whatever may be the views of their coadjutors in the service of Christ in sister denominations, surely Presbyterians may well exhort each other to a sense of their appropriate responsibility, and resolve to unite their hearts in the petition of our text, that God would, in this respect, strengthen that which he has, in so much kindness, wrought for the American people.

4. *God has wrought for us, in common with all our fellow Christians, an opportunity of carrying forward a great and powerful work for the melioration of the condition of the whole human race.* And as he has thus set before us an open door, so he has made it a precious privilege, and an imperious duty, on all who would share in his favor, in the respective ways which his providence provides, to come up to the help of the Lord against the mighty. I need not remind you, my brethren, to what an extent the last half century has developed the

prospects of Christianity, and thrown around its professed friends a vast increase of responsibility. How have the elements of religious knowledge, and the means of active usefulness, been accumulating! How has increased intercourse spread abroad over the earth a knowledge of the superior arts and attainments of Christian nations? and how has the Lord prepared "in the wilderness and in the sea," a way by which "to go out with joy and be led forth in peace" to disseminate his everlasting gospel?

If we look abroad upon our church, to say nothing of others, how many benevolent associations are there—how many thousands of Bible classes and Sabbath schools—what large and important missionary and educational organizations—how many colleges and seminaries of various kinds do we see, which need the strengthening and sanctifying help of Heaven, and whose prosperity and usefulness turn upon the prayer of faith and the revival of religion in the churches. If God's people truly resigned their hearts to him, and were anxious for the honor of his kingdom; and ambitious to please him, would not the idea of being thus more and more associated with Jesus Christ and his holy angels, and with all good men, in the sacred cause of truth and righteousness, afford the most grateful satisfaction? Most certainly it would; and prophecy marks out the period of abundant activity, liberality, and prayer for the increase of Christ's kingdom on earth, as unexampled in the happiness and prosperity of the righteous.

Now, it should not be concealed, because it cannot be questioned, that in respect to the actual success of these benevolent enterprises in the conversion of sinners and the overthrow of iniquity, a dark cloud at present overshadows the kingdom of Christ. The fathers looked forward to these, as the times when the Spirit of God would be sent down in an extraordinary manner into the Christian camp; and an era of reforms and conversions dawn upon the world. In their anticipations, benevolent action was conjoined with a deep experience of the power of godliness; and the multiplication of the means of grace, with early and multiplied conversions to God. But what is the fact at present, as to the progress of religion and the growth of holiness in the churches at home? And, as to the foreign field, though much good has been done, yet those who have been sent abroad among the heathen, all unite, from the banks of the *Missouri* to the shores of *China*, in attesting that the *cause of Christ seems to linger*; and that the eventful crisis appears to have come when *prayer without ceasing* should be offered to a gracious God that he would pour out his Spirit from on high and melt the hearts of pagan sinners, while by the power of his grace among ourselves, the means and instruments may be provided for carrying forward and enlarging the efforts which they have commenced.

Thus, brethren, it is. To a great extent, Providence has succeeded the outward and preparatory work. Institutions for literary and theological science have been planted in the midst of us—the temperance reformation has nearly won the day—the whole Sabbatic, and missionary, and educational machinery of the church has been adjusted; and for the provision of elementary books, and Bibles, and Tracts, in our own and foreign languages, the press is in motion, and the work of translation far advanced. But at the eventful moment, darkness and uncertainty rests upon the cause of God both at home and abroad.

A voice from the throne would appear to say, "If my people, who are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land:" Since "I will yet for this be inquired of by the house of Israel to do it for them." O, that in view of such obligations and necessities, the followers of Christ might be constrained to unite humbly and cordially in the petition, "*Strengthen, O God, that which thou hast wrought for us!*" What, then,

