

1. If My People Who Are Called...

On Fire with the Holy Spirit

If my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land (2 Chronicles 7:14).

The Condition of the World Today

Our topic today is *Carrying God's Heart of Revival*. Right at the beginning, our prayer is, “Will you not revive us again, that your people may rejoice in you?” (Psalm 85:6). To begin to see changes in society, we have to first look at the condition of the world and the called-out ones, the Church of the Living God. While the Church slept, our enemy has maneuvered his servants into positions of influence and control in our society. Incrementally, the Church has been sidelined and ridiculed and now finds it difficult to stand against the tide of evil launched onto the world. Here and there, though, God is raising up individuals who will stand and resist the devil so that he may flee from the Church.

The forces of darkness have entrenched themselves behind thought patterns and world views contrary to God. Meanwhile, the enemy pushes the borders of common decency, and few voices are raised against him. We are so busy in our daily jobs and lives that we don't see the moral barriers coming down: “Do not move an ancient boundary stone set up by your ancestors” (Proverbs 22:28). In 1939 when the movie *Gone with The Wind* came out with Rhett Butler's cussing, “Frankly, my dear, I don't give a **damn**,” it was front-page news in the papers.

These boundary or border stones are pushed back daily, but the Church is to be on the offensive, not on the defensive. Jesus said, “I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it” (Matthew 16:18). The gates speak of a defensive barrier against attacking enemies. The church is on the attack and plundering lives from the kingdom of darkness. The kingdom of darkness is being pushed back as the Light of Christ advances on enemy territory in many other countries except the West. In these United States, the enemy has seen our lethargy and has taken advantage by infiltrating our culture to the point where God, I believe, must send judgment to slow down the moral decay of our society. Let's take stock of the moral decline:

- 1) There is the moral corruption seeded into the world by Hollywood, which, more and more, pushes the boundary stones through obscene and disgusting movies, drama shows, and the entertainment industry.
- 2) Then there are the sins of Silicon Valley that push pornography on the population and make our children addicted to social media.
- 3) There are the sins of state legislatures that are now pushing the boundary stones to legalize pedophilia.
- 4) We could also talk about the abortion laws that have ended the lives of many.

Just as the German people, at the end of the Second World War, were shocked to find out what the Nazis had been doing in the concentration camps like Auschwitz, so God will bring to light the evils done behind the curtain of our society that will precipitate God's judgment. We read of

the warnings of the Scriptures that, when Israel started to sacrifice their innocent children to the false god, Molech (2 Kings 21:6), God brought swift judgment by using Babylon to destroy Jerusalem. I believe that the enemy will retaliate by taking advantage of the situation, and he will persecute true believers in Christ. Many countries are already experiencing this.

The Moral Decline Brings Judgment and Persecution but also Revival (Acts 11:19-26).

We should not think we will escape persecution in the West; in fact, we should be expecting it: **“A servant is not greater than his master. If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also” (John 15:20).** We should prepare for whatever lies ahead by getting close to Christ and learning to be led by the Spirit by having our spiritual ears sensitized to the whispers of the Holy Spirit. I believe that, when persecution comes to the Church in the West, we will see a great outpouring of the Spirit and, with it, revival.

Under Chairman Mao, the Communist government of China tried to wipe out the church; instead, a considerable revival has taken place with conservative estimates by the Communist government of more than 100 million Christians. In the New Testament Book of Acts, we read that, when there was persecution, there was also a great outpouring of the Spirit, such as after the murder of Stephen in the Book of Acts:

¹⁹Now those who had been scattered by **the persecution** that broke out when Stephen was killed traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, spreading the word only among Jews. ²⁰Some of them, however, men from Cyprus and Cyrene, went to Antioch and began to speak to Greeks also, telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus. ²¹The Lord’s hand was with them, and **a great number of people believed** and turned to the Lord. ²²News of this reached the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. ²³When he arrived and **saw what the grace of God had done**, he was glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts. ²⁴He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith, and **a great number of people were brought to the Lord**. ²⁵Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, ²⁶and when he found him, he brought him to Antioch. So for a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of people. **The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch (Acts 11:19-26).**

Barnabas "saw what the grace of God had done" (v. 23). What do you think he witnessed? How was he able "to see" God's grace?

