

# *What is Revival?*



*By Charles Spurgeon*

**T**HE word "revival" is as familiar in our mouths as a household word. We are constantly speaking about and praying for a "revival;" would it not be as well to know what we mean by it? Of the Samaritans our Lord said, "Ye worship ye know not what," let him not have to say to us, "Ye know not what ye ask." The word "revive" wears its meaning upon its forehead; it is from the Latin, and may be interpreted thus—to live again, to receive again a life which has almost expired; to rekindle into a flame the vital spark which was nearly extinguished.

When a person has been dragged out of a pond nearly drowned, the bystanders are afraid that he is dead, and are anxious to ascertain if life still lingers. The proper means are used to restore animation; the body is rubbed, stimulants are administered, and if by God's providence life still tarries in the poor clay, the rescued man opens his eyes, sits up, and speaks, and those around him rejoice that he has *revived*. A young girl is in a fainting fit, but after a while she returns to consciousness, and we say, "she revives." The flickering lamp of life in dying men suddenly flames up with unusual brightness at intervals, and those who are watching around the sick bed say of the patient, "he revives."

In these days, when the dead are not miraculously restored, we do not expect to see the revival of a person who is totally dead, and we could not speak of *there*-vival of a thing which never lived before. It is clear that the term "revival" can only be applied to a living soul, or to that which once lived. To be revived is a blessing which can only be enjoyed by those who have some degree of life. Those who have no spiritual life are not, and cannot be, in the strictest sense of the term, the subjects of a revival. Many blessings may come to the unconverted in consequence of a revival among Christians, but the revival itself has to do only with those who already possess spiritual life. There must be vitality in some degree before there can be a quickening of vitality, or, in other words, a revival.

*A true revival is to be looked for in the church of God.* Only in the river of gracious life can the pearl of revival be found. It has been said that a revival must begin with God's people; this is very true, but it is not all the truth, for the revival itself must end as well as begin there. The results of the revival will extend to the outside world, but the revival, strictly speaking, must be within the circle of life, and must therefore essentially be enjoyed by the possessors of vital godliness, and by them only. Is not this quite a different view of revival from that; which is common in society; but is it not manifestly the correct one?

It is a sorrowful fact that many who are spiritually alive greatly need reviving. It is sorrowful because it is a proof of the existence of much spiritual evil. A man in sound health with every part of his body in a vigorous condition does not need reviving. He requires daily sustenance, but reviving would be quite out of place. If he has not yet attained maturity growth will be most desirable, but a hale hearty young man wants no reviving, it would be thrown away upon him. Who thinks of reviving the noonday sun, the ocean at its flood, or the year at its prime? The tree planted by the rivers of water loaded with fruit needs not excite our anxiety for its revival, for its fruitfulness and beauty charm every one. Such should be the constant condition of the sons of God. Feeding and lying down in green pastures and led by the still waters they ought not always to be crying, "my leanness, my leanness, woe unto me." Sustained by gracious promises and enriched out of the fullness which God has treasured up in his dear Son, their

souls should prosper and be in health, and their piety ought to need no reviving. They should aspire to a higher blessing, a richer mercy, than a mere revival. They have the nether springs already; they should earnestly cover the upper springs. They should be asking for growth in grace, for increase of strength, for greater success; they should have out-climbed and out-soared the period in which they need to be constantly crying, "Wilt thou not revive us again?" For a church to be constantly needing revival is the indication of much sin, for if it were sound before the Lord it would remain in the condition into which a revival would uplift its members. A church should be a camp of soldiers, not an hospital of invalids. But there is exceedingly much difference between what ought be and what is, and consequently many of God's people are in so sad a state that the very fittest prayer for them is for revival. Some Christians are, spiritually, but barely alive. When a man has been let down into a vat or into a well full of bad air, yea do not wonder when he is drawn up again that he is half-dead, and urgently requires to be revived. Some Christians—to their shame be it spoken!—descend into such worldly company, not upon such unhallowed principles, and become so carnal, that when they are drawn up by God's grace from their backsliding position they want reviving, and even need that their spiritual breath should as it were be breathed into their nostrils afresh by God's Spirit.

When a man starves himself, continuing for a long time without food, when he is day after day without a morsel of bread between his lips, we do not marvel that the surgeon, finding him in extremities, says, "This man has weakened his system, he is too low, and wants reviving." Of course he does, for he has brought himself by low diet into a state of weakness. Are there not hundreds of Christians—shame that it should be so!—who live day after day without feeding upon Bible truth? shall it be added without real spiritual communion with God? they do not even attend the week-night services, and they are indifferent hearers on the Lord's day. Is it remarkable that they want reviving? Is not the fact that they do so greatly need it most dishonorable to themselves and distressing to their truly spiritual brethren?

