

## “A Third Awakening”

There were two religious renewal movements in the history of this nation. Both were called “Awakenings”. The first one occurred between the 1730s and 1740s. According to the Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church, “Stress was laid on the visible evidence of conversion and those who did not manifest such tokens of inward grace were openly denounced as unregenerate.” The second one came at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> and beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. With this movement, “The early leaders of this revival determined to restrain excessive emotionalism and laid stress on the need for active works of Christian benevolence.” While there were differences between the two awakenings, they shared an account of the guilt and imperfectability of mankind, the need for divine redemption, and the necessity for godliness.

I suggest we are living in another religious movement. But unlike the two previous awakenings, it has looked for answers horizontally. The horizontal turn impacts how we deal with sins against each other and offers no hope or forgiveness.

This is illustrated in Jesus’s parable of the unforgiving servant (Matt. 18:21-35). A king wishes to settle his accounts. A man was brought to him and who owed him a gross debt. The man cannot repay. The king orders him to be sold, with his wife and children, and restitution made. It is a business deal pure and simple. The servant falls on his knees and pleads for patience. Strangely, the king changes his attitude. The king cancels the debt for reasons entirely known only to himself.

But the king’s action is what the servant could not himself even do. The servant sees one of his fellow servants who owed him a days’ wage. He seizes, begins to choke, and demands payment. In the exact action of the first servant, the second one falls and pleads for forgiveness. However, the first forgiven servant refuses to forgive.

The parable foreshadows how the Messiah is going to answer the universal need for redemption and forgiveness. His answer to our debt is to swallow the debt through the cost of the cross. This unmerited gift is the only one that transforms our interactions with each other. Without a divine reference point you will always find ways to make some else in debt. And no one person or people can endure all the payments of sin accumulated, unless that person is the only innocent, Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. The only message to satisfy our longing for purity, innocence, and justice is the message of the gospel. We must awaken and return to the only innocent Lamb of God, Jesus, for the ills of our present time.

Judson Marvel

Pastor, Grace Presbyterian Church (PCA), Sierra Vista, AZ