

THREE GREAT AWAKENINGS IN AMERICA

A HISTORICAL ACCOUNT OF THE GREAT MOVES OF GOD IN AMERICA

Will American hear this call? Is it possible for America to experience another great Awakening? Yes, it is. But she will have to meet the requirements that God has set out in Holy Scriptures: "If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways: then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land." - Greg Gordon

RELIGIOUS AWAKENINGS

America as a nation has experienced many moves of the Spirit of God in her history. These times of "religious excitement" and revival are times when God draws near to His people and there is a "special" tangible sense of His working in the midst of men. This is nothing new but apostolic experience being revisited as God never changes and His economy never does either. Webster defines the word "awakening" as "an act or moment of becoming suddenly aware of something." Great Awakenings can be defined as those times where the presence of God becomes manifest to an entire nation and thus people everywhere suddenly become aware of God. Everything changes with a nation that experiences revival on this scale including law, government, history and literature. During these times of renewed devotion and attention to God there are many souls that are brought into vital relationship with Christ. Each awakening is characterized by the men that God uses as instruments to show the truths of Scripture afresh to the people of a nation. The Church historian Jay Rogers stated: "Although leaders of the First Great Awakening, such as Edwards, John Wesley, George Whitefield and Gilbert Tennant, did

not claim to have originated the move of God known as the First Great Awakening, their names are so associated with the event that historians often imply that they were the cause of it.”

THE FIRST GREAT AWAKENING

One of the men that God began this first great Awakening with was the godly Jonathan Edwards from North Hampton, Massachusetts. Edwards desired to have the people in his congregation become more devoted to God in serious considerations of the fear of God and the judgments of God. He sought to see the apathy and lukewarmness purged from his people thus he began to pray and fast for the entire week and the Lord gave him the message during that time to preach titled: “Sinners in the hands of a Angry God.” The next sabbath when Edwards delivered this message it shook the entire congregation in as much so that people clinging to the pillars of the church and cried out “mercy” for they felt as though they were sinking into the pits of judgement and hell as he spoke. At the same time the apostolic Whitefield was in America from England preaching and gathering crowds of tens of thousands to hear the preaching of the new birth with force and unction. Through these masses of penitent sinners seeking the face of God there was visible change and great results from their coming in contact with God. Edwards shares on the change of society around him during this time: “There has remained a more general seriousness and decency in attending the public worship. There has been a very great alteration among the youth of the town with respect to reveling, frolicking, profane and unclean conversation, and lewd songs. Instances of fornication have been very rare. There has also been a great alteration among both old and young with respect to tavern haunting. I suppose the town has been in no measure so free of vice in these respects for any long time together for this sixty years as it has been this nine years past.” Someone has spoken of these great awakenings and said: “the course of the entire nation was so distinctly transformed that even hardened skeptics could not deny it.” Oh for times such as this where national sins such as: sodomy, drunkenness, abortion, adultery, fornication are things once again shunned and forsaken by the majority of society!

THE SECOND GREAT AWAKENING

The second great Awakening in American history was of similar breadth and manifestation as the first. The second great Awakening exerted a lasting impact on American society, more than any other revival. While its fervor abated, it left a legacy of many established churches, and social reform. The Second Great Awakening was ignited by the preaching of James McGready, a Presbyterian, in the area of Logan

County, Kentucky, a community that Peter Cartwright deemed "Rogue's Harbor." The preaching of McGready and others touched a nerve, however, and at a Camp Meeting at Red River the ground was "covered by the slain." "Their screams for mercy pierced the heavens...[and] the most notorious profane swearers and Sabbath-breakers [were] pricked to the heart." James Finely a methodist circuit rider speaks of the revival: "The noise was like the roar of Niagara. The vast sea of human beings seemed to be agitated as if by a storm. I counted seven ministers, all preaching at one time, some on stumps, others in wagons and one standing on a tree which had, in falling, lodged against another. ...I stepped up on a log where I could have a better view of the surging sea of humanity. The scene that then presented itself to my mind was indescribable. At one time I saw at least five hundred swept down in a moment as if a battery of a thousand guns had been opened upon them, and then immediately followed shrieks and shouts that rent the very heavens." God was clearly manifest to many and mass conversions were very normal in whole villages and towns as circuit riders came through. May God once again come in such power that those that the mouths of the wicked will be shut and the name of God praised among all.

