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TIMES OF REFRESHING.

(A Sermon by the Rev. John Mack, of Red River.

Acts iii. 19,—“When times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord.”

It is possible that the Apostle has his eye specially directed to the glorious period of our Lord's second coming, to be glorified in his saints, and admired in all them that believe. Then, indeed, shall those who have repented, and been converted, and have had their sins blotted out, enjoy times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord. “Then the dead in Christ shall be raised to life, and the living in Christ shall be changed, and both shall be caught up together in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air; and so shall be for ever with the Lord.” “Then shall they see him as he is, and therefore, shall be like him.” Then he shall make them full of joy with his countenance—his very presence shall fill them with gladness, “for in his presence is fulness of joy, and at his right hand are pleasures for evermore.”

But with the usual comprehensiveness of Scripture language, it may embrace all such manifestations of God's special grace as are from time to time vouchsafed to men, to enliven their spirits, to melt their hearts, and to lead them to devote themselves unreservedly to God, or, if still in a state of nature, to awaken them, and bring them to the Saviour. It is in this latter view that we purpose to consider the words at present.

In discussing the subject thus indicated, we shall.

I. Inquire into the nature, character, and effects of such times, “of refreshing from the presence of the Lord,” &c.

II. Whether there is not great need for such times.

III. What means are to be employed in order to secure such times, &c.

I *Times of Refreshing*.—There is something to excite pleasing sensations in the very sound, yet something that implies an imperfect state. It suggests weariness and rest,—hunger and strengthening food,—a dry and thirsty land, and springing fountains of cool limpid water, weakness and discouragement of mind, and some good word to cheer and strengthen. It is in your mind associated with all you felt on some past occasion, when you were relieved from bodily weakness or pain, and mental or spiritual depression—and restored to strength, and cheerfulness, and joy.

Times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord are seasons of spiritual awakening and revival—of awakening as regards unconverted sinners—of revival as regards those who are already subjects of divine grace. It is the Spirit of God that works effectually in the hearts of men, whether to awaken them out of nature's sinful sleep, or to re-invigorate their languishing spiritual affections and feelings, and it is, therefore, by the outpouring of the Spirit of God that such blessed times are brought to pass. Hence in our text these times or seasons of refreshing are said to be from the presence of the Lord. The residue of the Spirit is with Him, and out of the exhaustless treasure and store of divine grace laid up in His presence, He pours out copiously for the refreshment of His heritage when it is weary.

When we speak of times of refreshing or revival, we have the idea a general striving up on the subject of religion.—If men begin to think much more on that subject than formerly;

—if a deepening concern about their souls has seized on the minds of numbers; if many sinners are aroused from their insensibility, and forced in spite of their pride and stubbornness to ask eagerly after the way of salvation, and when conversions to God begin to be greatly multiplied, and when the saints feel their languishing graces revived, their doubts removed, and their peace, and love, and hope, and joy abounding—then we speak of the state of things as a time of revival, or, “refreshing from the presence of the Lord.”

Now, we believe, that from the beginning the Spirit of God has been working in the hearts of men, always beginning and carrying on the work of grace in some heart or other, and that, therefore, God has never been without a witness. But then from the history of the Church it clearly appears that it is His plan, from time to time, to come forth with extraordinary power and visit His Church with peculiar displays of his grace and love Revivals, although they may have a modern name, are not to be discarded as a mere piece of modern delusion, enthusiasm, or hypocrisy. We have instances both in Old Testament and New Testament times, and also in the history of more recent ages. We might refer to the deep religious interest experienced in the days of Moses, and of Joseph, of David, and the earlier part of the reign of Solomon, and more especially, to what took place in the days of Hezekiah, to show that in these ancient days, before the coming of our Lord, the Church of God was not without her seasons of peculiar blessing.

And then, when we come to New Testament times, we find a marked revival in the days of John the Baptist. See what a deep interest then possessed men's souls, and how they flocked to hear the faithful, and sometimes awful words of this Elijah revived, to confess their guilt and repentance, and to receive, at his hands, the seal of baptism.

