

SOMETHING MUST BE DONE:

A NEW YEAR'S

SERMON,

PREACHED ON THE LAST DAY OF THE OLD YEAR,

BY

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SERMON, &c.

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And the Priests went into the inner part of the house of the Lord to cleanse it, and brought out all the uncleanness that they found in the temple of the Lord into the court of the house of the Lord. And the Levites took it, to carry it out abroad into the brook Kidron. Now they began on the first day of the first month to sanctify.

Time, in its eagle-flight, has rapidly passed away, and brought us to the eve of another New Year. As from this interesting period, we look back upon the past and forward to the future, a multitude of thoughts naturally rush upon our minds, and we have been at a loss to know how to guide your meditations as the occasion demands. But there is one subject which may well supersede the consideration of every other : I mean the welfare of our Zion. We have been casting our eyes over her desolations; we have felt her affliction and reproach; and we have come this evening to tell you, that something must be done for her deliverance and enlargement.

The passage just recited may give a direction to our thoughts. When Hezekiah came to the throne of Judah, he found religion in a low and languishing state. His father Ahaz was not only an idolatrous king, but notorious for his impiety. The torrent of vice, irreligion, and idolatry, had already swept away the ten tribes

of Israel, and threatened to destroy Judah and Benjamin. With this state of things, the heart of pious Hezekiah was deeply affected. He could not bear to see the holy temple debased, and the idols of the Gentiles exalted; and though but a youthful prince, he made a bold, persevering, and successful attempt to effect a revival of the Jewish religion. He destroyed the high places; cut down the groves; brake the graven images; commanded the doors of the Lord's house to be opened and repaired; and exhorted the Priests and Levites to purify the temple; to restore the morning and evening sacrifice; to reinstate the observation of the Passover; and to withhold no exertion to promote a radical reformation in the principles and habits of the people.

It is worthy of remark, that the season when these pious designs began to be carried into effect, was the commencement of a New Year. Now they began on the "first day" of the "first month," to sanctify the house of the Lord. The months of the Jews were lunar, the first six consisting of thirty days each, the latter six of twenty-nine. The first month of their civil year was Tizri, which answered to a part of our September and October. The first month of their sacred, or ecclesiastical year, was Abib. Since the time of Ezra, the return of the Hebrews from the Babylonish captivity, it has been called Nisan, answering to our March, taking sometimes from February or April, according to the course of the moon. It does not however, affect the question of our present duty, that the Jewish year began one or two months later than our own. The humble child of God in this distant age of the world, will

read the account of the benevolent efforts of Hezekiah and his associates, with devout admiration. As he looks back toward this illustrious period in the Jewish history, his heart will beat high with hope. Success is not restricted to the exertions of Hezekiah. A revival of religion is within our reach at the commencement of the present year, as really as it was within his, twenty-five hundred years ago. But to bring this subject more fully before you, I propose to show,

What a revival of religion is;

The necessity of a revival among ourselves;

What ought to be done in attempting it;—and

The reasons why we may hope to succeed in the attempt.

I. What is a revival of religion?

We have never seen a general revival of the Christian interest in this city. In two or three of our congregations, there have been some seasons of unusual solemnity, which have from time to time resulted in very hopeful accessions to the number of God's professing people. But we have not been visited with any general out-pouring of the Holy Spirit. Hence, we talk about revivals of religion without any definite meaning; and hence, many honest minds are prejudiced against them. Some identify them with the illusions of a disturbed fancy; while others give them a place among the most exceptionable extravagan-

* The phrase a "revival of religion," has almost obtained the sanction of a technical term. It may not be the most happily selected; but it is used in accommodation to the habits of the Christian community, and is considered as expressing all that is included in the phrase, an "out-pouring of the Spirit."

cies, and the wildest expressions of enthusiasm. But we mean none of these things when we speak of revivals of religion. It is no illusion—no reverie—we present to your view; but those plain exhibitions of the power and grace of God which commend themselves to the reason and conscience of every impartial mind.

The showers of divine grace often begin like other showers, with here and there a drop. The revival in the days of Hezekiah, arose from a very small beginning. In the early stages of a work of grace, God is usually pleased to affect the hearts of some of his own people. Here and there, an individual Christian is aroused from his stupor. The objects of faith begin to predominate over the objects of sense and his languishing graces to be in more lively and constant exercise. In the progress of the work, the quickening power of grace pervades the church. Bowed down under a sense of their own stupidity and the impending danger of sinners, the great body of professing Christians are anxious and prayerful. In the mean time, the influences of the Holy Spirit are extended to the world; and the conversion of one or two, or a very small number, frequently proves the occasion of a very general concern among a whole people. Every thing now begins to put on a new face. Ministers are animated; Christians are solemn; sinners are alarmed. The house of God is thronged with anxious worshippers; opportunities for prayer and religious conference are multiplied; breathless silence pervades every seat, and deep solemnity every bosom. Not an eye wanders; not a heart is indifferent;—while eternal objects are brought

near, and eternal truth is seen in its wide connexions, and felt in its quickening and condemning power. The Lord is there. His stately steppings are seen; his own almighty and invisible hand is felt; his Spirit is passing from heart to heart, in his awakening, convincing, regenerating, and sanctifying agency upon the souls of men. Those who have been long careless and indifferent to the concerns of the soul, are awakened to a sense of their sinfulness, their danger, and their duty. Those who "have cast off fear and restrained prayer," have become anxious and prayerful. Those who have been "stout-hearted and far from righteousness," are subdued by the power of God, and brought nigh by the blood of Christ. The king of Zion takes away the heart of stone and gives the heart of flesh. He causes "the captive exile to hasten, that he may be loosed, lest he die in the pit and his bread should fail." He takes off the tattered garments of the prodigal; clothes him with the best robe, and gives him a cordial welcome to all the munificence of his grace. He brings those who have been long in bondage out of the prison house; knocks off the chains that bind them down to sin and death; bestows the immunities of sons and daughters, and receives them into the glorious liberty of the children of God.

