

Psalm-Singers'  
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Psalm-Singers'

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condensed form, and they are well adapted both for missionary work and for the upbuilding of the people of God in the Divine life.

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## THE PSALMS IN REVIVALS AND EVANGELISTIC WORK.\*

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If the Psalms will not do for revivals and evangelistic work, they should be cast out. If they do not in revivals and evangelistic work head the list, if they are not, for these purposes, as superior as God's Word is superior to man's, let them go!

The subject assigned requires a Scriptural view of revivals and of evangelistic work. These two are not the same, though the terms are, at times, used interchangeably.

I. *The Psalms in Revivals.*—The meaning of a revival is, "the act of being revived; a restoration to life; a recovery as from languor or depression; renewed activity; special interest in, and attention to, religious services, duties, and the subject of personal salvation; to bring to life after apparent death; to revive one's spirit, courage, heart." Definitions, taken from standard authorities, show that revivals contemplate the quickening of a discouraged, languid, dead Church. Among the seven of the Apocalypse, the Church of Sardis seems to fall within the description—"Thou hast a name that thou livest and art dead. Be watchful and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die." God's call to the Church of Sardis was for a revival of religion, "for recovery from languor and depression," "for special attention to services, and duties, and personal salvation," "to bring to life after apparent death." *This is a revival.*

A genuine revival is the gracious work of the Holy Spirit. There are revivals and revivals. Some are produced by the magnetism of the speaker, by working on the emotions, by incorrect views of God, of Christ, of sin, of death, of hell, by some heresy which leads to fanaticism. A true revival is the work of God. It comes down, instead of being "worked up". It produces conviction of sin, sincere repentance and confession, longing for forgiveness, purified heart, endeavour after new obedience. It contemplates a soul, a church, seeking God according to the terms of the Covenant of Grace.

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\* Read by Rev. James Kerr, D.D., Glasgow, Scotland.

These two questions may be proposed—(1) Can the Psalms be used in this work? (2) Are the Psalms better than all else for this work?

As to the first, that the Psalms can be used in revivals, will not be denied. Churches which use hymns will admit this. If hymns had not been at hand, if they had not been written, if they had not been introduced into the Church, the use of the Psalms in revivals had been cordially accepted. The Church knew practically nothing of anything but Psalms in worship through all the Old Testament history, and through all the New Testament history, barring the last few hundred years. Hymns were not used authoritatively in any of the Reformed Churches until about 1765. They were not used to any considerable extent until within the memory of men now living.

This being an accepted fact, let it be observed that some of the most remarkable revivals the Church has ever seen were in Old Testament times. When Israel came up out of the sea, they sang an inspired song. When God delivered David and his men from the hand of Saul, their discouraged hearts were revived in the words of the 18th Psalm. In the revivals under Asa, Jehoshaphat, Josiah, and other kings, the Psalms were used. As all Israel gathered at Jerusalem for the feast, they were revived, encouraged, lifted up, as they went "from strength to strength", singing the Songs of Zion. These feasts were revivals; and the Psalms were used, and the Psalms only.

A true revival must have a Scriptural and complete view of God. The Psalms give that view. The hymns do not. A true revival must be based upon a scriptural and complete view of Christ. The Psalms give that view. The hymns do not. A true revival must be based upon a correct view of the law. The Psalms give that view. The hymns do not. A true revival is based upon a correct view of sin, its polluting power, how it is abhorred of God, and punished in awful judgments. The Psalms give that view. The hymns do not. A true revival is based upon a correct eschatology—a Scriptural view of death, the resurrection, immortality, the end of the world, final judgment, and the future state. The Psalms give that view. The hymns, in not a few instances, give a misleading, distorted, unscriptural view. A revival will be deep, lasting, mighty, in proportion as it rests upon the Divine Word. All revivals, of which there is record in the Bible, were Psalm-singing revivals; and these were not in a synagogue, hidden away in some village or mountain hamlet. They were not confined to some city, or to a few cities. But

they were national, and embraced the thousands of Israel in all their tribes. Nothing like them has been seen in New Testament times. In these, in all these, the Psalms and the Psalms only, were used. Will one say, will one dare to say, they were insufficient? Grapes do not grow on thorns, nor figs on thistles. The mighty results—a great nation weeping, supplicating, beseeching God to pardon in His great mercy; razing idol temples, and destroying their priests; separating from defiling relations with the heathen; setting up the worship of the true God in its purity; and renewing covenants—these are not superficial results, but results which show a deep, thorough-going revival.