And more wonderful still was the work of God, on and after the day of Pentecost. See three thousand awakened—convinced in heart converted to the Lord and baptised on one day. See five thousand crowding to the Saviour's feet on another occasion, and multitudes at other times besides. And then see what a high and unworldly conduct the converts exhibited, and you will see that here is a revival indeed.

And if we come to later times we shall find witnesses, in the remarkable work of God at the reformation in Germany, Switzerland, France, England, Scotland, Holland &c., under the preaching of the remarkable men raised up by God for His special work in those days.

At a somewhat later period still, in Scotland, there was the wonderful work under Welsh, Dickson, Livingstone, and yet a century later in England, Scotland, and America, under Whitefield and the two Wesleys, and Jonathan Edwards; and in the present century at Kilsyth, and many other places, and now for many months past, what marvellous doings have been witnessed in the United States, which even those who have gone to see them, with great doubts and strong prejudices, have been compelled to confess, are the pure and undoubted work of God. Happy the cities, the settlements, and Churches, who are thus favoured with times of refreshing. Happy the ministers privileged to be instruments in God's hand. Happy the souls who plentifully partake of this extraordinary grace. And it is well worth remarking how beautifully this mode of dealing with men, is adapted to the wants and weaknesses of this race. Not only do spiritual affections become languid and require to be freshened with new life, but even the very ideas and impressions of a spiritual and eternal world wax dim upon the soul, through the lapse of time, and the influence of

the world, and something extraordinary is required to renew these—some fresh testimony that there is a God and an eternity. It must be familiar to all, how events and appearances, however stupendous in themselves, lose their impressions by such regular recurrence as renders them familiar to our minds. What, for instance, can present a more magnificent spectacle than the passage of the sun through the heavens on a clear summer day, and so familiar are we with the spectacle, that we scarcely think of it. It is a part of the regular operation of nature, and passes unobserved. But suppose some day the sun should appear of double size, or that another sun of equal brilliancy were to traverse the heavens from north to south, then all would be struck and filled with amazement—it may be with alarm—for then it would appear that there is some power superior to nature that can interfere with its regular course when he will. God would thus be brought near. So it is in spiritual things. However mightily the work of God might be carried on, men would soon begin to forget God in it, and to attribute the deep and earnest religious feelings prevailing, to natural causes, and so something higher still would be needed to prove that the work was of God. Much more is thus needed in a time of comparative indifference, to bring palpably before men's minds that there is a God and a spiritual world. Men require something uncommon to stir them up from time to time. Our private devotions would be more ready to sink into coldness and apathy were they not quickened by the public services of the sanctuary, and the Sabbath services would also degenerate were we not stirred up by the occasional occurrences of the Sacramental services, so God's ordinary dealings require the aid of these seasons of revival.

The particular effects of such a gracious visitation are just such as we might have expected by considering the circumstance of the case. Sinners are awakened to a sense of their sin and danger. Stout stubborn hearts that have withstood all the ordinary means and appliances now begin to yield and give way, and proud spirits that would have scorned to ask about salvation, come for instruction, and with deepest earnestness cry to God, and ask your prayers in their behalf. You see a deep concern prevailing the mass of the people—no longer that of mere pretence—nor that of intellectual curiosity about scripture doctrines, but an awful earnestness and engagedness of mind about the salvation of the soul. This is now seen to be the one thing needful. Then prayer is indeed the cry of the heart to God. Then is there wrestling and struggling in earnest; prayer has force and energy in it. “The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force.” Opportunities are then eagerly embraced, and the hearer is far more intent on getting something for his soul, than on criticizing the sermon either for censure or admiration. Then does the world sink in men's esteem, and then is the Saviour magnified. Then does private conversation take the way of godliness, and ministers can preach with unction and power. Then many sinners are turned to God, and conversions multiplied. And it is not only among worldlings and sinners that such seasons have their effect; they are times of special refreshing to the people of God. You have seen a time of drought when grain, and grass, and flowers, and every growing thing had become yellow and stunted, and was beginning to hang its leaves and wither for lack of moisture, but at length a thunder cloud gathered, and rain fell, and all flourished green again, so it is when “times of refreshing come from the presence of the Lord.” Then spiritual affections which had been languid are kindled into new life. Then depressing doubts and fears