And is there any thing in all this so full of mystery, that it has no claim to our confidence? Behold that thoughtless man! Year after year has passed away, while he has been adding sin to sin, and heaping up wrath against the day of wrath. But the Spirit of all grace suddenly arrests him in his mad career. The conviction is fastened upon his con-

science that he is a sinner. Fallen by his iniquity, he views himself obnoxious to the wrath of an offended God. He sees that he is under the dominion of a "carnal mind;" his sins pass in awful review before him, and he is filled with keen distress and anguish. He is sensible that every day is bringing him nearer to the world of perdition, and he begins to ask, if there can be any hope for a wretch like him? But, O! how his strength withers, how his hopes die! He is as helpless as he is wretched, and as culpable as he is helpless. The "arrows of the almighty stick fast within him, the poison whereof drinketh up his spirits."

But behold him now! In the last extremity, as he is cut off from every hope, the arm of sovereign mercy is made bare for his relief. The heart of adamant melts; the will that has hitherto resisted the divine Spirit, and rebelled against the divine sovereignty, is subdued; the lofty looks are brought low; the selfish mind has become benevolent; the proud, humble; the stubborn rebel, the meek child of God. Jesus tells the despairing sinner where to find a beam of hope; the voice of the Son of God proclaims "forgiveness of sins according to the riches of his grace;" the Angel of peace invites and sweetly urges the soul, stained with pollution, to repair to the blood of sprinkling; stung with the guilt of sin, to look up to Jesus for healing and life.

Is this an idle tale? Nay, believer, you have felt it all. And if there is no mystery in this, why should it be thought incredible, that instances of the same nature should be multiplied, and greatly multiplied in any given period? If there are dispensations of grace above the ordinary operations of the spirit,

they may exist in very different degrees at different times. And if the immediate and special influences of the Holy Ghost are to be expected in the edification of a single saint, or the conversion of a single sinner, why may they not be expected in the edification and conversion of multitudes? It is not above the reach of God's power; nor beyond the limits of his sovereignty. God can as easily send down a shower, as a single drop; he can as easily convert two as one; three thousand as one hundred.

Now, this is a revival of religion. We do not pretend to have traced the features it uniformly bears, because it bears no uniform features. God is a Sovereign. "The wind bloweth where it listeth." Still, wherever God is pleased to manifest his power and grace, *in enlarging the views, in enlivening and invigorating the graces of his own people, and in turning the hearts of considerable numbers of his enemies, at the same time, to seek and secure his pardoning mercy,* there, is a revival of religion.

Such signal revivals of the Christian interest have been no uncommon thing in our world. We have many instances in the Old Testament, of God's deeply impressing the minds of the whole nation of Israel, and turning the hearts of multitudes to himself as the heart of one man. Beside the memorable instance recorded in our text, if you advert to the history of the rising generation in the wilderness, to the reigns of David and Solomon, of Asa and Jehoshaphat, of Joash, Uzziah and Josiah; you will find a succession of seasons, in which God has remarkably appeared and displayed his power and glory in building up Zion. After the great declension of the church during the

long captivity and stupidity of the Jews in Babylon, her vital interests were revived during the ministrations of Ezra. In the days of John the Baptist also, the Spirit was poured out in copious effusions, and the kingdom of heaven sustained an unusual pressure. In a manner still more remarkable, did the ascended Redeemer shed forth the influences of the Holy Ghost on the day of Pentecost, and subdued three thousand to the sceptre of his grace. And on the following day, he brought about two thousand more to renounce their enmity to the cross, and joyfully accept the offers of mercy. Just after this, he manifested the same saving influence upon multitudes in Samaria*. And upon the dispersion of the disciples after the martyrdom of Stephen, the power of divine grace attended their labours in the distant and remote parts of Judea, and even as far as the territories of Greece. Phenice, and Cyprus were visited, and Antioch still more graciously†. If we pass along to later periods, we find the word of life has had free course, and the Spirit of grace has been poured out from time to time, in copious measures. Unusual outpourings of the Spirit of God accompanied the labours of many of the Reformers in the 16th century, both in Germany, France, Switzerland, Holland, Denmark, the Low Countries, and in Britain‡. A very solemn and extraordinary revival of religion took place in the West of Scotland, about the year 1625§. In 1630, the divine presence was

* Acts, 8th ch.

† Acts 8, 15 and 20-21. Vid. the whole chapter.

‡ "Fleming's Fulfilling of the Scriptures." Part III.

§ A concise, but interesting account of this work of grace, may be found in "Gillies' Historical Collections." Vol. I, p. 306.

signally manifested during a communion season, at the church of Shotts, a small town between Glasgow and Edinburgh, at which nearly five hundred are said to have been awakened, the most of whom gave good evidence of a saving change of heart in their subsequent lives*. The year 1638 is also a season long to be remembered by the church of Scotland, as a “season of refreshing from the presence of the Lord†.” A work of great extent and power also took place in the North of Ireland, in the province of Ulster, in 1628, which is related to have been “one of the largest manifestations of the Spirit, one of the most solemn times of the down-pouring thereof, since the days of the Apostles hath been seen.‡” To these exhibitions of divine grace in the Old World, we may add a very general awakening during the plague in London, in the year 1665, in which hundreds and thousands were hopefully brought out of darkness into God’s marvelous light§.

It would be a delightful employment to pass down and survey these monuments of divine mercy in later periods||. The grace of God has made this Western World the scene of wonders. From the early settlement of this country, God “has made his work appear unto his servants, and his

* Gillies’ Hist. Col. p. 308, and onward.

