

## "Beginning With Me"

(Continued from Page One)

months, an old man in the village of Arnol pointed a visitor toward a particular building and said, "Do you see that house? That was the 'drinking house' of this village, where our young men met in utter disregard of God, His Word, or His day. Today it is closed, and the men who frequented it are praying at our prayer meetings."

In another village a visitor remarked, on seeing so many people attending church, "This is surely a wonderful sight." "Yes," said his friend, who lived there, "but before the revival one seldom saw more than four from the village going to church on Sabbath morning." One of the newly-converted young men said, "We did not know what church-going meant until the revival came. Now the prayer meeting is the weekly attraction, and the worship of God in His house on the Sabbath our chief delight."

All that following in the wake of the aggressive faith of two women who let the revival begin with them!

Suppose we pray: "Revive the fellowship of Thy church, beginning with me."

Daniel, you will notice, begins his prayer by saying, "I," but he has not prayed long until he says, "We." "We have sinned"; "we have committed iniquity"; "we have rebelled!"

Never mind the particulars of the confession for the moment. The important thing is this use of "we"—this identification of Daniel with his people. In the existing circumstances it was an identification of pain and penitence, which of course is precisely what is necessary when those who claim to be the people of God have forsaken His way for their own.

But the same principle holds good for the higher and better use of "we"—the "we" of united love for God and a concerted putting forth of time and energy for the bringing to pass of His purposes.

This closely-knit community of understanding and sympathy was a feature of the early Christian church that shines like a jewel in the setting of the Book of Acts. In one place Luke tells us, "They continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers" (Acts 2.42).

Revival among us today would give us a new definition of fellowship. Too many of us think it is just a matter of being with people. Or we think it is the shallow camaraderie that grows out of patting each other on the back. Or we think it is a group of people who, in a social, or economic, or cultural way, are very much alike and congenial to each other. Some of us, I fear, are so far off in our thinking that we call it fellowship if a company of people are brought together who have the same "gripes" and prejudices.

Real fellowship, in the New Testament definition of it, is what springs up when people—many or few—begin actually to walk in the light together, and to be open to one another and to Christ about their needs, their problems, their concerns, and their longings.

But, beyond a new definition of fellowship, revival would give us a new realization of fellowship. It might well start in our own family, and spread from there. A man came to his doctor and said, "I have my stuff in my car. I'm leaving home for good. I can't stand my wife's stubbornness." The doctor, being a Christian, told him he was heading the wrong way; that actually he was playing the fool to run away from his wife and family in this manner. In self-defense the man said, "I've tried everything. Nothing does any good." The doctor was guided to tell him he should try one thing more. "Go home," said he, "leave your things in the car, go in and take your wife alone, get down on your knees together before God, and

you confess your own sins, leaving your wife to confess hers." Reluctantly, the man promised that he would do it.

An hour or two later he called the doctor on the phone to say: "Doctor, I did it. And it worked. It's heaven. We've settled everything before God!"

Revival came to that home when the husband was willing to begin with himself, and to walk in the light of God. When his wife, humbled and challenged, began, too, her walking in the light, the result was inevitable—fellowship!

Let's not trifle about this business of revival. If we honestly, passionately want it, then let us close the gaps, repair the breaches, heal the grievances, ease the strains, in any and all relationships that we bear to other people.

### III

Suppose we pray: "Revive the fervor of Thy church, beginning with me."

Look into Daniel's heart as he takes the lead in calling Judah to repentance, and to a new realization of righteousness and honor before God. There's a flame in the young prophet's heart. "I set my face unto the Lord God," he tells us, "to seek by prayer and supplications, with fasting, and sackcloth and ashes."

We need a fire like that in our prayers. I don't mean the screaming of our voices; I mean the solemn intensity of our souls. I don't mean the artificial quiver in our tones; I mean the ardent quiver in our inmost desires.

John Welch would wrap himself in a Scotch plaid blanket in the dead of night and pray for the members of his parish and community. Once, when his wife complained of this exercise as being unnecessary, he replied: "O woman, I have the souls of three thousand to answer for, and I know not how it is with many of them!"

We need fire, too, in our witness for Christ. Some of you have been pretty excited at times over a political campaign. When you talked, there was some force in your voice and some animation in your spirit. The same could be said about your conversations on the World Series. Honestly now, has there been anything like that spirit, that sparkle, that nerve, in your conversations about Jesus Christ and His church and His great gospel, which is the one last hope of this desperate hour?

No wonder Sam Shoemaker, in one of his fine books, sets it down as a sad fact that "There are millions who claim adherence to faith in the living God, but who would be ashamed to get excited about it. That would be bad form." Shoemaker goes on today, and rightly: "The faith is harmed far more by such timid upholders than it is by violent and open enemies. The worst blasphemy is not profanity but lip service."

No wonder, also, that Dr. John Mackay declares: "It has become fashionable, alas, in many church circles—especially in the great traditional churches—to look with profound suspicion upon every manifestation of emotion in religion . . . There has been developed a cult of frigid restraint; liturgical procedures are being promoted whose aesthetic perfection sanctifies spiritual death." One more sentence leaps from Mackay's aroused soul: "They forget that there is more hope for uncouth life than for aesthetic death."

In a distant city there is a young woman who was reared in the church. One day she discovered that her Christianity was a profession without power; a respectful piece of sentiment about Christ without any vital experience of Christ. That experience became hers one day, and it helped her through several rough spots in her own life. Still, she kept it all pretty much to herself. The fire did not go out, but on the other hand, it did not flame out.

(Continued on Page 6)