

March 2008 Times of Refreshing

What an attractive and inviting phrase that is! It comes from Peter's sermon recorded in Acts 3, where he refers in verse 19 of that chapter to 'when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord'.

The theme of 'spiritual refreshment' is a familiar one in Scripture. To give just two examples: there is the divine promise through Isaiah, 'For I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground' (44:3). And there is the gracious invitation of the Lord Jesus Christ in John's gospel, 'If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink' (7:37). These examples could be added to many times.

If we have anything about us at all as the Lord's people, this matter should strike a strong chord. Why? Surely because we are in constant need of this very refreshment that is spoken of – and not merely spoken of, but actually offered and promised to us. We need refreshment times. We need spiritual refreshing. And we need it 'from the presence of the Lord'. This is not something we work up from below. It must always be something which God sends down from above.

We need these refreshings *in our personal Christian lives*. We know only too well that we are subject to many influences which bring the opposite of refreshment. Satan drags us down. The world clogs us up. The flesh hinders us at every turn. All our spiritual virtues and graces (faith, love, hope, holiness, and so on) are prone to declension. To say that sometimes we feel like 'dry sticks' is an understatement.

We need these refreshings *in our congregational lives*. Does our worship of God (the chief thing that we have been created for) always exhibit the holy fervency which it should? Does our mutual devotion to Christ and to one another do so? Does our service to Christ, our commitment to the gospel, our witness to the truth?

And we need these refreshings *in our national life*. With the moorings abandoned, the landmarks removed, the true gospel largely forgotten and the law of God despised – what but spiritual refreshment can bring us back? Unless in his wrath God remembers mercy, what hope can our nation (or any nation) possibly have?

Of course this matter is vitally related both to *our repentance* and to *God's supply of his Holy Spirit*. Spiritual refreshment (with its close relatives revival and reformation) does not just dangle in the air or appear out of nowhere. We must seek God for it – urgently. There must be about us in this something of the earnestness of Jacob, when he addressed God with the legendary words, 'I will not let thee go, except thou bless me' (Genesis 32:26).