† Ib. p. 315.

‡ Fulfilling of the Scriptures, p. 185.

§ Calamy’s Life of Baxter, part III.

|| The reader will be much interested in the perusal of “Historical Collections, relating to remarkable periods of the success of the Gospel, and the instruments used in promoting it,” in two vols. 8vo. by John Gillies.

glory unto their children.” From the year 1680 to 1744, there was a cluster of revivals, and particularly under the ministrations of the Rev. Messrs. Whitfield, Prince, Stoddard, Edwards, the two Tenants, and Mr. Brainard*. And if we come down to later periods, these out-pourings of the Divine Spirit have been multiplied and extended both in the Old World and in the New. Since the commencement of the nineteenth century, and during the past year, there have probably been more revivals of religion than have ever taken place in an equal period before. Such remarkable seasons are still to be expected, and we have reason to believe will more frequently occur from this time to the latter day of glory. The “day spring from on high” is yet to visit this benighted world in the brightness of its rising; Zion is yet to be “clothed with the robes of righteousness and the garments of salvation;” the tree of life is yet to open its foliage and scatter far and wide the leaves that are for “the healing of the nations.”

Having thus endeavoured to show what a revival of religion is, we pass

II. To show the necessity of such a revival among ourselves.

This necessity is of the most pressing kind. We may not feel it; and this is among the unequivocal tokens of existing darkness. In all its forms, spiritual declension possesses a hardening, infatuating tendency. “Thou sayest, I am rich and increased in goods, and have need of nothing, and

* Vid. Prince’s Christian History – Edward’s Narrative and Brainard’s Journal.

knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked!" When a church once begins to forsake God, they are more and more disposed to forsake him. Their coldness degenerates into negligence, and their negligence into universal declension. It is the natural operation of this Laodicean spirit to make the subjects of it insensible to their true character and deplorable state. "Ephraim," saith the prophet, "Ephraim hath mixed himself among the people; Ephraim is a cake not turned; yea, gray hairs are here and there upon him, and he knoweth it not." But shall we sleep over the verge of apostacy? Let us be aroused from our lethargy, and look at our real condition. We cannot but be deeply impressed.

1. With a conviction of the worldliness of professing Christians.

The great object of professing Christians in the midst of us seems to be, to become rich. If we should judge from their habitual deportment, we should not imagine that the thought has ever entered their minds, that the providence of God assembled them from various parts of our land, for the purpose of building up his kingdom in this populous city; but simply for the purpose of becoming rich. Though God has said, "they that will be rich fall into temptation, and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition;" yet they "will be rich." Their "chief end" does not appear to be so much "to glorify God and enjoy him for ever," as to obtain and enjoy the world. They "mind earthly things," heartily, supremely, habi-

tually. There is reason to fear that their highest aim is the attainment of wealth. Unlike expectants of glory, they “set their affections on things that are on the earth.” Wealth is the centre of their wishes; the point toward which their desires seem to preserve an invariable tendency. They “lift up their souls unto vanity and pant after the dust of the earth.” You do not find either the young or the old, either male or female, wasting their ardour and exhausting the strength of their affections for the honour of God and the salvation of souls; but their thoughts, their time, their talents, their privileges, are swallowed up in the world. How many who have named the name of Christ, and avouched him for “all their salvation and all their desire,” still “make gold their hope, and say unto the fine gold, Thou art my confidence!” How many who profess to have no portion beneath the skies, live as though wealth were their idol, mammon their God! And while this lamentable fact stares us in the face, does it not demonstrate that something must be done for the languishing, depressed state of the church? Christian brethren, it is this worldly spirit that blights our hopes—that chills religion to the very heart;—that withers your graces—poisons your comforts, and blasts the fair game of your Redeemer’s cause. While this spirit pervades the professing people of God, how can it be otherwise than that there will be few to weep over the woes of Jerusalem?—few who are jealous for her honour, or affected by her reproach?—few who struggle for her prosperity, or are in travail for the birth of her children? In such a state, does not the daughter of

Zion need help from above? We must be hardened, indeed, not to feel her exigency. Where is our hope without a season of “refreshing from the presence of the Lord?”

2. Another evidence of our need of a revival of religion, is the stupidity and indifference of God’s people, in regard to the power of godliness in their own hearts, and the interest of the Redeemer’s kingdom around them.

It cannot be denied, that there are seasons when the people of God in the midst of us, appear to be roused from their languor. But these seasons are so short—so very short—that for the most part we may be said to be in a state of deplorable stupidity. Nor can any thing less be expected from the predominating spirit of the world. The mind is always active. The affections are always placed on some one supreme object. Believers never do, and never can forsake God, while they are in the exercise of supreme love to him. Spiritual declension essentially consists in loving the creature more than the Creator. It is by placing their affections upon the world, rather than God, that his people ever lose sight of the permanent realities of religion. It is by choosing another God before him; it is by wandering after idols, that they ever relax their zeal and become remiss in their duty. And do we not discover decisive evidences of the truth and influence of this principle among ourselves? Who among us appear to realize the importance, to see the beauty, and enjoy the comforts of religion? Who among us appear to “savor the things that be of God” rather than “those that be of men?” Where is that deep and affecting impression of divine objects which is wont to