Of course, we cannot be sure as to what Barnabas witnessed, but verse 26 tells us that, the followers of Christ were so like Jesus that they were called "little Christs," or Christians. The Spirit of God was poured out on them in such a way that they experienced what today we would call a revival. That's our topic for today, i.e., the need for a Holy Spirit Revival. What does it look like, and what's our part in birthing it?

The Moral Decline of the United States in the early 1800s

You would have to have been asleep for the last fifteen years or more not to notice the surge of

evil taking place all over the world. Edmund Burke is quoted as saying, "The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing." The Church in America fell asleep in the early 1800s and did little to win the poor and lost. To help us to see similar things to a time in history, I would like to compare the time in which we are living to the state of men's souls in the United States in the 1820s through to the 1850s. The need then, as well as now, was for a mighty move of the Holy Spirit, i.e., what the Church calls revival.

In the face of increasing evil descending on the world, what do you think good men and women should do?

Not many people realize that, in spite of the awakening that preceded the American Revolution and its successful outcome, twenty years later, in the early 1800s, there came a time of moral bankruptcy. Drunkenness (like drug-use today) became epidemic. Out of a population of five million, 300,000 were confirmed drunkards, of which fifteen thousand died each year. Profanity was of the most shocking kind. For the first time in the history of the American settlement, women were afraid to go out at night for fear of assault. Bank robberies were daily occurrences.

What about the church throughout America? The Methodists were losing more members than they were gaining. The Baptists said that they had their coldest season. The Presbyterians, in general assembly, deplored the nation's ungodliness. In a typical Congregation church, the Rev. Samuel Shepherd of Lennox, Massachusetts, in sixteen years had not taken one young person into fellowship. The Lutherans were so languishing that they discussed uniting with Episcopalians who were even worse off. The Protestant Episcopal Bishop of New York, Bishop Samuel Provost, quit functioning: he had confirmed no one for so long that he decided he was out of work, so he took up other employment. The Chief Justice of the United States, John Marshall, wrote to the Bishop of Virginia, James Madison, that the Church "was too far gone ever to be redeemed." Voltaire alleged, and Tom Paine echoed, "Christianity will be forgotten in thirty years."

Look at the liberal arts colleges at that time. A poll taken at Harvard had discovered not one believer in the whole of the student body. A survey was taken at Princeton, a much more evangelical place: it found only two believers in the student body and only five that did not belong to the filthy speech movement of that day. Students rioted. They held a mock communion at Williams College, and they put on anti-Christian plays at Dartmouth. They burned down the prayer room in Nassau Hall at Princeton.¹ They forced the resignation of the president of Harvard. They took a Bible out of a local Presbyterian church in New Jersey and burned it in a public bonfire. Christians were so few on campus in the 1790s that they met in secret, like a communist cell, and they kept their minutes in code so that no one would know. In case this is thought to be the hysteria of the moment, Kenneth Scott Latourette, the great church historian, wrote: "It seemed as if Christianity was about to be ushered out of the affairs of men." The churches had their backs to the wall, seeming as if they were about to be wiped out.

How did the situation change? It came through a concert of prayer. Finally, in September 1857, a praying Christian businessman named Jeremiah Lanphier started a prayer meeting in the upper

¹ Alexander Leitch. *A Princeton Companion*. Princeton University Press, 1978.

room of the Dutch Reformed Church Consistory Building, in Manhattan, New York City. In response to his advertisement, only six people out of the population of a million showed up. However, the following week, there were fourteen, and then twenty-three, when it was decided to meet every day for prayer. By late winter, they were filling the Dutch Reformed Church, then the Methodist Church on John Street, then Trinity Episcopal Church on Broadway at Wall Street. In February and March of 1858, every church and public hall in downtown New York was filled.

