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“Beginning With Me”

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“And I set my face unto the Lord God”—Daniel 9.3

Five hundred years and more before the Christian era, God's covenant people—the only church He had at the time—were in a bad way. Their spiritual glory had gone into eclipse. Their temple at Jerusalem lay in melancholy ruin. The people themselves had been driven away into exile in Babylon, where now, for years, they had been stripped of their religious splendor and their national honor.

To make matters worse, no one seemed to care too greatly how long this unhappy and unholy situation continued. No one seemed to have any faith that it might come to an end, and the glory of the former times restored.

Yet, now and again, as these dreary years of the captivity dragged along, a man would arise with a light in his eye and a longing in his heart. He might be an Ezekiel or, as in this case, a Daniel. What distinguished him from the rest of the Hebrew exiles, what made him stand out from the spiritless or complacent mass, was the concern that raged through his soul over the defeat and dishonor that had stopped God's people in their tracks. Here they were, swallowed up by the pagans, their spiritual witness muted, their harps on the willows.

Nevertheless, it rightly occurs to a man like Daniel that if God's purpose of mercy and recovery is to be fulfilled, someone must lead out in bringing forth fruits meet for repentance. Someone must lead out in self-searching and self-abasement before the holiness of God. Someone must lead out in the creative refusal to accept defeat as the normal and the inevitable. Someone must lead out in the recognition that even prophesied events, such as the return of Judah from captivity after seventy years, are not the result of bare, blind fate, but are the consequence of man's obedient response to God's command and God's offer.

This, God would have us see, is the significance of a man like Daniel as he comes to view in our text. “I set my face unto the Lord God!” Never mind whether others are doing it or not. If we all wait for each other, it will never be done. “I set my face unto the Lord . . . to seek by prayer and supplications, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes. And I prayed unto the Lord my God, and made my confession.”

Thus, you see, Daniel was, by many centuries, a forerunner of the aroused Chinese Christian, Cheng Ching-yi who, in the 1920's, poured from his fervent soul the prayer that did so much to spark the Chinese Forward Movement of Evangelism: “Lord, revive Thy church, beginning with me!”

It is this simple, direct, down-to-earth, personalized approach to revival that I am proposing to myself and to you.

Suppose we pray: “Revive the faith of Thy church, beginning with me!”

It would do all of us a world of good to take this entire prayer of Daniel's and, on our knees, read it, and then read it again. Licking its way all through it, like a fire in a building, is a kindled and kindling faith. There is a living, listening God who will do this thing, who will answer this prayer, who will again clothe them with His honor and His glory! That was Daniel's faith.

The other day in my reading I came upon a sentence that stopped me. It called for underlining. It sent my mind out on long trails over this troubled, threatened land of ours. The sentence was this: “There are great numbers of people in this country whose convictions about God, the family, the state, are sound, and who wait only to be rallied.” Mark that last clause: “who wait only to be rallied.” Their beliefs are sound, you see, but the trouble is they're sound asleep! They must be “rallied.”

Not faith asleep but faith astir is what gets results. The Christian faith of too many of us is like a lazy man in bed at ten in the morning with the covers pulled around his ears. It needs to get on its feet. It needs to get going.

Recently the National Geographic Magazine ran an article on the Hebrides Islands off the northwest coast of Scotland. Few Americans, I find, have any knowledge of these “quiet islands in a world of noise,” as they have been called. In 1949 the largest of the Islands—Lewis—experienced a spiritual awakening that is one of the most fruitful and revolutionary of our century.

The churches of the island were dying out for want of conversions. The young people were almost totally distinterested in religion. The movie and the saloon had things pretty much their way. But in Barvas, near the north end of the island, were two elderly sisters, one of them blind, who carried a concern about revival that no surrounding unbelief could strangle or suffocate. They read about a man God was using in Scotland and on other islands closer to the mainland. They wrote him a letter of pleading. Would he not come to Lewis? His answer was that other engagements made it impossible. They prayed again. One of the sisters said, referring to this negative reply, “That is what man says, but God says something different. He will be here within a fortnight.”

She was not mistaken. Her faith was rewarded. A cancellation occurred. Within two weeks the man, Duncan Campbell, was there. After the first night such conviction of coldness fell on the church members and such conviction of sin upon the unconverted that the messages of the preacher were interrupted by the sobs of the distressed and broken souls who wanted peace with God. The awakening spread from the church to another; then from one village to another.

One day, when the revival had been going on for

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