have an abiding influence upon the hearts and lives of true believers? Ah, brethren! the throb of spiritual life is languid and low. The people of God have become cold and indifferent to all that concerns the interests of the Redeemer's kingdom both within them and without them. They have lost their first love. There is a chilling stupidity that pervades the church. You have forgotten God, and you have forgotten man. You disregard the languor of saints and the impending danger of sinners. Religion has become a dull, languid thing. The sacred flame which once enlightened and warmed, is reduced to a solitary spark; and all fervent, steady zeal for the honour of God and the salvation of souls, seems to have become well nigh extinct. There is not altogether a want of external attention to the word and ordinances; but they are cold and heartless. There is much parade, and show, and noise about religion; this is the fatal deception of our city; but where is its vital energy and ardour? There is a species of religious dissipation in our Christian community, which hardens the hearts of professing Christians, and fortifies the consciences of the impenitent against the arrows of conviction. Both the people of God and the men of the world attend upon the services of the sanctuary, with a portion of the same kind of feeling with which they would attend upon the diversions of the theatre, or listen to an argument at the bar. They hear; but it is a sound which "plays round the head, but comes not to the heart." They are pleased, but not affected; they are interested, but not humbled; they go away sometimes extolling the merit and as often the demerit of the preacher, but seldom steal silently to their closets under the condemning power

of pungent truth. There is an awful blank in our religious duties. There is a something wanting ; and I know not what it is, unless the vital savor is gone; unless the life-giving spirit is fled. "Our leanness! our leanness!" "For the hurt of the daughter of my people am I hurt." "Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there? O, we need his healing power. These desolations must be repaired. The Lord must arise and plead his own cause. I add.

3. Another evidence of our need of the out-pouring of the Spirit of God is our signal abuse of prosperity.

It is but a little time since our city was covered with a cloud. In the recent desolations of our land, we were not exempt from our portion of calamity. But the silver clarion of peace has again vibrated on our ears, and the rich blessings of peace have been again restored in unexampled profusion. Worldly prosperity has been flowing in upon us in deep, wide channels; and all classes of men have been growing rich. But I hardly dare ask, what return has been made to the Father of mercies for these multiplied favors? In "the day of adversity," we began to "consider;" but God has "spoken to us in our prosperity, and we have said, We will not hear." It is a mournful fact, that from the evening the glad tidings of returning peace thrilled the bosom of our city, we have been forsaking God, and God has been forsaking us. As a people, we have from that hour, been making our calculations for time and not for eternity; we have been "seeking our own and not the things that are Christ's." There has been less seriousness, less

attention to religious duties of every kind, less time, if not less property and talent devoted to the Redeemer, than were called forth during the season of our depression and distress.

Do not these things speak a language that is full of meaning? The affecting truth must be told. Prosperity has made us as a people presumptuous and hardened in sin. It has imparted both the power and the disposition to dishonour the God who made us and the Saviour who bought us. Heaven's mercies have only made us worse. The better God has treated us, the worse we have treated him. The more God has done for us, the more we have done against him. The more he regards our prosperity, the more do we disregard his glory.—"Do ye thus requite the Lord, O foolish people and unwise?" How true is that divine axiom, "Let favour be showed to the wicked, yet will he not learn righteousness; in the land of uprightness he will deal unjustly, and will not behold the majesty of the Lord." If unrivalled goodness has no other effect than to harden and stupify; if it does but entrench unbelievers in their rebellion, and increase the languor and enhance the sinfulness of believers; do we not need the humbling quickening influences of the Holy Spirit? The full tide of worldly prosperity seems to have set in with a resistless current. Thousands are floating calmly and imperceptibly upon its surface, and will ere long plunge down the precipice or be drifted beyond the hope of return. It is time to be alarmed. It is time to tremble for the church of Christ. While "the enemy is thus coming in like a flood," must not the Spirit of the Lord "lift up a standard against him?"

It would be easy to protract the lamentable detail of facts which are calculated to show us the indispensable necessity of a revival of religion. I have confined myself chiefly to those that are found among professing Christians, because these are the most alarming. A view of these supercedes the necessity of surveying those which spring up in such rank exuberance, in a less kindly soil. If wicked men “cast off fear and restrain prayer;” if the multitude “make light” of the gospel banquet; if “one goeth to his farm and another to his merchandise;” if some murmur and complain, and all “begin to make excuse;” is it not the natural result of the worldliness and stupidity of Christians? Yes, it is this, that casts so dark a shade over the prospects of the church. It is this, that is the prolific source of mischiefs to the souls of men. It is this, that weakens the strength of Zion, and strengthens the weakness of her enemies. This is the fatal stumbling block over which thousands stumble and fall into the gulph of perdition. It is this that shuts the doors of heaven upon many who might enter in, and that has long stood between God and his blessing upon us as a people. How can it be expected that sinners will hearken to the voice of the Son of God, when saints will not hearken? How can we hope that the world will regard what the church will not regard? “Shall horses run upon the rock, or will one plough there with oxen?” How few will be brought to the saving knowledge of Jesus, unless the Lord revive the languid graces of his own people, and pour out his Spirit upon his enemies? The people of God are so intoxicated by the world, so

stupified by indifference, so oppressed by criminal unbelief, that we need the effusions of his grace. “Evil men and seducers are waxing worse and worse,” and we need help from on high. Dying men are daily descending to the tomb, and we must have help from on high. When I look around upon my audience, and think of the probability that, before the return of another year, many of them will be sinking in the regions of interminable woe, I feel the necessity, the pressing necessity of a revival of religion.

With this view of the necessity of a revival, we are prepared to show,

III. What ought to be done in attempting this great and good work.

Let us not apprehend that we have nothing to do. When Hezekiah attempted to restore the spirit of piety in the kingdom of Judah, he saw that much was to be done, and he had the requisite humility and enterprise to do it. He called upon the Priests to survey the desolations of the Temple; he commanded them to go into the inner part of the house of the Lord and “cleanse it”—and “bring out all the uncleanness” and cast it into the brook Kidron. External cleansings under the old dispensation, were typical of spiritual cleansings under the new. If we would imitate the example of this pious prince, it becomes us to remove every thing from the church, that is offensive to the pure and holy God, and that separates between him and us. The temple must be cleansed. All this worldliness, all this stupidity must be banished. Selfishness, pride, the leaven of malice and hypocrisy, the chilling alienations, the un-sleeping jealousies, the little petty strifes among our-

selves, and the want of harmony among the great body of Christians and Christian ministers in our city, must find no place in the midst of us. Jerusalem must be searched with candles. No dark corner must remain unexplored, but all this filth must be purged away.