Horace Greeley, the famous editor, sent a reporter with horse and buggy racing round the prayer meetings to see how many men were praying: in one hour, he could get to only twelve meetings, but he counted 6,100 men attending. Then, a landslide of prayer began, which overflowed to the churches in the evenings. People began to be converted, e.g., ten thousand a week in New York City alone.

The movement spread throughout New England, the church bells bringing people to prayer at eight in the morning, twelve noon, and six in the evening. The revival raced up the Hudson and down the Mohawk, where the Baptists, for example, had so many people to baptize that they went down to the river, cut a big hole in the ice, and baptized them in the cold water. When Baptists do that, they are on fire!

When the revival reached Chicago, a young shoe salesman went to the superintendent of the Plymouth Congregational Church and asked if he might teach Sunday School. The superintendent said, "I am sorry, young fellow. I have sixteen teachers too many, but I will put you on the waiting list." The young man insisted: "I want to do something just now." "Well, start a class." "How do I start a class?" "Get some boys off the street, but don't bring them here. Take them out into the country, and after a month, you will have control of them, so bring them in. They will be your class."

He took them to a beach on Lake Michigan, and he taught them Bible verses and Bible games; then, he took them to the Plymouth Congregational Church. The name of the young man was Dwight Lyman Moody, and that was the beginning of his ministry that lasted forty years. For instance, Trinity Episcopal Church in Chicago had 121 members in 1857, and in 1860, 1400. That was typical of the churches. More than a million people were converted to God in one year out of a population of thirty million.

Then, that same revival jumped the Atlantic, appearing in Ulster (Ireland), Scotland, and Wales, then England, parts of Europe, South Africa, and South India—anywhere there was an evangelical cause. It sent mission pioneers to many countries. The effects were felt for forty years. Having begun in a movement of prayer, it was sustained for a generation by a movement of prayer. (J. Edwin Orr. Personal Notes.)²

What Does Revival Look Like?

How would you feel if the Spirit came in a similar way to your life, your town or city? Would you be resistant or receptive? What is the fruit of a true revival?

² From a sermon by Dennis Davidson. "Commitment, Confession, and Challenge" (5/16/2011).

True Holy Spirit Revival is a Move of God in Answer to Prayer.

One cannot plan to have a revival. It is entirely something that God does. Churches might call a series of meetings a revival, but it is a conference until God shows up in power. Only when the Holy Spirit manifests His presence can it indeed be a revival with the power of God displayed over the human heart. Often, it is an outpouring of grace over a territory or a country. Being outside of time, God knows ahead of time if a body of people will meet the conditions to revival, and many times in answer to prayer, God prepares a particular person to use as His spokesperson.

For the eyes of the LORD range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him (2 Chronicles 16:9).

As long as the person keeps a humble heart toward God, the revival continues. Throughout history, God has used revivals to change the spiritual environment of whole cities and countries, thus bringing many into the kingdom.

One such a man God used was Charles Finney, who gave his life to Christ in 1821 and was powerfully filled with the Spirit. God seemed to inhabit his words, finding that just a few words here or there to individuals were the means of having their hearts bared before God and converted. He said the Holy Spirit used his words to fasten like barbed arrows in the souls of men. In his writings, he talked in this way about the Spirit's power:

Sometimes I would find myself, in a great measure, empty of this power. I would go and visit and see that I made no saving impression. I would urge and pray, with the same result. I would then set apart a day for private fasting and prayer, fearing that this power had departed from me, and would inquire anxiously after the reason for this apparent emptiness. After humbling myself, and crying out for help, the power would return upon me with all its freshness. This has been the experience of my life.

