

# The Key to a Revival

Rev. Paul S. Rees

We must see that history, all along, is a strange blend of God's sovereignty and man's liberty. God wins in the end, but whether we win with him depends on our response to his purposes. Nehemiah, who also was among the exiles, saw this truth clearly. A prayer of his is recorded in the first chapter of the book which bears his name. It is a prayer of rare insight, humility, and fervor. Let's listen to some of its strains. This, for example: "Let thine ear now be attentive, and thine eyes open, that thou mayest hear the prayer of thy servant which I pray before thee now, night and day, for the children of Israel thy servants, and confess the sins of the children of Israel, which we have sinned against thee; both I and my father's house have sinned." (v. 6). Look at this praying man, I beg you. He isn't fumbling and he isn't fooling. In his praying hands he holds the key to revival. That key is confession and obedience.

Then he goes on: "Remember, I beseech thee, the word that thou commandest thy servant Moses, saying, If ye transgress, I will scatter you abroad among the nations; but if ye turn unto me, and keep my commandments, and do them, though there were of you cast out unto the uttermost parts of the heaven, yet will I gather them from thence, and will bring them unto the place that I have chosen to set my name there." (v. 9, 10).

With those words ringing fresh and strong in your ears, listen to the psalmist in this praise-poem: "When the Lord turned again the captivity of Zion, we were like them that dream" (v. 1). "The Lord turned!" Yes, but, as Nehemiah's prayer so clearly shows, the Lord's turning was dependent on Israel's turning. "If ye turn unto me!"

He that hath eyes to see, let him see! When God's people have lost their march and their song, they never recover either one by a glittering display of worldly prosperity or an idle fondling of memories they have inherited from a glorious past. Recovery is much more painful than that. It comes through a resolute seeking of the face of God. It comes through a terrific honesty that confesses pride, and prayerlessness, and jealousy, and unforgiveness, and backbiting, and insincerity. It comes through uncompromising obedience to all the known will of God.

Consider, furthermore, the cost that is involved in the march of a revived church. It is not enough to get Zion on her feet and out of her bondage. We must see that venturing out with God is always an expensive enterprise. It is not for cheap souls, for God is not a cheap God and his is not cheap business.

For example, a marching church must pay the price of separation. Examine verse 6: "He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him." Take the first clause: "He that goeth forth!" God is forever calling his people to new ventures that require separation: an Abraham and his family to leave "thy father's house" and strike out for the Promised Land; a Gideon and his unconventional band to use methods that man would scorn but that heaven would bless; an Elijah to brave the wrath of the king by calling a back-slidden nation to return to an altar of pure faith and divine fire; an Apostle Paul to lead his fellow Christians into a new chan-

nel of ministry in which the Gentiles, no less than the men of Israel, might have the Gospel preached to them; a Francis of Assisi to gather about him some friends of humble mind who would be willing to be Christ's trekkers, carrying the light of a cleansed Christianity into the darkened corners of thirteenth century Europe; a William Carey to leave his shoe cobbler's shop in Northampton and stir the Christians of Britain out of their visionless smugness into a foreign missionary offensive that has since touched every major area where pagan man may be found! Yes, and a thousand unknown adventurers in every generation, who have helped to save the Christian Church from being a society of squatters and have made it instead a community of crusaders! Crusaders who have been distinguished by their willingness to separate themselves from worldly self-love and, if need be, from family and friends in order to take Christ's gospel where it is least known and most needed! "He that goeth forth!" If the Church would march, it must reckon with the cost of separation. But this is not all.

To separation there is often added sorrow as the price of advance in the cause of Jesus Christ. "He that goeth forth and weepeth!" If you are looking for signs of spiritual dullness and dryness among today's Christians, I suggest you consider the absence of tears, "Jesus wept." The record declares it plainly. The Apostle Paul referred to himself as "serving the Lord with all humility of mind, and with many tears." (Acts 20:19) St. Augustine prayed: "Lord, give me the grace of tears."

By contrast we modern Christians are ashamed to weep. We neither weep over the sins of the church, nor the sins of the world. Our Christianity has to be light-hearted and gay. The idea that living for Jesus Christ, while affording the deepest satisfaction of which the human spirit is capable, is at times terribly sweaty business—that is foreign to us. The thought that having "the mind of Christ" in us means letting the world's weary, wicked, muddy feet tramp across the door-sill of our soul's sympathy until they crush and splinter and shred it—that thought is

## RULES FOR DAILY LIFE

Begin the day with God,

Kneel down to Him in prayer;

Lift up thy heart to His abode,

And seek His love to share.

Open the Book of God

And read a portion there,

That it may hallow all thy thoughts

And sweeten all thy care.

Go through the day with God,

Whate'er thy work may be;

Where e'er thou art—at home, abroad

He still is near to thee.

Conclude the day with God:

Thy sins to Him confess,

Trust in His loving blood,

And plead His righteousness.

Lie down at night with God

Who gives His servants sleep;

And when thou treadest the vale of death,

He will thee guard and keep.

—Anon.

strangely unwelcome to us. Instead of praying with Augustine for "the grace of tears," our prayer seems to be "Lord, save us from the disgrace of tears."

Nevertheless, the tenderness of a Christlike compassion, the sensitiveness of a bleeding heart of love, is part of the cost we must pay down if God's church is to march redemptively. Have you ever heard the story of "Miss Toosey's Mission?" Miss Toosey, yonder in England, was a commonplace sort of Christian up to the time she was seventy. Then her life was revolutionized by a missionary sermon she heard preached by a bishop from the foreign field. So moved was she that she went to her rector and offered herself as a missionary to Africa. Of course there was a touch of childishness in what she said. But then, what are rectors for if it is not to interpret these things wisely and handle them tactfully? He told her that her mission was to stay at home and be a prayer-partner of those younger, stronger ones who went out to the field. He encouraged her, further, to give all she could to the financial support of missions.

In time the whole town came to know of her exertions and self-denials for the missionary cause. It was amazing how much she saved by skimping here and economizing there. In the village was a young man of wealth, a sporting fellow who loved his dogs and horses and, for purposes of decency, had his name on the church roll. Many of the villagers laughed at Miss Toosey, thinking her a bit daft on religion and especially on missions. But not John Rossiter. He paid visits to her, gave her money, and received her blessing. One night he heard that she was ill. Calling on her, he found her in tears. Self-pity? No. Physical pain? No. Between sobs she said, "John, my money only counts up a few small shillings, and my influence is not anything, for the people laugh at me." Her tears were not for herself but for the kingdom of Christ, for which she felt she was doing so little. That night Miss Toosey died. Next day John Rossiter sat for hours in the little cottage where she had lived, most of the time with his face in his hands. Something in that noble, simple, self-sacrificing life had pinned him and would not let him go. To Miss Toosey's Christ he surrendered himself; and that night, twenty-four hours after her death, he wrote to the missionary society of the Church of England offering himself as a missionary to Africa.

A creative sorrow had been hers—the sorrow of fellowship with Jesus Christ in his love for unredeemed mankind. It was costly. It was also fruitful. And that's the way the Church was meant to march.

Think of the compensation that comes to a marching Church. "They that sow in tears shall reap in joy. He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him."

Observe two things: (1) it is a guaranteed compensation: for he shall "doubtless come again . . . bringing his sheaves with him," and (2) it is a gladsome compensation, for he "shall come again with rejoicing." The church that sows will reap. The church that ministers will prosper. The church that shares will be strong. The church that forgets itself will never be forgotten. The church that marches will win.—The Herald.