II. IS THE BLESSING WHICH OUR CIRCUMSTANCES INVITE US TO SOLICIT?

Is it not such a measure of strength from above as may revive, and sustain, and carry forward the work of God, and enable his church to meet the exigencies of her condition? An ordinary degree of spiritual influence there undoubtedly is in the true church of Christ at all times; and under the faithful preaching of the gospel and the due administration of the sacraments, there will be a gradual, though often a feeble and scarcely perceptible progress of salvation, both as to the conversion of sinners and the sanctification of believers. This, however, may not keep pace with the growth of sin; and, at all events, in a country like this, where the increase of population is so rapid, and in an age like this, when the increased demand for the means of salvation over the largest portions of the earth is so great, every prospect of an auspicious issue must be connected with such special out-pourings of the Spirit, as have in past ages been uniformly connected with every distinguished advancement of the Redeemer's kingdom. We have already mentioned the indications of an uncommon divine influence, on the occasion of the removal of the ark to the city of David, and the candid reader of the Bible can hardly fail to perceive at one or two periods during the administration of Samuel, previously to that time, and in the reigns of Josiah and Hezekiah, after it, and especially in the days of Ezra, when the reading of the law to the assembled multitude of Israel, was accompanied with such remarkable effects, the marks of an unusual impression upon the minds of the people. Indeed, the prophets as well as the apostles constantly interwove the doctrine of special divine influences, not less than special and signal providences, (as forming a part of the established plan of God in the government of his church,) with all their communications. Thus, they spoke of the reign of the Messiah as a season of light, and power, and glory on earth, because God would "pour out a Spirit of grace and supplication upon the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem;" and, because, eventually, "when the Gentiles should come to his light, and kings to the brightness of his rising," "God would pour out his Spirit *upon all flesh*," inasmuch "that nations should be born (as it were) in a day," until "all the ends of the earth should see the salvation of God."

The apostle Peter, on the day of Pentecost, explained the remarkable descent of the Holy Spirit then witnessed, to be but the fulfilment of this prophecy; and the *Acts of the Apostles* show that the great, and sudden, and astonishing effects which every where attended the preaching of the gospel, were occasioned by this power of the Holy

Ghost, and not by the mere novelty and splendor of apostolic miracles. These servants of God and their successors, so long as they were like Barnabas, themselves filled with the Holy Ghost, appear to have cherished and inculcated the expectation of frequent if not continued effusions of this kind. The spirit of revivals sunk beneath the weight of the Roman apostacy, but it measurably re-appeared with the Reformers and the Puritans. Among these were a host of men, as remarkable for their qualifications in knowledge and piety, as for their attachment to the pure doctrines of the Bible and the unction of the Spirit; and, in their times the inward experience of religion was great in the church, and the power of the word in many cases astonishing, unfavorable as the period itself was, (owing to many circumstances,) to become an era of revivals.

To mention the honored labors of Whitfield and Tennent, as remarkable in this country at least, for the spirit of prayer in the churches, which accompanied their preaching as its effects, and the Journal of Brainerd among the Indians, and the Narrative of Edwards of the work of God in his day, is but to record the return of the Author and the Spirit of revivals to the bosom of the churches. Nor can any person reasonably doubt the reality and purity of the great proportion of those seasons of *refreshing from the presence of the Lord*, which prevailed twenty, and thirty, and forty years ago; nor account for those extensive and permanent reformati^ons—those numerous and astonishing conversions, and that subsequent and long-continued prevalence of practical religion which followed them, on any other principle. The great work which overspread the whole western country about the beginning of the present century, and the effects of which appear to this day, was, indeed, in many cases, attended with great bodily affections, but the ministers of that day appear to have accurately distinguished between this appendage and the inward experience of its subjects, and while they laid no stress upon the appearance itself, and did nothing to encourage it, they witnessed in the work itself, an excitement, which lasted for two or three years without abatement, and brought into the churches within a few months, larger accessions than in ten or fifteen years in the ordinary way. I may add, also, that the experience of more than a quarter of a century, during which most of its subjects have gone down to the grave, has shown that no additions have, in proportion to their numbers, turned out better.

Such, brethren, is the doctrine of revivals, as taught in the Scriptures and illustrated by facts, and it indicates a blessing too important and precious not to be most carefully and anxiously distinguished from its own accidental accompaniments, and from what, at best, are its mere appearances. It should not be forgotten, that, though the influence of the Spirit of God is in itself most pure, and holy, and true, yet still as it is exerted upon minds, all of whose thoughts, and aims, and motives, have the taint of sin, it must not be supposed, either that the judgments and affections of its subjects will thence be exact and unerring, or that the animal susceptibilities of man will not modify its effects. We look not, then, for a *perfect revival*, any more than we look for a *perfect Christian*, in order to satisfy us that it is the work of God.

