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## **Revival**

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-- *Commentaries from past newsletters* --

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It is interesting how the Lord uses events to make us inquire further into his Word. Recently, I asked a group of ministers with whom I pray for revival once a week how we would know if revival had come. We pray for it to come, but nothing happens. As I thought about this problem I remembered going to revivals in my youth and nothing visibly happened then either. This led me to investigate the reasons why we don't see it, and then to write down what I had learned. I want to share with you what I learned for it is one of the most important questions for the church in our society today.

With the current decline in the state of morals in the western world (and as a matter of fact in the entire world) it has become increasingly important that change is in order. Most evangelicals agree that the only way this change can be brought about is for the Holy Spirit to ignite the fire of revival across the morally polluted landscape! Jesus who was born in a morally polluted environment said that he came to set fire on the earth and longed to see it kindled. As his followers do we have this same longing, and if we do how do we ignite the fire?

Jesus knew that when the Holy Spirit came fire would fall. He used this metaphor because fire had always been associated with the presence of the Lord. It all began when the Lord had a blazing firepot pass between the two halves of Abraham's sacrifices. God next spoke to Moses out of the burning bush. When Nadab and Abihu offered unauthorized fire before the Lord they were consumed by fire. Then later when 250 others did the same thing as Abihu and Nadab, the Lord sent fire to consume them. In the revelation of his laws and instructions for worship the Hebrews were to make sacrifices on an altar and parts of them were to be consumed by fire. In the desert and on Mount Sinai God led the Israelis with a pillar of fire and spoke to them out of that same fire. In one of the most impressive episodes in the Bible God demonstrated his presence and power with fire when Elijah confronted the priests of Baal. Shadrach, Meshach and Abenego were cast into the fire filled furnace and God showed his control over nature by preserving them. Then the holy fire was extinguished with the destruction of the temple by the Babylonians. Although it was rekindled when the temple was rebuilt, it is not clear that it was accompanied by the power it possessed before the Babylonian exile. Fire, is then, related to the presence and power of God.

It is not surprising then that early on in the New Testament John the Baptist prophesied that Jesus would baptize us with the Holy Spirit and fire (Matt 3:11).

Before Jesus the Holy Spirit was not available to all Israel, but only to those who God had appointed to special tasks. When Jesus was baptized he had the Holy Spirit descend on him and with it God's full power. This made it possible for all of us who believe and have put our trust in Jesus to have the Holy Spirit come and live with us and in us. To begin he said: "If you love me, you will obey what I command. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever, the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives **with** you and will be **in** you (John 14:15-18). Later he said, "If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. He who does not love me will not obey my teaching. These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me (John 14:23,24). In these two passages Jesus made it plain to us that the power of God that was bestowed on him at his baptism would belong to all who believe. This power was bestowed at Pentecost when tongues of fire fell on the disciples. What Pentecost meant is that we now have the power to overcome sin and to obey his commandments, to love God with all of our being and our neighbors as ourselves, to love one another as he has loved us and finally to do love for our fellow man. It also means that we have in us the power to proclaim the gospel, heal the sick, cast out demons and raise the dead. That is what the disciples did immediately after Pentecost. It is a fact that just like them all of us can proclaim the gospel through our witness, we can heal the sick and cast out demons if we have faith and are not afraid to do so. Finally, we can raise the dead although it happens rarely. Does all this power belong to just a select few. NO! It belongs to all of us who believe.

Along with the power come one or more other gifts. These are listed in Romans 12:6-8 and in 1 Corinthians 12:7-11. Now I want to emphasize the point that I have not met anyone, not even the most effective of clergy, who possess all of these gifts, but everyone has one or more of them. Those who do not know Christ may appear to have gifts, but what they possess arises out of the flesh or has been given by the enemy.