But this part of our subject merits more particular consideration. We remark therefore,

1. That one thing which must be done by every church, in order to promote a revival of religion, is to repent of their declension.

This was one of the early measures pursued by the youthful prince of Judah. The spirit of deep humiliation introduced that year of revivals throughout Judah and Benjamin. In surveying the deplorable state of his people, this was the thought that pierced his bosom : “We have trespassed and done that which is evil in the eyes of the Lord our God.” And this was the spirit which pervaded the efforts of Nehemiah, when he attempted to revive the hopes and invigorate the exertions of the Jews in Babylon. He “sat down and wept, and mourned certain days, and fasted, and prayed before the God of heaven,” and “confessed the sins of the children of Israel.”

Christian brethren, if we would be instrumental in promoting a revival of religion, the first step we take, must be to mourn over our departures from God. As a church, we have long been making work for deep humiliation. And we must repent. We must repair to the blood of atonement, that the deep stained sin which so provokes God’s righteous indignation, may be washed away. We must think of our present state, and mourn over it. We must be deeply affected with the

view of Zion's desolations. We must feel pressed and borne down under a sense of our awful sinfulness as a church. We must lament our backslidings. We must break up our fallow ground. We must rend our hearts and not our garments. We must take with us words and turn to the Lord. Like the royal suppliant, we must bow in the dust before God, and say, "Have mercy upon us, O God, according to thy loving kindness; according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot our transgressions. Wash us thoroughly from our iniquity, and cleanse us from our sin!"—"We have gone astray"—"We have gone astray like lost sheep; "seek thy servants, for we have not forgot thy commandments." If this spirit were discoverable in the professing people of God, we might hope the blessing was near. And this spirit must be felt. Do what we will, without this spirit, God will hide his face. While "we regard iniquity in our hearts, the Lord will not hear us."

Does not the state of the church call for contrition? When I look round upon God's people in this congregation, and in our favoured city; when I see how much their worldliness, indifference and stupidity, weakens the hands of ministers; prevents the access of the Comforter; and retards the progress of a work of grace; I feel justified in urging this duty as of present and immeasurable importance. Be entreated not to resist the motives to immediate repentance. There must not be a closet that does not witness many a heart-felt sigh; nor a bosom that does not swell with grief; nor an eye that does not run down with tears.

2. The people of God must sincerely desire a revival of religion.

The people of God too often disregard the languishing state of the Church, and feel strangely unconcerned, though iniquity abounds, and the love of many waxes cold. But this chilling indifference must be subdued. Christians must be roused from this stupid and unfeeling state of mind, and sincerely desire that religion may revive and flourish. The attention of God's people is not often enough turned toward this important object. There is an intimate connexion between the thoughts and the affections, and the affections and the conduct. It is by warm and lively emotions, that men are prompted to vigorous exertion. It is when we "muse" that "fire burns." Your hearts, believers, your hearts must be engaged in the great object of promoting the interest of the Redeemer's kingdom, and of seeing it promoted in the midst of us. Your ardent desires must be excited, that the decaying graces of saints may be quickened, and that sinners may be turned from the error of their ways to the wisdom of the just. The children of God *must have* sensible and strong desires for the out-pouring of his Spirit, before they will make any humble, believing, patient attempt to secure so desirable an event.

3. To promote a revival of religion, we must sincerely and fervently pray for it.

"Every good and perfect gift cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variable-ness nor shadow of turning." If we enjoy a season of refreshing, it must come from God. "It is not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts." It does not depend on an human arm; it does not rest on any intrinsic efficacy of means; in vain does Paul plant and Apollos water,

unless God give the increase. Not a saint will be quickened, not a sinner converted, without the grasp of an almighty hand.

With this sweet and solemn truth before us, therefore, our eyes must be fixed on the throne of grace. There lies all our help. We must look to God for the influences of his Holy Spirit. We must know and feel, that no exertions of ours will be of any avail, unless God is pleased to take the work into his own hands, and give energy and success to the means he has instituted. We must engage divine power and grace in behalf of his sinking cause. There must be seasons when a revival of religion is the particular object of supplication. It is one thing to pray for the out-pouring of the Spirit of God as a matter of course, and another, to pray for it as a particular, distinct, important, and most desirable object. When Christians have strong and sincere desires for a revival of religion, they will pray especially and fervently for this great blessing in particular. If we would promote a revival, therefore, we must not feel that our obligations to this duty can ever be relaxed. We must pray and never faint. The welfare of Zion must be the great burden of our cry. It is not one evening of prayer, nor one day, nor one week, nor any one particular season of supplication, that secures the blessing; but it is the habitual spirit of prayer, it is the spirit of humble, fervent, persevering supplication. If you set apart one evening, or one day of prayer for this great object, you must not rest satisfied; you must persevere; you must cherish the spirit of holy importunity; you must "wrestle" with God "till the break of day;" you must "weary him," you "must not let him go until he bless you."

Your "heart's desire and prayer to God" for sinners, must continually be, that "they may be saved." You must beg him to "arise and plead his own cause;" to display the riches of his grace and glory in the enlargement of his kingdom, "and give him no rest, till he make Jerusalem a name and a praise in the earth."