Where revivals of religion, (as was the case with a great many of those to which I have referred,) are preceded by a state of spiritual

drought and general stupidity, and commence and continue without any extraordinary efforts whatever; and where, with the exception of those warm and active exertions, which ministers and private Christians will continually put forth in various ways when their minds become deeply interested, nothing but the plain and faithful preaching of the gospel in the ordinary way, and occasional conversation with the awakened and inquiring, occurs, there is no just ground, on any view of the philosophy of our nature, to suspect the genuineness of the work.

Facts abundantly show us, however, that when the great objects of religion are sought to be attained, by operating upon large masses of society at once, or even on an ordinary assembly, in a novel and extraordinary way, and by means which are reputed to possess a mysterious, divine efficacy, and when the people are taught to believe that there is a sort of indefinite divine energy operating upon them, the public mind may be brought into great excitement, where there is little or no heavenly influence. Let a mass of people be persuaded that their minds are so brought into near and powerful contact with God and other invisible existences, as brings their *eternal destiny to an immediate crisis*, and if the becalming, and sobering, and regulating influence of *divine truth*, is exchanged for passionate appeals, and extravagant and fanciful representations, and exhortations on pain of death and eternal reprobation, to do certain outward acts of compliance, it is impossible to say what sympathetic agitations and sudden transports of mind may be produced. Instead of the meekness, and humility, and solemn, pensive thoughtfulness, which becomes a deep-felt sense of the divine presence, these occasions exhibit the rash and extravagant conduct and expressions of some—the light and irreverent devotions and behavior of others—the zeal, and censoriousness, and spiritual pride, and forwardness of those, who conceive themselves to be highly honored and influenced from above, and the frenzy and outcries of such as apprehend that they are passed by. The main fact, however, which this admission implies, is that the human mind *may be* more or less excited on the subject of religion where there is no special agency of God; and that, therefore, instead of resorting to plans and measures calculated to do this, it is our solemn duty to guard against it, and put forward the marks of a divine operation, as that *alone* which we are authorized to encourage. And in doing this, every righteous man ought solemnly to consider what immense damage is done, if the prevalence of mere excitements tends to diminish the confidence of God's people in the reality and importance of those visitations of the Holy Ghost, which, in all ages, have been the glory of Zion. We have, for example, met in an inquiry room from thirty to fifty persons, who were suddenly brought together, as they verily believed at the moment, as subjects of special awakening, among whom there was not half a dozen who appeared, amidst much visible emotion, to possess any real conviction of sin, or any just idea of their true situation as lost sinners; while, at another time, we have met, under similar circumstances, a company of inquirers, among whom, with here and there an exception, one could trace, from day to day and week to week, the application of God's truth to the heart and conscience by the Holy Spirit, with as much distinctness and apparent certainty as a

physician would mark the progress of disease in the animal economy. Now, it appears to us plain, my brethren, that when stript of human extravagance—of fine wrought theories, as to the manner of originating and conducting revivals of religion, the whole subject is extremely plain and simple. We have in the Bible and in the history of the church, clearly laid down the doctrine of special and extraordinary visitations of the Holy Spirit, and it comprises a blessing which the children of God are to expect, and hope, and pray for, until the gospel of the kingdom becomes universal. We are taught, further, that there are periods when a common necessity may exist throughout the church, and when all eyes should be lifted to God, and all hearts prostrated before him, in trembling anxiety for the ark of the Lord. We have further the data by which, as honest men, we may distinguish between real and apparent revivals of religion, and our duty is to seek the blessing and reject its counterfeits.

