

Duncan Campbell

The Instruments of Revival

"Son of man, can these bones live?"
(Ezekiel 37.3)

SOMETIMES a faintheartedness creeps over us as to the power of the Gospel in these desperate days, and accordingly there springs up within us an unwillingness to make strenuous efforts for the spiritual recovery of man, or even to believe in the possibility of revival. Now, if any book is fitted to correct this tendency, that book is the Bible, and a signal illustration is furnished by this Old Testament story.

This portion of Scripture brings before us this most encouraging and stupendous fact, namely, that death itself is made to flee before the presence of the Lord of life, so that in the words of the hymn-writer we sing:

"The barren wastes are fruitful lands,
The desert blooms with roses;
And He, the glory of all lands,
His lovely face discloses."

Again and again we have seen this happen during the recent movement in the Scottish Hebrides, when whole communities came under the grip and fear of God, and disregard and indifference to the things of God gave place to soul concern, so that, according to the local press, more people were attending the prayer meeting in a certain community than attended public worship on the Sabbath before revival broke out.

Will you notice that the matter of supreme interest in this remarkable story is that God got His hand upon a man. What might not happen when God gets His hand on a man! How arresting and significant are the words: "The hand of the Lord was upon me." Here we have the story of a man who, because he is rightly related to God, becomes the human agent in revival.

Let us consider the kind of man whom God can trust with revival:

1. A Man of Vision

He must be a Man of Vision: This is brought out in the story—"The Lord . . . set me down in the midst of the valley which was full of bones, and caused me to pass by them round about" (Ezek. 37. 1-2). In other words, he surveyed the field before he planned the attack. Every soldier knows that this is of major importance in the strategy of warfare. It was when Paul saw the city of Athens given over to idolatry, and the people worshipping at an altar "TO THE UNKNOWN GOD," that his soul was stirred within him — vision moved him.

There are few pictures in the Old Testament story so arresting and vivid as Nehemiah's ride at

midnight round the walls of Jerusalem. What desolation met his eye! Jerusalem, the pride of the whole earth prostrate and broken! But his soul was stirred by another vision: arising out of the ruins he saw a new Jerusalem with its temple restored and its walls rebuilt. That was the vision that moved him to action and gave to his life purpose and direction and a sense of urgency. But we must ever remember that where we are will determine what we see. The man on a bicycle will see something, but not what the man in the airplane sees. In the case of the one, vision is restricted; the other sees from a higher altitude. Is this not what is suggested by the words of the wise: "Where there is no vision the people perish" (Prov. 29:8)?

Mark the words: "The Lord carried me out in the Spirit," i.e., in the Spirit of the Lord. In the early stages of the Hebridean revival how well I recall that Christian men would be so burdened by the vision of need that they were constrained to spend nights in soul-agony, pleading the promises of God. They were men of vision: they saw the need; but they also saw a God who could meet their need. That was the double vision that moved and inspired them and led them to pray the prayer of faith that brought down the blessing of God.

Early one morning, I remember suggesting to a minister who had been in the midst of the movement for many hours without sleep, that he should retire to rest his weary body. But his words to me were:

"How can I sleep when so many in my parish are in danger of being lost eternally?" The parish minister of Barvas was a man of vision, and one was not surprised that the movement that swept over the Hebrides began in the midst of his people. Oh, for such men — men who regard themselves as "the ambassadors of eternity in the courts of time," and who make it their business, under the anointing of God, to "permeate the courts of time with the atmosphere of eternity"!

2. A Man Who Had a Word From the Lord

Notice further, here was a Man who had a Word From the Lord: What authority, what purpose it gives to our labours when we have a word from the Lord, i.e., when the word we proclaim is a living word! Here I would stress the need for the proclamation of a positive Gospel, which will give first place to the word of God as such, and bring back the lost, or greatly lost radiance of such words as 'Grace', 'Atonement', 'Redemption', 'Salvation', and 'Sanctification'. It is my firm conviction that God honours the word that He has inspired when that word is proclaimed in the anointing of the Holy Ghost. C. H. Spurgeon said: "The old truths that Calvin preached, that Augustine preached, that Paul preached, are the truths I must preach today or else be false to my conscience and my God." These are days when there is a tendency to bypass the great words of Scripture and substitute words that, I fear, have no sanction in the vocabulary of Heaven. May God raise up men and women who will fearlessly proclaim the word of God as "a word from the Lord!"

Here let me refer again to the hand of the Lord being upon him. You will recall that when Jesus commissioned His disciples, He said: "All power is given unto Me; go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature, and lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." "Pentecost did not teach the disciples anything; it made them the incarnation of what they preached" (Oswald Chambers). But we do well to remember that apart from Heaven's anointing and the power that is vested in Jesus Christ, man is unable to accomplish anything.

Again and again I have known congregations bowing as corn before the wind under the preaching of men and women in the Hebrides who were in touch with God and knew His power resting upon them. I remember one meeting in particular when a young woman was proclaiming the truth: suddenly there was a cry in the midst of the congregation and in a very short time some were prostrate in the grip of conviction and crying for mercy. On the following day I was traveling by plane to the city of Glasgow. A young man came and sat beside me and told me how God had spoken to him the previous evening. In the course of conversation he said: "Something touched me where words failed to reach me." Again I was impressed by the power of Heaven's anointing, causing men to tremble in the fear of God. Surely this is the preaching that we need today! Men are not going to be impressed by our nicely worded sermons or our essays on the ethical interests of human life. We need to pray the prayer of the Prophet: "Oh that Thou wouldst rend the heavens, that Thou wouldst come down, that the mountains might flow down at Thy presence" (Isa. 64:1). Our need is for a demonstration of the supernatural, lifting men from the plane of the ordinary to the realm of the extraordinary—to the higher heights of God-realization.

