

ROAD TO REVIVAL

By

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Seven -

WHY HAVE THE SHOWERS BEEN WITHHOLDEN?

"Therefore the showers have been withholden, and there hath been no latter rain."
(Jeremiah 3:3).

THE early and latter rains were symbols of GOD's blessing upon His people. Since they were a sign of His favor, He withheld them on account of sin. It is not my purpose here to discuss the dispensational interpretation of the latter rain as it applies to Israel. I am concerned with the application of our text to the latter rain of revival upon GOD's people, why the showers have been withholden.

It is an undeniable fact that we have before us today the greatest opportunity for living and preaching the Gospel in all history. The fields are white unto harvest, and I had better be living right now than at any period in the record of the church. But it is also pitifully true that at no time have Bible Christians bungled their opportunity more miserably than today. At no time have believers handled more awkwardly their privileges than at this time.

We are living in a land which has been graciously blessed of GOD but which is now sinking into paganism. The last days and the perilous times have come. Any man who can hold an open Bible in one hand and a newspaper in the other and yet cannot tell what time it is needs to hear our Lord's sharp word, **"O ye hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky; but can ye not discern the signs of the times?"** (Matthew 16:3). On the other hand, Christians all over the world are praying for revival. There are prayer bands and intercession bands and supplication bands praying, **"Wilt thou not revive us again that thy people may rejoice in thee?" "O LORD, revive thy work in the midst of the years, in the midst of the years make known; in wrath remember mercy."**

Yet there is no revival. There are localized, sporadic stirrings in the Body of CHRIST, as there have always been. But although GOD's alarm clock is going off every hour in earthquakes, floods, famines, droughts, pestilences, wars and rumors of wars, there is no sign of repentance. Our nation is not at the family altar and the prayer meeting but at the dance hall and the liquor shop. Revelry, not repentance, is the order of the day. Sunday after Sunday we sing:

"There shall be showers of blessing;
This is the promise of love;

There shall be seasons refreshing
Sent from the Saviour above;
There shall be showers of blessing,
Precious reviving again;
Over the hills and the valleys
Sound of abundance of rain."

But always we sing, "*There shall be showers of blessing*"; and it is becoming embarrassing that we keep it in the future tense. Finney tells in his autobiography how, in the days before his conversion, he was asked whether he wanted the local church to pray for him; and he replied to the effect that he did not see that it would do any good: they had been praying for years for revival and had never had that, so he saw no use in their praying for him. Of course, that was a bitter attitude; but many unbelievers might argue to that effect today. Where is the revival of which we sing and for which we pray?

There are reasons why the showers have been withholden: "**Therefore the showers have been withholden . . .**" For one thing, many Christians do not expect revival. They argue that the apostasy is on and the days are as those of Noah, so there will be no awakening. Some have surrendered to pious defeatism and are sitting with folded hands listening to lectures on prophetic mysteries, while millions might yet be saved if GOD's people stirred themselves to take hold of GOD. Now, prophetic lectures have their place and never were more fitting than today; but there is a grievous malady amongst us affecting thousands who go from meeting to meeting, with notebook and pencil, taking notes from favorite speakers, absorbing information like sponges, but not really doing anything about it after they hear it.

In Finney's day, while he was arousing men to the Gospel, the Millerites (SDA) were assembling on a mountain top for a return of the Lord, which did not occur. There is, in some quarters, an attitude that savors more of Miller than of Finney. And there is a smug and complacent fundamentalism that hides behind walls of orthodoxy, merely defending the truth but forgetting that the best defensive is an offensive.

We are not here merely to hold the fort but to take the fort, to storm the ramparts of the enemy! If anyone lives on the defensive it should be the devil, for he has been defeated and we are the victors. Ours is the winning side, and we are not a beleaguered garrison waiting for the Lord to come to our relief. Faith is the victory; and the devil will flee if resisted, so we ought to keep him on the run.

Again, there seems to be no common understanding of the causes and conditions of revival, no agreement as to how it may be brought about. We seem to think that it just happens like a thunderstorm and that we have little to do with antecedent conditions. But even thunderstorms do not just happen, they have causes; and while revival, like all else, is wrapped in the sovereignty of GOD, He has offered to pour out blessing if we meet certain conditions. Confession of sin, for instance, is required; but we do not like to bite the dust and own up to GOD, "**Against thee, thee only, have I sinned.**" Yet we must, before we can pray, "**Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation.**" Our text, "**Therefore the showers have been withholden, and there hath been no latter rain,**" is followed by a significant word, "**And thou hadst a whore's forehead, thou refusedst to be ashamed.**"

How that describes our hardness today, our stubborn wills! We pretend to repent, but real repentance that gets under the surface of our shallow and superficial piety and cracks up our church faces and smashes our obstinate rebellion is rare indeed. **"Nevertheless they did flatter him with their mouth, and lied unto him with their tongues. For their heart was not right with him, neither were they steadfast in his covenant"** (Psalm 78:36, 37).