The question, then, what are the marks of a genuine work of divine grace? must be answered substantially in the same way as we would reply to the inquiry, how are we to distinguish renewed from unrenewed applicants for church privileges? The operations of the Holy Spirit on the hearts, both of saints and sinners, in the conviction of sin, the production of spiritual life; and the maturing of the graces and fruits of holiness, are in their own nature and in their essential effects, the same in all cases and in all ages, and where these appear with unusual strength, and in a number of separate instances, at the same time, we call it a revival of religion. When God returns to pour out his Spirit upon a congregation, it not unfrequently happens, that, while some have been weeping in secret places, and mourning over the depressions of Zion, the *time*, and *manner*, and *circumstances*, in which “the Messenger of the covenant suddenly comes to his temple,” are such as evidently to show the hand of God, and strike his own people with surprise and astonishment. The pious seem at once to recognize the voice of their Shepherd, and many perhaps feel unprepared to greet the heavenly visit. Hence, if there have been variances, or alienations, among the members of the church, they make mutual concessions and seek reconciliation. If professors have been remiss in their attendance upon family, or social duties, they immediately reform, and the place of prayer is crowded with attentive and solemn worshipers. *Professing Christians*, each one, and without any sort of concert, begin to search their hearts and try their ways; and, after deep humiliation, and often after great distress, successively come forth to the help of the Lord, with new light, and joy, and power. Their lips are opened to speak for God, and with animated hope and holy joy, they love to testify for Christ and proclaim the wonders of his grace. They feel ready to take up every cross, and go forward in every duty with a meek sincerity and an humble boldness. Enlargement and prevalence in prayer, and a consciousness that God’s word is quick and powerful, gives them a firm expectation that He has *now* appeared to build up Zion, and will surely hear and answer his people in behalf of unconverted sinners. Hence they go to a throne of grace and to the sanctuary of God, *expecting* to feel his presence and to behold “his stately steppings.”

In these fresh anointings from on high, *ministers of the gospel* also share, and thence, they will have become more conscious of their own weakness and inefficiency, and more desirous that God himself should undertake for their perishing hearers. They will press the truth upon their people with more simplicity and earnestness, and in their prayers, and preaching, and intercourse, show a growing preparation for the day of the Lord. *Sinners* are awakened from the sleep of many years, and the word of God takes hold of their consciences. The guilt, and misery, and ruin of their situation, becomes to their minds a painful reality; and while they abandon their evil courses, and give close and earnest attention to the means of grace, they truly discover the enmity of their hearts to God, and become sensible that, without a change in the temper of their minds, they never can be happy. They become, as it were, experimentally convinced that they can do nothing to effect their own salvation, and they find rest and peace only when, as a last resort, and in a kind of despair of relief, they throw themselves into the arms of divine mercy. *Then* they are enabled to recognize the merits of Christ as the only and all sufficient ground of justification and acceptance, the Holy Spirit as the author of sanctification, and God himself as the blessed object of their heart-felt complaisancy.

Thus, without any visible, adequate cause, meetings become crowded, solemn, and impressive. Mountains of oppression are rolled away, and backsliders and wandering professors return to God. Christians are warm, fervent, and happy. The tongue of clamor is silent, and the countenance of levity begins to wear the aspect of concern. The moralist begins to examine the foundation of his trust, while the blasphemer, instead of uttering in profane mockery the name of God, *now* lifts his weeping and anxious eyes to Heaven and asks if there can be forgiveness for him. The current of iniquity is stayed, division ceases, and God's people take sweet counsel together; while mourning souls begin to sing for joy.

That which the eternal Spirit employs instrumentally to produce these effects is the *truth of God* most appropriately used, not by studied singularity of form or utterance, or in harsh and menacing language, but with heart-felt earnestness, and plain, direct, and pungent appeals to the conscience. The total depravity and corruption of the heart—the guilt and inexcusableness of continuing in an impenitent and Christless state; the work and offices of the Redeemer as constituting the only hope, and affording the only refuge for ruined man; and the sovereign, renewing operation of the Spirit, as that which alone can obviate the fatal effects of the moral blindness and blame-worthy impotence of lost sinners, and present any hope of their salvation, are among those doctrines which God has, at such seasons especially, owned and blessed. When the wakening up of believers has been sought, or new converts brought to the test of truth, the nature and evidences of faith, and regeneration, and evangelical repentance, and self-dedication, have been investigated; the tokens of delusion and false peace, and self-deception pointed out; and the duties, and exercises, and motives, and obligations, of those who profess to come out from the world and dedicate themselves to God, have been stated; and both actual and intended professors exhorted to make their calling and election

sure, and warned against inconsideration and insincerity in their solemn transactions with God.

Thus, we have seen that God's plan has ever been, to meet and provide for the exigencies of great and eventful occasions like the present, by the special out-pourings of his Spirit, and that these may be so sought as to be certainly obtained, and so distinguished that there need be no mistake. That our social nature is suited to this plan, and our best system of securing the effusion itself, and of dealing with its subjects, is that found in the Bible. Let us, then, as we proceed, attentively consider how important the blessing is. Clear discoveries of divine things, strong faith, decided improvement in holiness, and a possession of the spirit of prayer among Christians, as well as the increased number of conversions in our churches, and the clearness of their evidences, and the decision of their Christian stand and character, not less than the subversion of immorality and licentiousness, and the maintenance, in their life and vigor, of all benevolent enterprises, must stand in intimate connection with the prevalence of revivals.