Some time ago I visited a family on the Island of Skye. It was shortly after electricity was installed on the island, and the good lady of the house was showing me round. She mentioned the various electrical appliances that were installed—refrigerator, cooker, sweeper, and so on; but on this particular day a bag of peat would have been of more value, as there was no electrical supply owing to the fact that during a storm on the previous night the electric cable was fouled by the anchor of a ship in the bay. They had pamphlets telling one how to use the cooker, etc., but there was no practical demonstration of what they knew theoretically; and I fear that this is often too true in the church of Jesus Christ today. In theory, we accept the truth of the power of the Holy Spirit, but somehow the supernatural is not in operation.

Now it seems to me that the question that confronts us today in face of the dire situation, is just this question: Can these bones live?

3. A Man of Faith and Obedience

We have here a Man of Faith and Obedience: In verse 7 we read: "So I prophesied as I was commanded." Now, could any situation be more desperate—one man in the presence of desolation and death? It was against all human reason to expect that the bones in the valley could ever become a mighty army, and like Mary, he might have said, "How shall this be?" Of course, he believed that nothing was too hard for the Lord; but was he willing to demonstrate his faith by his obedience? With many today he might say: "God is the God of the impossible; He can do 'exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think'." Yes, all that is true, but is he willing to obey? He prophesied and saw that dead bones could live, that God could turn defeat into "victory's ringing cheer" or in other words, "We can expect revival today."

4. A Man With An Awareness of God

We have here also a Man with an Awareness of God: Some time ago it was my privilege to minister in a certain congregation in the city of Glasgow. The services were charged with a tremendous sense of God, and at the close there were those who sought the Saviour. I was so impressed with what happened that I wrote the minister who, on that particular weekend was

assisting at a Communion elsewhere. In my letter I mentioned how impressed I was with the spirit in his congregation and the crowds that listened to the word, and the fruit that followed the proclamation of the Gospel. In his reply he wrote words that I have frequently quoted: "We are fortunate in our congregation to have a praying people who produce a spiritual atmosphere." One is not surprised at this when I state that priority of that place is given to the prayer meeting in this congregation. Need I say that the supreme need of the Christian church today is just what this congregation has—men and women who wait upon God and plead His promises?

I often think of that incident recorded by Jonathan Edwards in the hour when God was preparing him for the great revival of 1739. Here are his words: "I rode out into the wood and in a retired place dismounted. There I had a view of the glory of the Son of God—a view that continued for about an hour, which kept me for the greater part in tears. I felt an urgency of soul to be emptied, to lie at His feet; to be filled with Christ and Christ alone."

Surely we have here a man with an awareness of God—a man to whom God was real, and a man possessed of a consciousness of the Divine, that created within him a strong confidence in the power of the Almighty. Here again, may I quote from a letter received from a worker who laboured in the midst of the recent revival: "Each morning I have an hour and a half in the woods before breakfast. God has drawn very near to me and broken me daily in His presence. I find I can concentrate better when I pray aloud in the woods, disturbed by nothing but the hum of the bees and the singing of the birds." Oh, that God may baptize the Church into this spirit of fervent and prevailing prayer!

5. A Man With a Burning Message.

Further, we have a Man With A Burning Message: "Hear the word of the Lord." If man is God's agent in revival, the word is God's instrument, and that word is compared to a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces. As I have often said, that is the word we must preach with passionate, personal conviction. It is the word of the Cross, the word of separation, the word of cleansing and the word of judgment. Is there not a need today to proclaim the word of judgment?

Several years ago I was impressed by words spoken by Lord Samuel in the House of Lords, as reported in the Daily Express, November 5th, 1953: "How we find to our dismay that the vices of Sodom and Gomorrah are rife among us. The moral law has weakened because the dogmas of heaven and judgment no longer grip and control conduct." We need to proclaim the whole counsel of God. It is my firm conviction that the message the country needs today is a message of righteousness and judgment. Charles Finney said long ago: "Away with your milk-and-water preaching of the love of Christ that has no holiness or moral discrimination in it!" I remember listening to a Highland minister preaching on this subject saying: "Bring me a God all mercy but devoid of justice and I will have no scruples in calling him an idiot of your imagination. Remember that the judge is condemned when the guilty is acquitted!"

It is of special interest to remember that the message that was proclaimed for at least three years during the Lewis awakening was the message of sin, righteousness and judgment. I shall not soon forget the scene that met our eyes while one preached during the awakening, from the text: "The times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men everywhere to repent:

because He hath appointed a day in the which He will judge the world in righteousness ..." (Acts 17:30, 31). During the preaching of that sermon scores were gripped by the mighty power of God, and again and again the cries of the penitent were heard. May God give us grace to be faithful in the ministry and to proclaim without fear the whole counsel of God!

This, then, is the man whom God can trust: he was in the place where he could command. The words of verse 9 are arresting and significant: "Thus saith the Lord God; come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live." Notice, there was much activity before the breath came. Verse 7 speaks of "a noise and a shaking." Scattered bones became articulate skeletons—much movement but no life.

Now it is good to plan, to organize in the field of Christian work and witness; but what if all our endeavours produced nothing but articulate skeletons? I fear that our churches and missions are full of this—a noise and shaking, but no life! But here was a man who could command because he was obedient to God, suggesting that if we obey the law of the Spirit, the power of the Spirit will obey us.

In closing let me quote the following:

"Soul of mine, must I surrender,
See myself as crucified?
Turning from all earth's ambitions,
That Thou may'st be satisfied."

This is the place of blessing, and the place of revival!