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Lamps, Pitchers and Trumpets

A Sermon by
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"It is the Spirit that quickeneth" (John 6:63)

If there is a genuine revival here at E. N. C., or anywhere, it will be because of the Holy Spirit. The advance of the Church and the work of the Spirit are inseparable. It has always been so.

The Holy Spirit was the active agent in the birth of the Church at Pentecost. On that "same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls."

The Holy Spirit has been the source of power in the Church—the power of proclamation, of personal witnessing, and the only basis of moral power.

The Holy Spirit has been the sole basis of continuity in the Church. There has been valid apostolic succession wherever He has been present, whether in the early Church, among the Montanists, the Waldensians, the Hussites, the German and Swiss Reformers, the early Methodists, or the modern holiness movement.

The Holy Spirit is the source of all creative advance or adventure in the Kingdom of God. Genuine revivals are creative adventures. They are the occasions when the Holy Spirit is so predominantly in control that it will be clearly apparent that it was the Holy Spirit who won the victory and not the human agencies involved.

In casting about for a Biblical illustration of some basic revival ingredients and norms, my mind turned to the story of Gideon (Judges 6-8) and his great victory as a beautiful transcript, or outline, of an ideal revival. One thing is clear in the Gideon story, and that is the dominating presence of God. Human leaders, co-workers, physical agencies were present, but throughout there is a gradual stripping of human power until it is clear that it was the Spirit of God who welded all these agencies into a unified and consecrated force.

Look first at the Human Leader. Contrary to the common view, Gideon was not a hero. (In fact, there are probably no Old Testament heroes according to any human category. The "heroes" were men touched by God). He was an ordinary man with no special, intrinsic qualities of a hero. But God promised to be with him, and the Spirit impelled him to action. "The Spirit of the Lord came upon Gideon and he blew the trumpet..." What a text! Gideon is but one in a great series of self-effacing men like Moses, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Paul, who were pushed into proclamation and action by the compelling power of the Spirit.

Look at His men. He started with 32,000, but God did not want so many, "lest Israel vaunt themselves... saying, Mine own hand hath saved me." From the great army 22,000 were sent home, and the other 10,000 were taken to the river to drink. With the exception of 300, all of them went down to their knees, remaining alert and ready for action. The 300 went flat on their faces and lapped like dogs. Of all the men, these 300 were probably the poorest, militarily speaking, of the whole original host.

But God said, "By the three hundred men that lapped will I save you." There was no chance for anyone to say that Gideon won this victory by human effort.

Look at Their Weapons. Each man of the 300 was given a receptacle holding a torch or lamp over which could be placed a cylindrical, earthenware pitcher. This was to be held in the left hand. In the right was a trumpet. With these "weapons"—who could fight with these?—they surrounded the camp of Midianites who lay along the valley like locusts, and their camels were like the sand upon the seashore for number. At the right moment the pitchers were broken, the lamps blazed forth, the trumpets blew.

Lamps, pitchers, trumpets! In the lamps, pitchers, and trumpets I think we have beautiful symbols of the norms which one might look for in a revival.

I. THE LAMPS

Revival is a lighting of the lamps, the lamps of intelligence—the light of reason. At no time should the light of intelligence burn more brightly. There is no reason especially at a college, why our minds should be omitted from the reviving program. Revival is the Spirit of Truth which illumines the darkened recesses of the mind, clearing out the cobwebs of endless genealogies and old wives' fables letting the clear light of truth shine, in all its radiance—the truth that makes our minds clean and which, to change the figure, sets men free.

That intelligence should ever be divorced from faith is one of the great mysteries of religion, especially in the light of the many Biblical emphases which associate the two:

1. In Isaiah we are invited to enter into reasoning with God.
2. Paul speaks of those who "have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge."
3. If I Corinthians 13 is a "love" chapter, then I Corinthians 14 is a "reason" chapter. Paul says he will pray and sing with the spirit, but he will pray and sing with the understanding also.
4. Paul reminds Timothy that "God hath not called us unto the Spirit of fear, but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind."
5. It was characteristic of the great awakening under Nehemiah that the people understood because their scribes read the law distinctly and gave the sense.
6. Part of the great summarizing concept of the Law tells us to love God with all our minds.

It is a genuine revival when the lamps of the mind are lit and the light shines clearly and sparkling. I do not mean the kind of intellectualizing that freezes into rigidity, but the kind of Divine wisdom that one can ask for from above and receive.

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