

Preparing the Ground for Revival

- J. Edwin Orr

"See, I have this day set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, to build, and to plant" (Jeremiah 1:10).

Of this six-fold commission, four injunctions are destructive and only the latter two are constructive. "To build and to plant" surely a great work. But it had to be preceded by a rooting-out and a pulling-down, destruction and demolishing. Surely this sounds drastic! Yet it was very necessary, as the historical background shows. The Jewish kingdom had become overgrown with weeds, overbuilt with traditional superstructures. They had to go first. Some iconoclasm was necessary. Some destruction was required.

Let us look in the garden for a parable. We walked round a beautiful garden which occupied a former piece of waste land. The gardener showed us round. "Those are beautiful roses," we said to him. "I planted them," replied the gardener, with justified pride. "What a beautifully-cut hedge," we remarked next. "I trimmed that," he said. "Who is responsible for that lovely Sweet William border?" Again the gardener smiled and claimed the credit. We passed on, thinking to ourselves that this gardener had created a grand testimony to his skill in gardening.

At the garden gate, we found an old fellow watching a smoking heap of refuse. "What have you been doing?" "Working at the garden," he said. "Well, then, what have you to show for your labor?" "Nothing, Sir," he replied. "Then you cannot have been working!" We told him. "Sir," he asserted. "When we came here, this garden was a piece of waste land, overgrown with weeds, full of stones and sand, swampy in one corner, and pretty hopeless all round." We got interested. "Well sir," he went on,

"I broke up the land, and I destroyed the weeds, and dug out the stones, and carted away the sand, and it was my job to drain the swampy comer." We listened with growing appreciation. "I am saying nothing against the other fellow who planted the garden. He did his job well. But where would his planting come in if I hadn't first rooted out and destroyed the weeds?" Both men's labor was necessary, but the rooting out and destruction of weeds preceded the planting of flowers and shrubs.

Let us remember the first work of rooting out the weeds and utterly destroying them. One of the great weaknesses of many forms of ministry today is the attempt to sow good seed among thorns. The thorns generally continue springing up, and the seed is choked thereby, despite the good intention of the human sower. Seed sown in a prepared ground requires only the action of the elements to produce fruit in season. Seed sown by the wayside, or in stony places, or among thorns, will have its prospects of life severely threatened almost immediately. Likewise, changing the mode of illustration, a Christian who is in proper relationship with God is generally hungry for the great truths and affirmations of the Gospel. A constructive message is then not only desirable, but necessary. Good food, the finest of the cream of the wheat of the Gospel of Christ, is eagerly assimilated by the Christian who lives in harmony with God.

Yet all Christians are not in proper relationship with their Lord. The present obvious dearth of revival is largely due to the fact that the majority of Christians are out of touch with the source of Divine power. Even at conventions, the first work needed is to get things put right in the lives of those attending. To give a sick stomach an overdose of cream is to risk indigestion. Even a sick stomach prefers the taste of cream to the flavor of the bitter medicine. Still the bitter medicine is necessary, and it does not prevent the enjoying and digesting of good food afterwards-rather it creates the actual appetite of good health, which is quite distinct from the false cravings of indigestion.

For instance, the glorious message of the position of every believer in Christ is a comfort to many souls. Yet it cannot bring much blessing to a stubborn Christian living in disobedience and conscious sin. He needs to act on the teaching of repentance and confession and cleansing FIRST, and then he may comfort himself with other truths. I heard once of a church which had the cream of doctrine given within its walls, week in, week out. Judging from the quality of uplifting ministry given there, one would have expected to find the church members on the highest heavenly plane. But in this instance, they had a church quarrel which resulted in the bread and wine being spilled in a scuffle, and the police were called in to restore order. They obviously needed more than cream. Medicine was wanted badly. Positional truth cannot be profitably taught until conditional teaching has had its effect. Cast no pearls before swine. So great is this problem, that when the preacher strikes out against sin among believers and urges purity of life, critics cry "Introspection," and some insist that he is trying to divert the eyes of the people away from Christ towards self and shortcomings.

It was my happy experience once, to speak at a great convention well-known in England. It was arranged with the council members that if blessing came through in the degree hoped for, I would be at liberty to continue for double the time. Beginning with destructive ministry, the Lord used His word to create deep conviction of heart. The place was thronged. Christians were stirred to confession and repentance, and many souls were saved.

By contrast, I was speaking at another convention, not so far away. It was a convention of good standing. I felt led to speak first of the shortcoming of believers and the need of getting right before enjoying the good things of the feast. The next speakers seemed to doubt the worth of such a method, and their message seemed to be: "You are complete in Christ, so don't worry about these trifles. God accepts you in the Beloved, and you needn't mind." For days there was that cross-

current of message. I believed with all my heart in the truth of their message, but I thought that the time was unripe for its application.

With a burdened heart, I prayed for clear guidance regarding continuing my message. The Lord put a text, a "new" text for me, into my heart, and I preached it. Before I preached it, a speaker dwelt on the glorious promises of God, promises meant for obedient children. Then followed my opportunity. "Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God" (2 Cor. 7:1). It gave the connection at last, but we had no great revival. It drove home many truths to me. Let us comfort one another with the grand truths of our position in Christ. But let us not make excuse by saying that our "completeness" in Him permits us to wink at known sin.