A great revival took place in Babylon. For many long years God bore with Judah. "The Lord God of their fathers sent to them by His messengers, rising up early and sending; because He had compassion on His people and on His dwelling-place: but they mocked the messengers of God, and despised His words, and misused His prophets, until the wrath of the Lord arose against His people, till there was no remedy." The Scriptures go on to describe the awful judgments which were then visited upon Judah. The recital closes with these significant words, "And them that had escaped from the sword carried he away to Babylon." The remnant of this mighty people, with their beautiful country and their magnificent cities in desolation, with torn flesh, with bleeding feet, with streaming tears, with breaking hearts, toil on to Babylon. Once there, a revival of religion takes place, possibly not right away, but certainly very soon. And what is the vehicle of praise? The Songs of Zion! As deep called unto deep, as waves and billows passed over them, they turned to those old, inspired Songs. The pathos of the scene is touching. They wept when they remembered Zion! They hanged their harps on the willows by the rivers of Babylon. To add to their grief, their captors, for their own delectation, demanded that they sing these famous old Songs. In distress, they answered, "How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land? If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning. If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth; if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy." Here is a genuine revival. There is nothing superficial about it. It has the marks of genuine worth. It goes down into the very soul.

Now, bear in mind, in this revival the Psalms, and the Psalms only, were used. And this is the kind of revival for which the Psalms were written. A superficial, evanescent revival has not reached the boundaries of, much less entered into, these deep things of God. Hymns, like superficial

revivals, are a mixture of orthodoxy and heterodoxy, and wholly fail to express the experiences of a soul under deep conviction of sin, under the wrath of God and impending judgments, and God's beseeching love and forgiveness set forth with Divine certainty.

A reformation is practically a revival in the Church. In the Reformation in Scotland the Psalms, and the Psalms only, were used. It was a revival national in its boundaries, and it established a whole people in the truth. No superficial songs would do. Hymns will not sustain a people as they pass through the throes of reformation when these are accompanied by prolonged persecution. Sentimental songs will not give relief or strength. As they faced the rack, the stake, the dungeon, as they gathered in conventicles to worship, as they fled for life amid the moss-hags, and over moor and mountain, nothing would sustain but the pure, unadulterated, inspired Psalms. And they sang—

"God is our refuge and our strength,  
In straits a present aid;  
Therefore, although the earth remove,  
We will not be afraid."

Such inspired song lifts up, strengthens, gives peace of soul.

A Temperance Revival, called "The Woman's Crusade", occurred in the States about twenty-seven years ago. The women would meet for prayer, beseeching God for help. In one city, at least, when the feeling, the desire, the longing, for Divine assistance and interposition was exceeding great, the use of hymns, with which the meetings had commenced, was discontinued, and the Psalms were used in their stead, emphasizing this—when the revival goes deep enough, nothing short of God's Songs will satisfy! The conclusion is irresistible, viz., when a backsliding, a fallen, a dead Church experiences the renewing influences of the Holy Spirit, she finds the Psalms not only suitable, but necessary, to express her emotions, her desires, her longings, her praise, necessary to cover her new and blessed experience, necessary to express her worship of that God Who forgives sins and restores to His people the joy of salvation.

II. *The Psalms in Evangelistic Work.*—But what is the status of the Psalms in evangelistic work? Are they suitable for this? Are they better for this than hymns? Here, again, a correct understanding of the nature of the work proposed is necessary. The word means, "to instruct in the Gospel," "to convert to Christianity," "to proclaim the Gospel." An evangelist

is one who goes from place to place holding services, with a view of reaching the unchurched and the unsaved. The work really includes all missionary effort ; for the commandment of the Head of the Church is, to go and evangelize all nations.