4. The people of God must act agreeably to their desires and prayers.

There is a species of religious zeal that is "like clouds and wind without rain." A few empty desires, a few fervent supplications, and no inconsiderable degree of noise, and it is all gone! It was not so with Hezekiah. "Throughout all Judah, he wrought that which was good and right, and truth before the Lord his God." Bold and zealous exertion is indispensably necessary to surmount the obstacles which lie in the way of a revival of pure and undefiled religion. All the corruption of the human heart stands opposed to revivals of religion, whether it be found in good men, or in bad. When good men have fallen into declension, they are averse to every thing that will reform them. They are loathe to be awakened from their stupidity. And can it be expected that the enemies of God will be less averse from being awakened from their slumbers? Good men, when they attempt a revival of religion, need to be prepared for the work by unshaken zeal and resolution. Much is to be done to awaken the attention of Christians; and great love, tenderness, boldness, and zeal are put in requisition for the faithful discharge of this arduous duty. Much is to be done to warn and admon-

nish the self-righteous and secure. Opportunities of pouring instruction into the minds of the thoughtless and ignorant are to be sought and improved. Much is to be done in maintaining the discipline of the church. Much is to be done by parents and heads of families, by ministers, elders and private Christians, to call up the attention of children and youth, to restore the habits of better days, and conduct the rising generation in the straight and narrow way which leadeth to life. Much is to be done for the suppression of error and immorality, and for the advancement of truth and virtue. In the work of reformation no practicable effort ought to be unattempted; but every thing that needs to be reformed, humbly pursued, and vigorously eradicated.

But we may add,

5. In order to promote a revival of religion we must expect it.

“It is good that a man both hope and quietly wait the salvation of the Lord. Hope animates exertion. In every effort, expect to accomplish. If you never expect a revival, you will never enjoy one; and because you will never make those exertions that are necessary to produce it. But if you expect it, you will think of it; you will desire it; you will pray for it; and your efforts will all correspond with this high expectation. If you expect it, when you pray for it, you will pray in faith. You will look to God, and rely on God in all you do. And “this is the confidence you will have in him, that if you ask any thing according to his will, he heareth you.” You will believe that God has promised to impart divine assistance in your duty; and

you will pray in faith that he will fulfil his promise; and thus by the prayer of faith, you will exercise entire dependence on him, for grace adapted to every exigency, and free for every want. The expectation of promised good will buoy up your hearts and animate your exertions. The spirit of revivals will animate your own souls and enkindle the souls of those around you. Your despondency will be turned into hope, and your weakness will become strong. And while you are thus encouraged by promise, and urged forward by hope, “The Lord whom ye seek shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant whom ye delight in, behold he shall come, saith the Lord of Hosts.”

But this leads me to show,

IV. That when the people of God do thus attempt to promote a revival of religion, they may hope to succeed.

With the example of Hezekiah before them, they may derive hope from several distinct considerations.

1. God is able to help them.

This was the hope of the king of Judah. He knew that “in Judah, the hand of God was to give them one heart to do the commandment of the king and the princes, by the word of the Lord.” And this is the hope of the church in all ages of the world. Because God is almighty, his cause shall triumph. The work of reviving the decayed interest of Zion is great and arduous; but those who are engaged in it have the privilege of looking for its accomplishment to him who can do all things. “Son of man, can these dry bones live?”—O Lord, Thou knowest!” What other, than a thought like this, could have ani-

mated the sinking heart of the Prophet while taking this melancholy survey? What ray of hope other than this, could have lighted up these regions of moral desolation?—"O Lord, thou knowest!"—We have no hope, if it be not here. Thanks be unto God, this is enough. God has the hearts of all in his hands. He can awaken the attention of the most secure and thoughtless. All their natural powers are under his direction and control. He can make them fix their minds upon what object he pleases. It is his prerogative to open the eyes of their understanding. He can shew them their lost and perishing condition, and make them feel their need of a Saviour; and he can operate upon their hearts, and "work in them to will and to do of his good pleasure." There is no obstinacy he cannot control; no stupidity he cannot remove; no saint beyond the power of his quickening Spirit; no sinner beyond the reach of his converting grace. To human view there may be insurmountable obstacles to the work;—but "who art thou, O great mountain! Before Zerubbabel, thou shalt become a plain." God can breathe upon the valley of dry bones. When his church is hemmed in on every side, Jehovah Jesus can open a way for her through the sea; he can spread a table in the wilderness; he can bring water out of rock. He can open the heavens and pour down salvation. He can make the wilderness like Eden, and the desert as the garden of the Lord. When Christians undertake to advance the cause of the Redeemer, little as their encouragement may be from every other quarter, they cannot hope for too much from God.

2. They may take encouragement from the object they are pursuing.

It is the cause of God. It is the glorious object for which he made and governs the world. It is the object on which his eye and his heart have been fixed from the early ages of eternity. It is the object, which bore with such infinite weight upon the mind of the Eternal Son, that he clothed himself with flesh—became a man of sorrows and acquainted with griefs—was stretched upon the accursed tree, and bowed in agony his guiltless head. It is the object, for which the Eternal Spirit dwells with men. It is the object, upon which the three sacred persons in the ever blessed Trinity, have fixed their highest and sweetest affections;—it is the glory of God in the salvation of lost men. If you engage in the promotion of this glorious design, you have the confidence that you engage in a cause which meets the approbation of God; and you have a right to hope that God will own and succeed your exertions. “The Lord is with you while ye be with him.” If you sincerely attempt to promote the glory of God in the salvation of sinners and the enlargement of his kingdom, you are “fellow-workers together with Christ;” and how can you fail of your object? If you are interested to promote the same grand design which he is pursuing in all the dispensations of providence and grace, you may be assured your exertions will not be lost, but sooner or later, and in a greater or less degree, will be crowned with success. “The zeal of the Lord of Hosts” centres in the execution of the purposes of his grace. For this his honour is pledged. It is his highest and no-

blest work; and if you are engaged with him to promote it, you may expect his approbation, presence, and blessing.