III. LET US NOW PROCEED, THIRDLY, TO CONSIDER THE MANNER IN WHICH THE REVIVING AND STRENGTHENING POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IS TO BE OBTAINED.

The text, you perceive, contemplates a solemn appeal to God, for help to withstand the influx of iniquity, and to sustain and carry forward his cause on earth. It implies, of course, that while we are doing, or are ready to do, all in our power, to maintain the purity, and growth, and honor of his kingdom, we believe the time has come, when we may properly ask and expect him, visibly to make bare his mighty arm, and pour out his Spirit upon his churches, with such marks of grace and energy in the suppression of iniquity, the reformation of morals, the fresh anointing of his people, and the ingathering of souls, as shall convince all that this is the work of God. Now, the simple statement of the case is enough to show, that when the people of a district, or congregation, suddenly pause in the heat and hurry of the world, and, without any previous heart-felt acts of repentance and reformation, and any sincere and strenuous efforts, faithfully and unitedly to carry forward the *whole work* of God among them, enter upon a series of protracted meetings, in which the neglects of years are attempted to be amended, and the duties of months to be thrown into the services of a few brief days, they do not present a fit occasion for the true and reverent presentation of such an appeal to God; and if he were to consider it in that light, soon would the glory of Israel be changed. God, it is true, is sovereign and unsearchable in his counsels, and he can, and sometimes does, pour out his Spirit where the divinely appointed method of preparing the way of the Lord, and seeking, through the medium of believing prayer, for spiritual blessings, is not employed; but when he has expressly informed us on what principles he will invariably return to his churches, with reviving grace and power, how inconsistent is it for us to neglect these, and yet make the appeal as though we were wholly engaged, and truly sincere? and expect a blessing, simply because such a thing has sometimes happened; and become discouraged if it does not come? It were just

as proper for sinners to ask and expect to be saved in their sins, as for churches to ask and expect revivals apart from the holy and sanctifying influences which they are intended to exert.

To open such meetings, therefore, with all the established forms of a revival season; or, to carry the idea that when a certain regular course of exercises, or discourses, have been gone through, God will come down in power upon a church, which has, it may be, slept in worldly conformity all the rest of the year, and because he has promised to hear and answer the prayer of faith, is calculated to foster and establish an illusion, and to bring down that high and holy standard which God has established. Real good may no doubt be done to individuals by such meetings, even where there is no general awakening, but the mistake is, that they are sought to be carried forward and urged under the idea that a special out-pouring of the Spirit exists, or is to be expected. But, my brethren, if to shun all this, and to avoid the abuse of the doctrine of special divine influences, we settle down into a state of cold inaction, to wait for an unsought revival; if, in dread of being burnt over, we are frozen up, the sin and the calamity in this case is more fearful than in the other. Fanaticism and extravagance are calamitous indeed; yet, in the midst of them, God may bring some to a knowledge of the truth; but, where the wise and foolish virgins all slumber together, and a lifeless formality presides over the established means of grace, there is deadness and gloom, without even an illusion to variegate the scene. How can God's people in either case make this solemn appeal to him, who hath said, "Turn ye, even to me, with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning"—"*Return unto me, and I will return unto you, saith the Lord of hosts,*" if they have not sought to follow the prescribed course of duty?

Nor should ecclesiastical vigilance, in maintaining the doctrines and the order of the gospel, however useful and necessary, any more than the provision and support of institutions for the increase of the ministry and the spread of the gospel, be relied upon as that which will of itself insure the special dispensation of the Spirit, or in any measure supersede the necessity of close self-examination, a sincere repentance, and thorough reformation, and a return with all the heart, by earnest prayer, to him from whom we have departed. At the same time, it may be mentioned,