THE THIRD GREAT AWAKENING

The third great Awakening started with a 48 year old business man Jeremiah Lanphier who began work as an urban missionary for the North Dutch Reformed Church in July, 1857. Later that same year the New York stock market crashed and the prayer meetings overflowed with people who desired to seek God. Within six months 10,000 people were gathering daily for prayer in numerous places throughout New York. Key figures such as Henry Ward Beecher were preaching to crowds of over 3000 people was common place. The historian J. Edwin Orr wrote: "The influence of the awakening was felt everywhere in the nation. It first captured great cities, but it also spread through every town and village and country hamlet. It swamped schools and colleges. It affected all classes without respect to condition . . . It seemed to many that the fruits of Pentecost had been repeated a thousand-fold . . . the number of conversions reported soon reached the total of fifty thousand weekly." Other major cities also developed prayer meetings. It was accounted of the revival that "the form of worship was always the same: any person might pray, give a testimony or an exhortation, or lead in singing as he or she "felt led." Although pastors such as Beecher often attended and lent their enthusiastic support, laypeople provided the leadership. What impressed observers, and the press, was that there was no fanaticism, hysteria, or objectionable behavior, only a moving impulse to pray. Little preaching was done. As the people gathered they were largely silent; there was a great overarching attitude of glorifying God." Oh that God would send his church to their knees! Hear the exhortation of Brownlow North a man used mightily in the Ulster revival in England: "Oh Christians, go more to the prayer-meetings..." No has ever started Awakening without the desperate prayers and pleadings of the Church for God to draw near once again.

A FOURTH AWAKENING?

Will there be a fourth Awakening? Will God draw close to His people again in reviving power to transform a nation that it will honor and please God again? Someone stated this about these Awakenings: "Enemies of faith cannot deny the reality of these Awakenings, but they can try to conceal the historical evidence. Sadly, most public school textbooks contain little about the First Great Awakening, and reveal nothing of the Second and Third Great Awakenings." And therefore we see that America is trying to hid and ignore the wonderful workings of God in her midst. Bill Bright the founder of Campus Crusade for Christ shared these startling words: "It is sobering to realize that we are no longer "one nation under God." And, unless America turns back to Him as a people, there is no way our country can survive. Rome was the mightiest empire to rise in the history of the world. But it decayed morally until civil disobedience broke out on a massive scale. Rome became so weak that she fell prey to uprisings within and to the barbarian hoards without. These are warnings that God will not tolerate sin. Throughout Scripture, God has made His message clear: "If you obey Me, I will bless you. If you disobey me, I will discipline you. And if you continue to disobey Me, I will destroy you."

Will American hear this call? Is it possible for America to experience another great Awakening? Yes, it is. But she will have to meet the requirements that God has set out in Holy Scriptures: "If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways: then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land." I would have you see three things from this Scripture. Firstly God says "my people" not the politicians or vile sinners or religious cults but "my people." These "people" are the people of God, blood bought and born again who in them dwells the presence of Christ Himself. Now secondly notice it says "If"! God is waiting for His Church to "humble" herself. God is waiting for His Church to "pray." God is waiting for His Church to "seek His face." The first great Awakening started with Edwards who had a humble desire for God to revive his congregation. The Second Great Awakening was ignited by the preaching of James McGready, burdened for the restoration of the Church. The third great Awakening start with Jeremiah Lanphier to pray for the condition of American and the Church and humbly started a lunch prayer meeting. Hear the words of Bill Bright again: "I believe God wants to spare our nation and am confident that He is going to send a great spiritual awakening to America and the world. God is touching the hearts of many influential Christians across our land, as He has touched mine. He is convicting His people-persuading them of their sin and the sins of the country-in preparation for the coming revival." Has he touched your heart today with this desire to see God send another great Awakening? Andrew Gih said: "God's time for revival is the very darkest hour, when everything seems hopeless. It is always the Lord's way to go to the very worst cases to manifest His glory." may the Holy Spirit open your heart to realize the utmost need or revival! It is our only hope today. Oh may we see another Awakening!