This power is a great marvel. I have many times seen people unable to endure the Word. The most common and straightforward statements would cut men off their seats like a sword, would take away their strength, and render them almost helpless as dead men. Several times it has been true in my experience that I could not raise my voice, or say anything in prayer or exhortation, except in the mildest manner, without overcoming them. Many times, vast numbers of persons in a community will be clothed with this power when the very atmosphere of the whole place seems to be charged with the life of God. Strangers coming into it and passing through the area will be instantly smitten with the conviction of sin and in many instances, converted to Christ. When Christians humble themselves and consecrate their all again to Christ, and ask for this power, they will often receive such a baptism that they will be instrumental in converting more souls in one day than in all their lifetime before. While Christians remain humble enough to retain this power, the work of conversion will go on, till whole communities and regions of the country are converted to Christ.³

I am convinced that this is what is needed today. The Church today is battling against a wicked

³ Oswald J. Smith. *The Revival We Need*. WRT Books. www.wrtbooks.com. Xulon Press: Fairfax, VA, page 52.

tide of evil that threatens to engulf the world, “**When the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord shall lift up a standard against him**” (Isaiah 59:19 KJV). If ever there was a need for Holy Spirit revival, it is today. Where are the intercessors today who will pray and cry out to God for what is needed? Billions of people are heading toward a Christless eternity unless the Church rises to the need. God will do His part if the Church will pray:

If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land (2 Chronicles 7:14).

Often, we don't take note of the conditions of this Scripture, i.e., the word *if* that starts the promise. We are to humble ourselves, pray, examine ourselves in the light of God's righteousness, and turn from all unrighteousness (confess our sins to God), and then God will act to forgive our sin and heal the land. If we don't do these things, then guess what – we will not receive the blessing. Often, the act of praying together, confessing our sins to God, asking for forgiveness of our brothers and sisters, and getting our lives right before God will restore relationships and bring a spirit of unity. This has always been God's way to the path of revival.

The enemy will often sow discord among the people of God to try to shut down any move of the Spirit. When Peter and John were used of the Lord to heal the lame man at the Gate Beautiful, the response of the religious elite was to warn them not to talk about Christ. What did the disciples do? They maintained the unity of the Spirit, and God's gracious power was on them to continue to preach Christ:

³²And the congregation of those who believed were of one heart and soul; and not one of them claimed that anything belonging to him was his own, but all things were common property to them. ³³And with great power the apostles were giving testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and abundant grace was upon them all (Acts 4:32-33).

How close is your relationship with other brothers and sisters in Christ? Would you say that there is a sense of unity among you and your Christian friends?

Verse 33 states that with great power the apostles were giving testimony to the resurrection of Jesus. How do you think people were able to witness this power?

Dr. A. T. Pierson once said, "There has never been a spiritual awakening in any country or locality that did not begin in united prayer." L. Nelson Bell said, "Power in the Christian life depends upon our communication with the source of power."⁴ Then, there is the comment by Francis Fenelon, "It is amazing how strong we become when we begin to understand what weaklings we are!"⁵

When the Holy Spirit moves powerfully, He will often place such a heavy burden of prayer on individuals that their whole being cries out in prayer for the lost. John Smith, an English soul winner, said, "I am a broken-hearted man; not for myself but on account of others. God has given

⁴ Compiled by John Blanchard, *More Gathered Gold*, Published by Evangelical Press, Welwyn, Herts, England. Page 223

⁵ Ibid.

me such a sight of the value of precious souls that I cannot live if souls are not saved. Give me souls, or else I die."

I have shared these accounts from the past to give an idea of what happens during times of revival. One thing stands out to me, and that is, when God moves supernaturally during a time of revival, there is no rational explanation for how it happens. I am sure that, at times like this, unsaved people were unable to explain the phenomenon.

When there is a true revival, the fruit is evident in changed lives. Many people come to Christ and turn from sin, repenting, and confessing Christ as their Savior. In my opinion, anything short of that is not a real revival. God is in the business of salvation. He has not come to merely give us a feeling, a spiritual high, or even physical healing, but He offers complete redemption. I love it when God visits us with His presence in a substantial way, i.e., when we see healings and the gifts of the Spirit at work, but His will is that people come to know Him. He wants His house to be full, and He will work through us if we make ourselves available.