1. That if a people, would be enabled to offer this petition without hypocrisy and with good hopes of success, they *must engage heartily and actively in resisting the progress of iniquity*. It is a trite remark, that God helps those who help themselves. If immorality abounds—if the Sabbath is desecrated—if church discipline is neglected—if social and family prayer is omitted by professing Christians, and the spirit of the world prevails, and God's people lay it not to heart, and do not unitedly strive to accomplish a reformation, with what confidence can they address God on the subject, just as though they possessed *real concern* themselves, and were honestly trying to sustain his interests? Would they dare to appeal to him in behalf of their own sincerity, or could they possess any animating hope of being heard? The same remark applies to the cultivation of religious knowledge, and the careful instruction of the youth of the church in the principles of sound doctrine. The flower of the Redeemer's army, in its best

days, consists of a considerate, knowing, and thinking people, mild and courteous, but bold, resolute, and firm; enlightened in truth and ardent in piety, before whom infidel sophistry, and lawless immorality tremble. They are not to be caught by the bait of a specious but a corrupt and blighting literature, to sell the truth and applaud licentiousness and scepticism. They cannot be carried away by a single gust of religious or popular fanaticism, as chaff before the wind, or be brought over to compromise the convictions of duty and the sacredness of Christian example, for purposes of lucrative gain or political distinction. No; rely upon it, my brethren, the churches that God may be expected to signalize with *his* blessing must decidedly stand on the Lord's side; be true to his word and to his honor, pure in their principles, and righteous in their lives.

Let the children of the kingdom, then, acquire a just sense of the evil of sin, and reflect on men's ingratitude to God, and the dishonor done to his injured law, *until they can pray* to him, in a feeling and conscientious manner, that the wickedness of the wicked may come to an end. Let them converse with each other, and unite their counsels and their prayers in behalf of every proper and just method to effect a reformation, and persevere in this, not in an ostentatious and unkind way, but with the meekness of wisdom, and the affection of evangelical fidelity, warning and admonishing each other, if delinquency is found in the church. Where differences of opinion exist on the all-absorbing subjects of existing controversy, let Christians, in the spirit of moderation, unite in praying for better times. Let them consider how poor a compensation the cause of Christ will receive, if, in maintaining his truth, or repelling the wrongs of his law and kingdom, they lose his meek and heavenly spirit, and contribute to alienate the Holy Ghost from our church and land, at this most critical period in our history. Let them strive to give a new impulse to all the useful associations which exist among them, and revive such as have become extinct, especially restoring meetings for prayer and the means of Christian union and fellowship, and then they will have attained one important qualification to ask God's blessing.

2. If we would be prepared as a church to ask of God a revival of religion, we must *individually humble ourselves before the Lord, and endeavor to return unto him ourselves*. It is important for church members generally to examine and ascertain whether they have been truly made the subjects of a saving work of the Spirit of God, and whether their want of piety may not stand in the way of a revival. It is an awful thing to be a professing Christian, and yet not be prepared to take a lively interest in an event which is represented as filling angels and the saints above with unspeakable delight and joy; and yet many of us probably ought to examine ourselves whether this is not our case. If it is not, we shall certainly be willing to abandon all vain excuses, and set ourselves as Daniel did, to seek the face of the Lord God of Israel. We shall closely examine our past lives, and inquire into the present state of our minds, bringing both up to the test of God's word? Are our lives characterized by evangelical purity and a luminous consistency with our profession? Or, does formality and lukewarmness mark our intercourse with God, and coldness and unbrotherly feeling, that with our fellow Christians? Does parental kind-

ness and affection constrain us tenderly to admonish our households, and pray earnestly for the salvation of our children? Do we love the sanctuary of the Lord and the house of prayer, and give a constant, and a devout, and collected attention to its duties? In a word, do we *now possess* the life and power of religion in our own hearts, or is the gold become dim, and the most fine gold changed? Are we, as ministers of the gospel, and elders in the house of God, endeavoring, in season and out of season, faithfully to watch for the souls of our people? Do the public agents of the church—her beneficiaries, and missionaries, as well as Tract distributors, and Sabbath school teachers, all truly feel, in their respective departments of evangelical labor and responsibility, the *necessity of turning unto the Lord*, and thus obtaining the glorious presence and sanctifying power of God's Holy Spirit? Are our Foreign Missions, our Seminaries, and churches watered, as it were, with the tears of those who long for the outspreading of the Redeemer's kingdom? Now, if instead of this, our hope for and confidence in revivals is lost—if the public mind is carried away with other exciting topics, and the spirit of worldliness and slumber prevails, *we must repent* and turn to God, with weeping and mourning, and with all our heart. We may seek to devise a shorter and easier way, by which to secure the return of an absent Savior, but no other will be successful. Let us consider, then, to what an alarming condition the great interests of Christ's kingdom are to be reduced, if darker and still darker clouds should skirt the moral heavens, and an offended God leaves our churches, and benevolent enterprises, and our nation, to the consequences of a departed Spirit? Let us repent and forsake our sins, and engage faithfully in every duty, and then we can lift up our eyes to heaven with expectation and with joy.