3. They may hope to succeed, because it is through the instrumentality of their exertions that God designs to build up his kingdom.

In accomplishing the purposes of his grace, the great Head of the church has been pleased to institute a system of means. It is not because he is unable to work without them; but it is his own sovereign pleasure to work by them. He can convert men without his word and ordinances; but he sees fit not to do it. So he can make his word and ordinances effectual to their salvation without the prayers and exertions of his own people; but he sees fit to use them. He does not need their exertions; but he does not work without them. Their prayers and exertions are as indispensable, as the proclamation of the prophet over the valley of dry bones, or the blowing of the ram's horns around the walls of Jericho. Be it so, that they derive all their efficacy and depend for all their success on the sovereign appointment of God; are they the less necessary? We assume it as a principle of permanent importance, and as the spring of all our efforts, that the prayers of Christians for the effusion of the Holy Spirit, and their exertions for the conversions of sinners, are as much a part of the method by which God is pleased to extend the limits of the Redeemer's kingdom, as the dissemination of the Gospel, the existence of a living ministry, or any other institution whatever.

Here is the broad basis of hope, in every effort to promote a revival of religion. When God is about

to pour out his Spirit upon any particular section of his church, he employs his people in the great and important work. He gives them the spirit of deep humiliation for their sins; he animates their hearts with zeal; and he excites strong desires and fervent prayers for the revival of his declining cause. Though he designs to pour out his spirit, yet “for this he will be inquired of by the house of Israel to do it for them.” And the connexion between the means and the end is indissoluble. The husbandman does not more certainly reap in harvest, when with due diligence he cultivates his soil, than the people of God enjoy a season of refreshing from the divine presence, when they continue in the diligent use of the means to obtain it. The spirit which animates their bosoms is the fruit of a divine influence; and God will not check its celestial ardour, by a denial of the blessing. He has moved them to the effort, and he will not blast their expectations, by a denial of the blessing. “Who hath heard such a thing? Who hath seen such things?—For as soon as Zion travailed, she brought forth her children?”—It is not in vain that the church of God cries and strives, and labours, and agonizes for the birth of her offspring. “The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.” It has a prevailing influence with God. The entreaties and tears of his people were all foreseen, and his determinations to regard them, all formed in the ages of eternity. God has never said to the seed of Jacob, “Seek ye me in vain.” “Before they call,” saith he, “I will answer, and while they are yet speaking, I will hear.” The people of God may hope that he will enable them to attain what he

moves them ardently to desire and pursue. There is no reason to believe, either from the intimations of his word, or the analogy of his providence, that he would dispose them to the use of the appointed means, without designing to accomplish the end. In due season, they shall reap if they faint not. O Christians! who can tell but the day of blessing is near? Already, I seem to hear the “sound of abundance of rain.” While bowing your knees like the prophet on the top of Carmel, some herald of mercy may tell you of a “little cloud that ariseth from the sea” which, though now no bigger than a man’s hand, may soon cover the heavens and pour down the refreshing shower. But we may add,

4. In our attempts to promote a revival of religion, we may take encouragement from the fact, that God has so often succeeded the attempts of others.

There would be no end to an enumeration of the instances in which God has appeared for the enlargement of his church, in answer to the prayers and exertions of his people. He appeared in a remarkable manner in favour of Hezekiah and his devout confederates. To human view, there was very little ground to hope for success; but in the strength of omnipotence they boldly attempted the arduous design, and the hand of the Lord was with them. Time would fail me to mention Asa, Josiah, Ezra and Nehemiah, John the Baptist, and the disciples at Jerusalem, who were permitted to behold the abundant success of their exertions for the welfare of Zion. The various instances of the outpouring of the Spirit which we have enumerated in a preceding part of our discourse, were all in answer to

prayer. The night preceding the great out-pouring of the Spirit at the church of Shotts, in Scotland, in the year 1630, was set apart by the people of God in that place, as a season of prayer. It may be questioned, whether the history of the church furnishes an instance of united, vigorous, humble, persevering supplication for the effusion of the Holy Ghost, where the attempt has not been owned and blessed.

The present is a day in which this observation is remarkably verified. In our own land, the blessing has trodden close upon the heels of effort. Scarcely an exertion has been made, upon ever so small a scale, which has not been *speedily* crowned with a greater, or less degree of success. Cast your eyes over the various sections of the church, and wherever you find the people of God trembling alive for the interests of Zion; there you find Zion herself rising from the dust and putting on the garments of strength and salvation. Wherever you find the people of God deeply impressed with a sense of their need of a revival, and anxiously desiring it; there, the thoughtless begin to shake off their indifference; there, sinners become weak and saints become strong. Shall I call your attention to scenes which we ourselves have witnessed? Three or four times within three years past, we have appeared to be just on the eve of a revival. And you will bear me witness that those were seasons of deep reflection, and fervent prayer. Short and transitory as they were, the amount of blessing far transcended the effort; and let it be recorded, that the most of those, who from

time to time, have been added to our communion, date their impressions of the importance of personal godliness from those seasons of short, though general solemnity. So it ever has been, and so it ever will be. God is “not a man that he should lie, nor the son of man that he should repent.” He has so visibly smiled upon the pious exertions of his people, that they may always hope for his blessing, when they are sincerely and steadfastly engaged to promote a revival of pure and undefiled religion.