I am concerned with the lack of emphasis (in the western church in particular) of making the Gospel and the response clear to individuals. If there is no repentance, there is no real conversion and born-again experience with God. A man that doesn't forsake his sins is still carrying them. I look back to the time when I accepted Christ. I responded to the message of Christ on the cross. Before that, I had been in meetings and felt and saw the power of God at work. I saw the joy on people's faces. However, had I not heard what Christ had done for me and how He saved me, I may not have begun to walk the way of the cross. If we get a chance to pray for someone, to show them the love of Christ, to pray for healing, then that is great! That is doing the works of Jesus! However, we should be ready to share a clear explanation of the Gospel to those willing to listen. The Gospel, the good news of Christ and what He has done for us, needs to be spoken.

On the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit was powerfully manifested as tongues of fire, and people spoke in other languages to those gathered around the building. The Holy Spirit came powerfully in revival as a supernatural phenomenon, yet there was confusion and speculation among the onlookers. When God moves, there are all kinds of responses. We should not expect God to be "tidy" and "play nice," according to our expectations. People grappling with their sins can be messy at times, but the phenomenon was followed with Peter's clear message calling for his listeners to repent and turn to Christ (Acts 3:19). There was no doubt about the response the Spirit of God was seeking.

I want to finish by focusing on our part, i.e., what we can do to be part of a mighty move of the Holy Spirit. How are we to make ourselves available to God to be used by the Spirit?

- 1) Draw near to God. We can do this in prayer and in reading His word.
- 2) Confess whatever the Spirit brings to your attention. Do not harbor un-forgiveness or bitterness in your heart, for this is a roadblock to the Spirit of God.
- 3) Study the Word of God and especially the words of Jesus, which will allow the Holy Spirit to use what is stored in your heart (Psalm 119:11). He brings to remembrance God's Word hidden

in our hearts to use at the moment of opportunity, so prepare your heart with the Word of God.

4) Place yourself in fellowship with the body of Christ. When the Spirit moves in power, He comes to where His people are in unity. It does not have to be a large gathering; it can be wherever His people are coming together in agreement. Do not think you can experience Christian life on your own. Be with the family. Seek unity. Join your hearts in prayer.

5) Do what you know. Obey what is clear in Scripture and seek God for the rest. One of the things the Holy Spirit has promised us is that He is our guide and our teacher. Many revivals have started with just two people desiring to be used by God and beginning to meet the conditions, humbling themselves, and praying passionately. Think of the time when you leave this world and see people on the other side that you had a hand in influencing for eternity. How blessed you will be! These are true spiritual riches.

The revival that spread through New York in the early 1800s was a direct result of people's obedience to draw near to God in prayer. Had they not responded, God would have called someone else. However, what a blessing it must have been for those praying for people to witness God's moving in response to their prayers and longings! How wonderful it must have been for them to finally arrive home and see the fruit of their prayers for revival, i.e., many lives saved and in heaven with them. My prayer is that you, too, will invest your life in the same way.

Finally, do not rely on your feelings, but on the Word of God and what you know about Him. I have been to meetings where I have felt nothing, yet beautiful things were happening around me. Has that ever happened to you? Do not doubt God's love for you at times like these. Do not trust your feelings, but trust what you know about God's character and His love for you. If you feel that your heart is hard, ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you anything you need to put right in your relationships with others. If that is done, then it could just be that you are right where He wants you to be and that He is building up your faith.

I want you to think for a moment about the time after the resurrection of Christ when the early Church, i.e., the 120 believers that had gathered together for prayer. They did not know what was going to happen. Were they on a spiritual high? Certainly not! Many of them were frightened, with the door of the upper room locked for fear of the Jewish elite. I imagine that they were missing the closeness of the Lord Jesus, and they were crying out to God in desperation. They did not have a total understanding. They were still coming to grips with the story of salvation as it was unfolding. They were about to witness a mighty outpouring of the Spirit of God, but they did not then know it. They were obedient, putting themselves into a position for the Spirit of God to move. That is what we need to do.

Prayer: Father, we pray that You will visit us in the 21st Century in a mighty move of Your Spirit that will awaken and draw millions to You in these last days. Fill us with Your Spirit in such a way that Your Church will rise with a new anointing to fulfill Your longing that Your house will be full. Amen!

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