

The Revival That Stopped Contagious Diseases

When the Great Awakening came to Northampton, Massachusetts, in 1735, it had an amazing impact on the entire populace of the city. Not only was there a spiritual impact, but as Jonathan Edwards said, “It was the most remarkable time of health I ever knew.”

The Spiritual Transformation

There was an incredible spiritual transformation of Northampton. Everywhere one went in the town, people were talking about God. Edwards, who was pastor of the Congregational Church in Northampton, said, “The town seemed to be full of the presence of God” (Hyatt, *1726: The Year that Transformed America*, 57).

People came to Christ in droves. The one bar in the town was soon left empty. The town was transformed and Edwards said, “A loose, careless person could scarcely be found, and if there was anyone that seemed to remain senseless or unconcerned it would be spoken of as a *strange thing*” (Hyatt, *1726: The Year that Transformed America*, 57).

Without any emphasis on church growth methods or other human attempts to increase attendance, the church in Northampton filled with those already born again and with others seeking salvation. Edwards wrote:

Our public assemblies were then beautiful: the congregation was alive in God's service, everyone intent on the public worship, every hearer eager to drink in the words of the minister as they came from his mouth; the assembly were in general from time to time in tears while the word was preached; some weeping with sorrow and distress, others with joy and love, others with pity and concern for the souls of

their neighbors (Hyatt, 1726: The Year that Transformed America, 57-58).

The Physical and Mental Transformation

This Awakening also impacted people's health both mentally and physically. We must remember that this was before penicillin and modern vaccines. The only weapons they had against contagious diseases were quarantines, which they called "bills."

Edwards says there were normally several quarantines (bills) put on houses every week. But during the Awakening something wonderful happened. He wrote:

We seemed to be wonderfully smiled upon and blessed in all respects. Satan seemed to be unusually restrained; persons who before had been involved in melancholy [depression], seemed to be as it were waked up out of it; and those who had been engaged with extraordinary temptations, seemed wonderfully freed. And not only so, but it was the most remarkable time of health that I ever knew since I have been in the town. We ordinarily have several bills [quarantines] put up, every sabbath, for the sick persons; but now we had not so much as one for many sabbaths together.

This is even more amazing when we realize that Edwards did not believe in divine healing. As a staunch Calvinist he believed sickness to be sent by God. He never preached a sermon on healing and never prayed for anyone to be healed. He never made any prophetic-healing proclamations.

The Power of a Pure Heart

How then are we to explain this marvelous manifestation of healing and health? I believe it had to do with the purity of the motives of Edwards and his wife, Sarah, in seeking God. They may not have understood some of the doctrines we know

today, but they far surpassed us in their pursuit of holiness and purity of heart before God.

Their prayers for an Awakening were born out of an intense desire to see God's name honored in New England and to see people turn to Christ and be saved. They were not concerned for personal fame, larger offerings or a bigger building. Their motives were pure and Godward.

Edwards was not an entertaining preacher. In fact, he wrote out his sermons and read them in a monotone voice without ever moving from behind the pulpit. He was, however, a person of prayer and was known to spend as much as 11 hours per day in study and prayer.

In response to their fervent prayers for a "revival of religion," God invaded the community with His manifest presence. In His presence, there was health and healing even apart from healing sermons and healing prayers.

What We Can Learn From Them

This should encourage us who preach and teach divine healing. If this could happen with people who did not preach and practice divine healing, how much more should it happen with us. Here is what we can learn from them.

1) **Seek God with a pure heart.** Matthew 5:8 says, "Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God." It is obvious that Edwards and his wife, Sarah, strove to have pure hearts before God. They knew the power of David's prayer in Psalm 139:23, "Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my concerns." Their prayers for an Awakening were not self-serving, but honorable and pure.

2) **Be jealous for the honor and glory of God.** They were grieved and distressed to see the name of Christ dishonored by the spiritual apathy and indifference of the people of their city. They prayed for an Awakening that would turn the hearts

of people to God and ignite in them a desire to serve and honor Him.

3) **Stay focused on Jesus.** Edwards considered this to be the No. 1 sign that a revival is a true work of the Holy Spirit. He wrote, "If the spirit that is at work among a people is plainly observed so as to convince them of Christ, that He is the Son of God ... to beget in them higher and more honorable thoughts of Him, and to incline their affections to Him, it is a sure sign that is the true and right Spirit."

If we can couple their purity of heart with our understanding of faith and spiritual authority, who knows what sort of displays of God's power we might see in the days ahead. {eo}

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