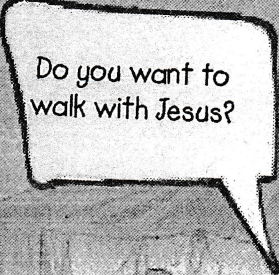


The Age of Revival: The Second Great Awakening

The Meeting

There was a big crowd tonight. Word about Preacher Wheeler had preceded him. The folks over in Fremont were still talking about his revival there. The campfire burned brightly as the tired farmers and merchants sat on benches or on the ground. There was a glow from the torches as the people finished the spirited hymn sing. Deacon Rogers had begun with some mighty praying. Some of the men had even come out of the tavern at the sound of the deacon's urging. As Preacher Wheeler was helped onto the platform, there were cries of "Lord, have mercy! Praise, Jesus!" There were also a couple of hoots from the fringes of the crowd. Ma Haskins shushed old Mr. Cooper, who seldom came to Sunday meetings.

Wheeler's first words thundered out, "Do you want to walk with Jesus?" The crowd responded with loud assents. One of the Johnson girls began to shake as she loudly shouted, "Amen! Amen!" over and over again.



Do you want to walk with Jesus?

"Well, then love your neighbor," Wheeler continued. He spent the next hour and 20 minutes calling for the crowd to work hard, live a pious life, care for the poor, and flee idleness. "Jesus wants you to be saved. He wants you to be delivered from the evil of this world. Do you love Him? Then come forward. Walk right up here and receive the blessings of His hand. Claim your place in the Kingdom." Many of the people came forward. Others were shouting and encouraging each other. The night was electric with excitement. It was a night to remember.

The Age of Revival

The camp meeting described above could have taken place in almost any part of the U.S. around 1800. Revival meetings were part of an awakening to spread the Christian Gospel, especially to the new frontier. In some respects, this awakening to the Gospel was a continuation of the First Great Awakening of the early 1700s. At that time, clergyman Jonathan Edwards had called for personal piety, individual conversion, and the need for community revival. Now Edwards was being rediscovered, and his great enthusiasm was directing many to passionately speak of spiritual renewal with a new vigor.

The Second Great Awakening did not happen by accident. America was adjusting to a new age and the demands it placed upon life. This was an age shaped by the Industrial Revolution and new rational or scientific ways of thinking that challenged church authority. The Pietistic Movement from Europe, which encouraged the demonstration of personal faith and witness, was a leading force for church leaders who were determined to keep God's will at the center of daily life. Revivalist influences continue today in the form of mission festivals and tent meetings, as well as in the efforts of television evangelists.

The Age of Revival Seen in Context

The U.S. Constitution was only 20 years old. The understanding of separation of

church and state was still unclear. Protestant churches were struggling against the rational thought of the Enlightenment that attempted to place scientific thought as the center of truth. There were serious divisions within mainline churches in the young country. The Revival Movement or Second Great Awakening was an effort to reclaim the original Puritan ethic. Revivalists held that personal piety and salvation were demonstrated by hard work and success. This movement used revival meetings to attempt to call and emotionally motivate people to live out this vision.

The writings of Jonathan Edwards were central to leaders who sought to reform both church and society. Many pressures were attacking the church. As the 19th century progressed, the move from a rural farm culture to an urban industrial society, along with Enlightenment thinking and concerns with new immigrants (many who were Roman Catholic), all pointed toward the need for the revival of Puritan ideas.

The Protestant Revival Movement should also be seen in the larger context of the age. It was an ethical response to the culture. This can be seen in many social efforts that grew from it: Sunday schools, temperance (anti-alcohol) concerns, public schools, a new labor movement, prison reform, and the abolitionist movement.

The Revivalists called for a pious morality that remains important in American politics. They also helped to shape the strong reaction against slavery and to define American behavior throughout the century. Their influence continues today as a strong voice in American culture, reflected in ideas about morality, hard work, and reward.

Revival Review

1. The Second Great Awakening was a response to several factors. How did each of the following help create the need for the Revival Movement?

- The Industrial Revolution

- Enlightenment thinking

- Immigration of new Americans

- Westward expansion

- Urbanization (growth of cities)

2. Would you have liked to attend a revival? List major points a preacher might make in a Revivalist sermon.

3. Why might a Revivalist message be popular in today's society?

To Review and Remember

When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near. *Luke 21:28*