There is, a condition of mind which is even more sad than either of the two above mentioned; it is a thorough, gradual, but certain decline of all the spiritual powers. Look at that consumptive man whose lungs are decaying, and in whom the vital energy is ebbing; it is painful to see the faintness which suffuses him after exertion, and the general languor which overspreads his weakened frame. Far more sad to the spiritual eye is the spectacle presented by spiritual consumptives who in some quarters meet us on all hands. The eye of faith is dim and overcast, and seldom flashes with holy joy; the spiritual countenance is hollow and sunken with doubts and fears; the tongue of praise is partially paralyzed, and has little to say for Jesus; the spiritual frame is lethargic, and its movements are far from vigorous; the man is not anxious to be doing anything for Christ; a horrible numbness, a dreadful insensibility has come over him; he is in soul like a sluggard in the dog-days, who finds it hard labor to lie in bed and brush away the flies from his face. If these spiritual consumptives hate sin they do it so weakly that one might fear that they loved it still. If they love Jesus, it is so coldly that it is a point of question whether they love at all. If they sing Jehovah's praises it is very sadly, as if hallelujahs were dirges. If they mourn for sin it is only with half-broken hearts, and their grief is shallow and unpractical. If they hear the Word of God they are never stirred by it; enthusiasm is an unknown luxury. If they come across a precious truth they perceive nothing particular in it, any more than the cock in the fable, in the jewel which he found in the farmyard. They throw themselves back upon the enchanted couch of sloth, and while they are covered with rags they dream of riches and great increase of goods. It is a sad, sad thing when Christians fall into

this state; then indeed they need reviving, and they must have it, for "the whole head is sick and the whole heart faint." Every lover of souls should intercede for declining professors that the visitations of God may restore them; that the Sun of righteousness may arise upon them with healing beneath his wings.

When revival comes to a people who are in the state thus briefly described, it simply brings them to the condition in which they ought always to have been; it quickens them, gives them new life, stirs the coals of the expiring fire, and puts heavenly breath into the languid lungs. The sickly soul which before was insensible, weak, and sorrowful, grows earnest, vigorous, and happy in the Lord. This is the immediate fruit of revival, and it becomes all of us who are believers to seek this blessing for backsliders, and for ourselves if we are declining in grace.

If revival is confined to living men we may further notice that *it must result from the proclamation and the receiving of living truth*. We speak of "vital godliness," and vital godliness must subsist upon vital truth. Vital godliness is not revived in Christians by mere excitement, by crowded meetings, by the stamping of the foot, or the knocking of the pulpit cushion, or the delirious bawlings of ignorant zeal; these are the stock in trade of revivals among dead souls, but to revive living saints other means are needed. Intense excitement may produce a revival of the animal, but how can it operate upon the spiritual, for the spiritual demands other food than that which stews in the fleshpots of mere carnal enthusiasm. The Holy Ghost must come into the living heart through living truth, and so bring nutriment and stimulant to the pining spirit, for so only can it be revived. This, then, leads us to the conclusion that if we are to obtain a revival we must go directly to the Holy Ghost for it, and not resort to the machinery of the professional revival-maker. The true vital spark of heavenly flame comes from the Holy Ghost, and the priests of the Lord must beware of strange fire. There is no spiritual vitality in anything except as the Holy Spirit is all in all in the work; and if our vitality has fallen near to zero, we can only have it renewed by him who first kindled it in us. We must go to the cross and look up to the dying Savior, and expect that the Holy Spirit will renew our faith and quicken all our graces. We must feed anew by faith upon the flesh and blood of the Lord Jesus, and so the Holy Ghost will recruit our strength and give us a revival. When men in India sicken in the plains, they climb the hills and breathe the more bracing air of the upper regions; we need to get nearer to God, and to bathe ourselves in heaven, and revived piety will be the sure result.

When a minister obtains this revival he preaches very differently from his former manner. It is very hard work to preach when the head aches and when the body is languid, but it is a much harder task when the soul is unfeeling and lifeless. It is sad, sad work—painfully, dolorously, horribly sad, but saddest of all if we do not feel it to be sad, if we can go on preaching and remain careless concerning the truths we preach, indifferent as to whether men are saved or lost! May God deliver every minister from abiding in such a state! Can there be a more wretched object than a man who preaches in God's name truths which he does not feel, and which he is conscious have never impressed his own heart? To be a mere sign-post, pointing out the road but never moving in it, is a lot against which every tame heart may plead night and day.