Once again we say, If the Psalms be not suitable for the work of evangelization, the Church has just ground for complaint, for God commands her to perform a work for which she is not suitably equipped. Can we make this accusation against God? All who introduce hymns do thus accuse God! Are they justified? When we displace the Psalms, used for nearly 3,000 years, saying, "The hymns are better," we sit in judgment on the work of the Head of the Church, condemning it as insufficient, faulty, not so good as man's. If we say that the Psalms can be improved upon in the work of evangelization, we condemn God.

But, be it observed, the Psalms have been used in the greatest evangelistic work the world has ever seen. Not since the history of the Church began has there been such mighty work in reaching men with the glad tidings of salvation, done so effectively, as during the time of the Apostles. They literally went everywhere preaching, evangelizing, organizing churches. In some cases whole towns were brought under the power of the truth ; in some, whole provinces. In nearly every case the devil was full of wrath, and kindled the fire of persecution. The work was tried, whether it was wood, hay, stubble, or genuine gold. Each stone was tested, and cemented with tears, if not with blood. The tremendous power of these mighty evangelizing works does not suffer by comparison with similar efforts at the present day. Indeed, the present is scarcely worthy to be compared with what was done in the first, second, and third centuries.

And yet! and yet!! in all this mighty work, the old Psalms, at which people of this generation look with suspicion, were the vehicle of praise! The ransomed of the Lord returned and came to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads, and their joy was voiced in the songs of "the sweet Psalmist of Israel". Nothing else was used. The Church worshipped God with the Psalms. The converts worshipped God with the Psalms; and like the Psalms, they were strong, noble, God-like. It did not occur to them that the Psalms were insufficient. The evangelizing work was mighty. Kings stopped and considered. Some thought to crush it out by mighty armies and by savage ferocity. But Julian, the last of the heathen emperors, and himself an apostate, drew the arrow which pierced his breast, and hurled it up toward heaven, answering, "The Nazarene has conquered!" Evangelistic work, with the Psalms as the médium of praise, has

exhibited the grandest courage, the most persistent effort, the greatest fidelity, the most glorious results.

The great evangelistic work done in the Apostolic Church was repeated, in part, in the Reformation in Scotland. The Reformation was practically evangelistic work, as it spread through the Three Kingdoms. It was so intense, so powerful, that the Three Kingdoms entered into a Solemn League and Covenant to faithfully serve God, His truth, the interests of souls. The world looked on in wonder. In all this work, which was truly evangelistic, the Psalms, and the Psalms only, were used.

May not these three propositions be accepted—

1. If the Psalms are not suitable for the work of evangelization, God is at fault for not having sooner led the Church to prepare hymns.

2. But God has given a profound demonstration of the suitability of the Psalms for this work in the first three centuries.

3. God has given a second demonstration, but less remarkable, in the evangelization of the Three Kingdoms.

Now, what has served the Church in such glorious and successful evangelization, may not be lightly cast aside as insufficient, even by the Church in the enlightened times in which we live. And yet she has presumed to do so; and she has so criticised God's Songs that some ministers and members, in Psalm-singing Churches, have fallen under the heresy that you cannot do evangelistic work with the Psalms. It is remarkable how we can become befogged on the plainest evidence which Church history can produce. But the fact is unmistakable.

The wrong conclusion arises, in part, from a misconception of what true evangelistic work is. There may be, there often is, superficial work done by the pastor. But this cannot be compared with the superficial work done by popular evangelists. The coming of some of these is a calamity. They have no proper conception of the truth of God. Their message consists largely in exhortation which frequently dissolves into platitudes. Great effort is made to get the popular ear. The meetings are attractive, much as is an amusement hall. Once the meetings close, congregations are about as small as they were before. We do not hesitate to say that much of the so-called evangelistic work of the present day is a travesty on the evangelism of Bible record. God providentially withdraws the Psalms from such associations. You could not keep them in such setting. One or other must give way. Then, there is a popular misconception of the part which praise should have in evangelistic services, based on