Thus, my brethren, you have seen what a revival of religion is—the necessity of such a revival among ourselves—what ought to be done in attempting this great and good design—and the reasons we have to believe that we may succeed in the attempt. Such are our wants; such our duty; such our hopes. It is under the weight of such considerations that we urge you to begin another year. Time is passing away. The season of revivals, the day of grace will soon be over. We live within the empire of the King of Terrors. “It is appointed unto men once to die.” From the fatal hour of the first apostacy, every passing year has been conducting its millions to the tomb. How multiplied the trophies of the Dread Destroyer! “How populous, how vital is the grave!” How many are this year, to be summoned from the proud height of their expectations to the dark and narrow house! How many favoured schemes of enjoyment are this year, to be frustrated! How many scenes of long and eagerly anticipated happiness are this year, to be overshadowed by the darkness of the grave! How

many are this year to give up their last account! When I look around me, and anticipate the awful events which another year will disclose; when I contemplate the solemn truth, that with many of my audience, the scenes of time, the day and means of grace will come to an end this year; and many who now hear me, will this year, become the inhabitants of boundless Eternity; I am ready to ask, Must another year pass away without a revival of religion? Christian brethren, we must awake! You see that it depends on you, whether this year shall be a year of revivals, or a year of barrenness and stupidity. If any of us should be spared till another New Year's day, and could we then be permitted to look back upon the year, as a year when the hand of God had been signally visible, and his grace and glory signally manifested in behalf of this part of his kingdom, what an animating review! what a joyful day! O my bosom heaves to think it possible! My heart beats high with hope to be allowed the privilege of viewing it probable. My eye kindles with joy to anticipate it as certain. And is it not possible? Is it not even probable? And what prevents its being certain, but our stupidity, indolence, and unbelief? Let not that day reproach us. Come, brethren, shake off that spirit of indifference and inactivity, and pour forth the cause of the Redeemer. You may lose all anxious regard for the honour of God, and all tender solicitude for the souls of men; you may remain stupid and slothful; but your negligence will hedge up the way of life, and people

the world of perdition. If this much-loved portion of God's vineyard does not become like the barren heath; if it does not continue to be parched with the droughts of summer and desolated by the winds of autumn; you must water it with your prayers; you must enrich it with your tears. Though you are entirely dependent on God; though every effort will be fruitless without his blessing; yet you have as much encouragement to act, as though success were depending on your exertions alone. With what freedom, with what boldness, with what constancy, with what full assurance of faith ought you to approach the throne of grace for dying sinners. Let there not be a child of God among us who does not feel his obligation to this duty. Let the old and the young, let male and female, let rich and poor unite their hearts in this glorious work. It is worthy of remark, that in the places where God has been pleased during the last year, to pour out his Spirit, *the exertions of pious females* have been abundantly blessed. The prayers, the visits, the varied efforts of females may do much, very much. It is time, ye disciples of Immanuel, that *your* exertions for the Redeemer's kingdom, were called forth in a more decided character. Let the female members of this church be formed into little circles for prayer; let not a week pass without seeing five or six of you assembled in different parts of the congregation, and lifting up your voices in the name of the great High Priest of your profession for the effusion of the Holy Spirit. "Ye that make mention of the name of the Lord, keep not silence, and give him no rest till he make Jerusalem a praise in the earth."

Let us bear this subject upon our hearts. Let us bear it into our closets. There let the sacred fire be kindled, that shall burn deep, and last long. There, let us bear it together. It must be no divided, no partial effort. It is not the way to promote a revival, for any of God's dear children to hang back in this magnanimous enterprise. There, let us bear it now. It is not the way to promote this good work, to set down and feel that you must wait God's time. This slothful spirit is the bane of the Christian church. The pretence of waiting God's time is but a miserable excuse for doing nothing; and is, in reality, nothing less than asking God to wait yours. There, let us bear it with hope. It is not the way to advance this glorious object, to say, we have no right to expect it. Expect it you may; expect it you must. Already the Redeemer waits to call the church from her obscurity; to cause the "day to break and the shadows to flee away." I am sensible that I say very little, when I say the importance of this subject is not half-realized. Would to God it were, by every minister of the gospel—by every church—by every private Christian in our city! "Then would our light break forth as the morning, and our health spring forth speedily, and our righteousness should go before us, and the glory of the Lord should be our reward!" Look, brethren, look down the long descent of future ages. Draw aside the veil and take one glance at immortal glory, one glance at everlasting burnings, and then tell me what you think of revivals of religion. O *now*, for some fellowship with the Saviour in his unwearied exertions, in his prayers and tears, in his agony and bloody sweat for the salvation of men!

But I ought not to conclude my discourse, without one word to you, beloved hearers, who are still strangers to the grace of God. You have been permitted to live another year. It has been a year of revivals all around you, but in the holy sovereignty of God, we as a city, and as a congregation, have been passed by. And the consequence of this lamentable fact is, that *you* are left to begin another year without God and without hope in the world. Forbearing mercy has passed the limits of another year, and is almost exhausted. This year, you begin to set your faces toward the grave. Oh! who can tell but the mandate is gone forth, and some lingering illness, some acute disease, some fatal providence is at the door to cut thee down! You may cherish the vain presumption, that you have many years to come; but the fond expectation will not ward off the shafts of the destroyer. That bloom shall fade; that sprightliness shall languish; that vigour shall decay. You shall be “cut down as the grass, and wither as the green herb.”

“Each moment has its sickle, and cuts down
“The fairest bloom of sublunary bliss.”

You may procrastinate the work of repentance; but death will not procrastinate the work of desolation. You may delay to obey the divine commands; but death will not delay to execute the divine commission. O what momentous consequences hang upon the brittle thread of human life! Think, beloved friends, think what it will be to enter this year, upon the untried scenes of eternity! Will it be to be delivered from an evil and distracted world, and be at rest

with God? Will it be to sin and weep no more? Or will it be, to enter upon a world of woe; there, to rest not day nor night; there, to weep, and wail, and gnash your teeth? And so soon, fellow-sinner? Must the door of hope be closed this year? It is in my heart to wish you all a happy New Year; but O, what a year will it prove to you, if this year place you beyond the reach of mercy!