Our denominations claim that they want revival, but generally we want to have a revival and save our face, when the first thing we must lose is our face. Fallow ground must be broken up, even at the cost of humiliation and embarrassment. GOD will not rain showers of blessing on fallow ground, for that would mean only more briars and weeds. He will not waste His blessings on ground that has not been prepared, and to prepare the soil of our hearts means that they must be disturbed and broken up. But, of course, we do not like to be stirred and agitated nowadays in our churches, so we preserve a smooth exterior, while underneath are roots of bitterness and hidden sins. There certainly are definite conditions of revival; and when they are met, revival will come. But GOD has not changed the price of revival, nor has He put any of His blessings on bargain counters at reduced rates.

Another reason why the showers have been withholden is that there is no unity among GOD's people, they are not of one accord. Many have turned aside unto vain jangling (I Timothy 1:5, 6) and, **"not holding the Head,"** have divided into Paulites and Cephasites, Apollonians and the CHRIST-party. To illustrate:

Modernism has a representative voice on the air today in a nation-wide hook-up. But if sound believers were allowed a like opportunity, we doubt that they could agree on a representative man. Then, too, so many are "disciples of a phrase" instead of the Person, CHRIST Himself, that they become champions of a pet doctrine instead of witnesses unto Him. Here is a grievous thing and a hindrance to GOD's working.

We need a Whitfield, a Finney, a Moody, who will preach the whole scale of Bible truth instead of sawing on one note; who will proclaim a solid, substantial message of sin black and hell hot and judgment certain and eternity long and salvation free by grace through faith in CHRIST.

There is too much back-fence haranguing and hair-splitting, peddling of knick-knacks and sandwiches, when men are dying for the meat of the Word. We need to hear afresh the pulpit thunders of an Edwards or Knox or Cartwright or Wesley, when giants of GOD, fresh from the Cherith of prayer, stood at the Carmel of judgment and, knowing the terror of the Lord, persuaded men, the love of CHRIST constraining them; preaching a dynamite Gospel that brought down showers of blessing on believers and brought hardened sinners to their knees in genuine repentance toward GOD and faith in the Lord JESUS CHRIST.

That reminds us of another reason for spiritual drought today: the lost note of condemnation of sin. There is a tendency to paint a lovely picture of CHRIST and then say, "There He is, now fall in love with Him!" But the natural man cannot love CHRIST nor feel any need of Him until he faces the fact of sin and his need of a Saviour.

We must begin our message where the Bible begins, with GOD; where John 3:16 begins, with

GOD; where Romans begins, with a holy GOD and a broken law and a guilty race of sinners. We try to treat the patient when he does not know he is sick. Men do not see themselves as sinners, so they do not grow sick of sin nor forsake it; they join our churches on empty professions of faith, carrying their sins with them. We are calling the righteous to repentance.

When our Lord talked with the woman at the well, He spoke of several matters; but it was when He touched on the sin question in her life that she said, "**I perceive that thou art a prophet.**" It is a mark of the prophet to make men face sin. Then, when she spoke with her townspeople, she said, "**Come, see a man, which told me all things that ever I did: is not this the Christ?**" It is a mark of the CHRIST that in His presence men cry, "**I am a sinful man, O Lord.**" And when her townspeople believed on Him, it was first for the saying of the woman that He had told her all that ever she did.

It is a mark of Christian testimony that CHRIST dealt with our sins. Men must see sin to be sin and themselves to be sinners before they will want a Saviour. Sins of Christians need to be exposed and condemned, and Nathan must tell David, "**Thou art the man,**" before there will be a returning to the Lord and a recovering of the lost joy of salvation, true marks of a real revival.

Finally, we have lost the note of joy in a prejudice against emotion. When Philip preached in Samaria, there was a revival followed by great joy. And what sort of joy is this that does not affect our feelings?

True, feelings are dangerous and not to be unduly emphasized; but man has intelligence, will, and emotion; and a real experience of GOD's grace will affect all three. What would love, music, patriotism, any of life's deep interests be worth if they did not stir emotion? Certainly life's greatest experience should stir us as nothing else.

True, some Christians begin with a fever and end with a chill; but, because some, with joy, receive the Word and yet endure for but a while (Matthew 13:20, 21), we should not discredit that true joy of the Lord that is to remain in us "**that our joy may be full.**" We have repressed our rejoicing until, in most churches, amens would be no scarcer if they were ten dollars apiece. Yet, as Finney said, it is doubtful that we shall have revival until Mr. Wet-Eyes and Mr. Amen are in the congregation.

These are only a few reasons for spiritual drought in our day and, therefore, have the showers been withholden. Let us "**ask... of the Lord rain, in the time of the latter rain; so the Lord shall make bright clouds, and give them showers of rain, to every one grass in the field.**"

"Showers of blessing we need;
Mercy drops 'round us are falling
But for the showers we plead."

~ end of chapter 7 ~