a wrong view of the purpose and object of worship. It is customary to "round up" the best singers in a village or town when an evangelist begins services. This he insists upon. In not a few instances, Psalm-singers are "rounded up" into hymn-singing choirs. No inconsiderable part of the service is given over to singing. And the songs sung are not the better class of hymns, but light sentimental songs of the gushing type, and which live about one year, and are then cast over to the rubbish heap. It was Sankey, if our information is correct, who made popular the notion that you can sing the Gospel into men's hearts; and now, all over, you have evangelists attempting to sing men into the Kingdom! Then all are called upon to sing. "Let all sing"! is the loud exhortation. The wicked and unregenerate are pressed into service, and they are made, on this theory, converting instrumentalities! Let it be admitted that some effect is produced. But it is of the anodyne character. It soothes, it charms, but that it converts is yet to be proved. Christ was the Prince of evangelists. There is no record that He went about singing the Gospel. The Apostles went everywhere evangelizing. There is no record that they attempted to soothe men by singing the Gospel. History does not record any great evangelistic work with this characteristic. Indeed, it rests upon a fallacy, if not a great heresy.

There is a striking contrast between the Psalms and the hymns. The former were written by the Spirit of inspiration, and they are for, and professedly for, the saints. They are Songs of Salvation. Their experiences are not such as the world can enter into. Their hopes are foreign to people out of Christ. God gave these Songs for His people to sing, as they "go from strength to strength". The evangelist's view is, Get men to sing and they will repent. God's view is, Repent and you will sing. The one is man's wisdom. The other is Divine. There is no force at man's disposal that will enable him to cause an assembly of unregenerate men to sing the Psalms—that is, for any length of time. They will not do it. Nor could they do it acceptably. "But unto the wicked God saith, What hast thou to do to declare My statutes, or that thou shouldst take My covenant in thy mouth?" (Psalm 50, 16). Their whole life and desires are foreign to sentiments in the Psalms. "And they sung as it were a new song . . . and no man could learn that song but the hundred and forty and four thousand, which were redeemed from the earth" (Revelation 14, 3). The unregenerate cannot honestly sing, "O come, let us sing unto the Lord; let us make a joyful noise unto the rock of our salvation", "Praise the Lord, O Jerusalem; praise thy God, O Zion", "To-day

if ye will hear His voice, harden not your heart ", "Upon the wicked He shall rain snares, fire and brimstone, and an horrible tempest".

No; unregenerate men assembled will not sing these words. The incongruity is so manifest, so patent to all, that the Psalms are cast out and hymns are introduced. The theory upon which the matter proceeds is extra-scriptural, if not positively unscriptural. It is not sanctioned by Scriptural precept, or by Scriptural example. The character of the Psalms argues against it. That it is producing superficial results, so much so that "evangelistic services" are passing, need not be emphasized.

What is needed in this day is a genuine revival, and genuine evangelistic work. Neither of these can be produced with hymns. Superficial, unscriptural methods will produce superficial, unscriptural results. We hold that the introduction of hymns is largely responsible for the deadness in the Church. She has sung, "I want to be an angel, and with the angels sing," until she has lost power with God! Nor will a genuine revival come; nor will there be an awakened interest in true evangelistic work, until hymns, which usurp the place in worship, are cast out, and the Lord's Songs become the glory of His people, Israel. How eloquently the interests of souls appeal to God's people to be obedient to this His commandment, and to use in His worship that, and that only, which He has ordained, viz., the Songs of Zion!



## DISCUSSION.

Rev. Gawin Douglas, Loughbrickland, Ireland, said—Mr. Chairman, it was once said of an American minister who visited this country, that he was a good listener. Now, Mr. Chairman, I am a good listener; and in connection with an organization of this kind, where I find men better able to speak than myself, I am quite pleased to keep my seat. However, in connection with the present Papers there is one idea which, I think, has not been referred to hitherto in this Conference, to which I wish just for a moment to call attention. On the first day of our meetings you will remember that our friend, Dr. Petticrew, in that magnificent Paper of his, established the true theory of all worship, and demolished the opinion of the prohibition theory. But, sir, there is an-