Should this revival be granted to deacons and elders what different men it would make of them! Lifeless, lukewarm church officers are of no more value to a church, than a crew of sailors would be to a vessel if they were all fainting and if in their berths when they were wanted to hoist the sails or lower the boats. Church officers who need reviving must be fearful dead weights upon a Christian community. It is incumbent upon all Christians to be thoroughly awake to the interests of Zion, but upon the leaders most of all. Special supplication should be made for beloved brethren in office that they may be full of the Holy Ghost.

Workers in the Sunday-schools, tract distributors, and other laborers for Christ, what different people they become when grace is vigorous from what they are when their life flickers in the socket! Like sickly vegetation in a cellar, all blanched and unhealthy, are workers who have little grace; like willows by the water-courses, like grease with reeds and rushes in well-watered valleys, are the servants of God who live in his presence. It is no wonder that our Lord said, "Because thou art neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth," for when the earnest Christian's heart is full of fire it is sickening to talk with lukewarm people. Have not warm-hearted lovers of Jesus felt when they have been discouraged by doubtful sluggish people, who could see a lion in the way, as if they could put on express speed and run over them? Every earnest minister has known times when he has felt cold hearts to be as intolerable as the drones in the hive are to the working bees. Careless professors are as much out of place as snow in harvest among truly living Christians. As vinegar to the teeth and smoke to the eyes are these sluggards. As well be bound to a dead body as forced into union with lifeless professors; they are a burden, a plague, and an abomination. You turn to one of these cold brethren after a graciously earnest prayer-meeting, and say with holy joy, "What a delightful meeting we have had!" "Yes," he says carelessly and deliberately, as if it were an effort to say so much, "there was a good number of people." How his frostbitten words grate on one's ear! You ask yourself, "Where has the man been? Is he not conscious that the Holy Ghost has been with us?" Does not our Lord speak of these people as being cast out of his mouth, just because he himself is altogether in earnest, and consequently, when he meets with lukewarm people he will not endure them? He says, "I would thou wert cold or hot," either utterly averse to good or in earnest concerning it. It is easy to see his meaning. If you heard an ungodly man blaspheme after an earnest meeting, you would lament it, but you would feel that from such a man it was not a thing to make you vexed, for he has only spoken after his kind, but when you meet with a child of God who is lukewarm, how can you stand that? It is sickening, and makes the inmost spirit feel the horrors of mental nausea.

While a true revival in its essence belongs only to God's people, it always brings with it a blessing for the other sheep who are not yet of the fold. If you drop a stone into a lake the ring widens continually, till the farthest corner of the lake feels the influence. Let the Lord revive a believer and very soon his family, his friends, his neighbors, receive a share of the benefit; for when a Christian is revived, he prays more fervently for sinners. Longing, loving prayer for sinners, is one of the marks of a revival in the renewed heart. Since the blessing is asked for sinners, the blessing comes from him who hears the prayers of his people; and thus the world gains by revival. Soon the revived Christian speaks concerning Jesus and the gospel; he sows good seed, and God's good seed is never lost, for he has said, "It shall not return unto me void." The good seed is sown in the furrows, and in some sinners' hearts God prepares the soil,

so that the seed springs up in a glorious harvest. Thus by the zealous conversation of believers another door of mercy opens to men.

When Christians are revived they live more consistently, they make their homes more holy and more happy, and this leads the ungodly to envy them, and to enquire after their secret. Sinners by God's grace long to be like such cheerful happy saints; their mouths water to feast with them upon their hidden manna, and this is another blessing, for it leads men to seek the Savior. If an ungodly man steps into a congregation where all the saints are revived he does not go to sleep under the sermon. The minister will not let him do that, for the hearer perceives that the preacher feels what he is preaching, and has a right to be heard. This is a clear gain, for now the man listens with deep emotion; and above all, the Holy Spirit's power, which the preacher has received in answer to prayer comes upon the hearer's mind; he is convinced of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment to come, and Christians who are on the watch around him hasten to tell him of the Savior, and point him to the redeeming blood, so that though the revival, strictly speaking, is with the people of God, yet the result of it no man can limit. Brethren, let us seek a revival during the present month, that the year may close with showers of blessing, and that the new year may open with abundant benediction. Let us pledge ourselves to form a prayer-union, a sacred band of suppliants, and may God do unto us according to our faith.

"Father, for thy promised blessing,  
Still we plead before thy throne;  
For the time of sweet refreshing  
Which can come from thee alone.

"Blessed earnest thou hast given,  
But in these we would not rest,  
Blessings still with thee are hidden,  
Pour them forth, and make us blest.

"Wake thy siren bering children, wake them,  
Bid them to thy harvest go;  
Blessings, O our Father, make them;  
Round their steps let blessing flow.

"Let no hamlet be forgotten,  
Let thy showers on all descend;  
That in one loud blessed anthem,  
Myriads may in triumph blend."