Finally; if we would see a glorious day of strengthening from on high, we must become duly and deeply sensible that our *only hope* is in God, and carry this appeal to *him by humble, believing, and persevering prayer*. We must cease to rely upon an arm of flesh, and to put off, on vain pretensions, the claims of duty. We must consider how great and precious the blessing is, and how important it is that it should be obtained.

It often happens that in one year, during the prevalence of pure and genuine revivals of religion, more persons are converted to God; and the piety, and life, and usefulness of churches, is more improved, than in several years in the ordinary way. The attention of the irreligious is arrested, and salvation carried into the most unlikely neighborhoods and families. Divine grace raises up active and useful teachers for Sabbath schools, and young men of promise are brought into the church and trained up for the service of Christ. The hearts of the people are opened to give freely and liberally for the promotion of religion; and Christians, seeing and feeling the blessed effects of the gospel, and being united in love to each other, are ready to unite in every useful enterprise; and what they undertake, at such times, they prosecute with zeal and spirit. In times of revival, the foundations of society are shaken—open wickedness is banished—morals are improved—the world is brought to its proper place—the pursuits and intercourse of society are chastened—religious dissensions allayed; and from difficulties which threatened long and distressing perplexity, a way of escape is pro-

vided. Thus, God delights to pour out a blessing upon a grateful, devoted, and faithful people. To the obtaining of this mercy let us consider, that "the effectual, fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much." And shall we think it hard, when so much is at stake, here and elsewhere, at home and abroad, to be called upon in our closets, our families, the social prayer meetings, and in the house of God, to take this appeal to him? You have read of, and I trust many of you have known by happy experience, the efficacy of such humble, believing, heart-felt appeals, as the text suggests. The Bible records many animating instances; and it is one of the most precious facts connected with revival seasons, that the church acquires new impressions of the duty and the power of prayer. We shall soon be called, fellow-disciples, to think of these things, and to review our own course in life with reference to them, upon a dying bed. How bitter will be our reflections, if, amidst such surpassing urgency as now exists, we shall have neglected to take warning, and slumbered away the only period of supplication. On the other hand, if we now individually and collectively give ourselves to prayer, and resolve to make full proof of the promises of God—if Christians "take sweet counsel together," to lament after the Lord God of Israel, "until he return and pour out a blessing," what soul-refreshing seasons may succeed to the darkness and confusion which now prevails, as the morning dawn upon the mountains. *Come, then, ye tempted, desponding, and declined saints*, who have in times past knelt in secret wrestling with the Angel of the covenant, give up your delusive joys, your oppressive fears, and again present your intercessions to him who waits to grant a listening ear to your requests. May our gracious and sin-forgiving God, enable us who are officers in his church, and watchmen upon the walls of Zion, to stand between the porch and the altar, and cry aloud spare not, that Israel may be saved. To God's professing people of every station, we would address the apocalyptic exhortation of the great Master, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock"—"be watchful and *strengthen the things* which remain and are ready to die, for I have not found thy works perfect before God." Let aged believers speak to each other of the years of former times—let the mothers and the daughters of Jerusalem, whom, ever since the days of Hannah and Esther, and Mary and Lydia, the Redeemer has honored with a distinguished instrumentality in the promoting of his cause, commingle their united intercessions for the revival of the work God—let the youthful members of the Christian household, also, assemble together in the place of prayer, and encourage each other in looking for "the promise of the Father." If thus united, penitent and importunate, trusting in Him alone, this and other churches of our Lord, thus come up to the throne of grace, need I announce the certain and joyful issue—"And it shall come to pass, that before they call I will answer; and while they are yet speaking I will hear"—"AND YE SHALL KNOW THAT I AM IN THE MIDST OF ISRAEL, AND THAT I AM THE LORD YOUR GOD AND NONE ELSE."