At this point you may be wondering what all this has to do with revival. The answer is everything. You cannot revive people who do not have God's Spirit. Interestingly we found in the Lay Witness movement in the 70's and early 80's that a large part of most Methodist congregations were not born again Christians and, therefore, did not have God's Spirit residing in them. Sadly the church did not know what to do with them after they were born again so the church did not profit from their new attitudes. In time they all drifted away to the Baptist and Assembly of God churches. The same is true today in most of the mainline denominations. But what about born again believers in the church today? Do they need revival? Yes they do because they have either quenched or grieved the Holy Spirit, and in the light of David's plea in Psalm 51 God seemed to have taken his Holy Spirit away from them. Of course he really has not taken him away

but he has turned off the power until they do something to turn it back on. It follows that when revival comes it will be turned back on.

How do we accomplish this? The answer to the question posed above is simple. We need to look at the Bible and see what it took to revive people while at the same time we should try to determine what happened to them when they were revived. But the Bible cannot be our only source of information. The history of revivals since Pentecost is especially important since they have occurred under the New Covenant. The revivals that have taken place since the New Testament was written are more cogent since the Holy Spirit is always the power behind these.

One of the wonderful things about the Internet is that there is a plethora of information that reveals much of the historical information we need. There is one site called *Revival Library* that has almost everything we need to know about revival. The only problem is that they only give you half of the articles. You have to buy their CD to get them all. Even without the CD there is enough information to help us begin to answer our questions. So what are the answers? Let us first look back to the history of previous revivals and determine what preceded those movements of the Holy Spirit. If we inspect them carefully we find first that there was a heartfelt desire on the part of a group of people or a congregation to have revival occur. In a few cases God sent a person to initiate it by creating the desire for revival. This desire led the people to petition God in prayer to send revival. They were motivated to stand fast in prayer until it was accomplished. They then asked for a new infilling of the Holy Spirit. God listens to our heart, but our heart only gets right with our words and getting our hearts right takes time. It has been said that we do not pray to convince God, we only pray to convince ourselves. In time God will pour his Spirit out on people who desire revival.

Now it should be plain that we really may not want revival because when it comes things happen that we may not want to experience. Just as at Pentecost, the disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke in other languages, so has this happened with other revivals through all time. But other languages and unknown tongues are not the only signs of the work of the Holy Spirit in revivals. People beg for mercy in repentance of their sins. This is one of the most important effects of revival. Others are spiritually slain (or rest in the spirit). Others will shout in praise of God and his love. The revived will experience an abounding love. If there are unsaved at the meeting they will be saved, and many of these will at the same time be filled with the Holy Spirit. With revival, healings will take place and demons will manifest themselves and be cast out. Most importantly almost all of the revived will be compelled to go forth in the world to witness.

The occurrence of a revival will attract the curious among those who do not know the Lord and they will come to inquire, repent and be saved. If the power is greatly manifest, some of the unsaved people on the street will be drawn into the

meeting house out of curiosity and will be saved. It happened on one occasion that the evangelist Charles Finney walked through a textile mill and women and men at their machines fell to the floor in repentance and at the same time or later sought salvation. So powerful was the effect of his presence that the mill had to temporarily shut down. In the same way, it was said that when Tommy Tenney led a revival in Houston people were attracted off the street and when they entered the building they fell to the floor repenting.

The revivals led by George Fox, John Wesley, and George Whitefield were unique in that they were mostly carried out in the fields and public halls and still affected so many people. They also gave rise to some of the greatest hymnody and sent forth the most people to proclaim the gospel of any revivals in the history of the church. It is interesting that an earlier revival among the Moravians was directly responsible for the Wesleyan revival. Peter Boehler, a Moravian minister, was responsible for Wesley's search for a new relationship with God and his ultimate filling with the Holy Spirit that led to his field preaching. He preached in the fields after he was urged by Whitefield to do so. Even so the signs of the work of the Holy Spirit were present not only in the initiation of this revival, but also as it spread throughout England and in America.

The earliest revival in America was led by a New England Presbyterian named Jonathan Edwards who was renowned for his sermon entitled, "The Sinner in the Hands of an Angry God." It was said that the people who heard this sermon could feel the flames of hell licking around their ankles. Even so, this revival was quenched by unknown forces so that the Northeast later became known as the "burnt over" area.

But there was more to come after Edwards. Some years ago I read a book entitled *They Gathered at the River*. This book described the onset of the fire falling on a meeting at Cane Ridge in Kentucky. This was where the great frontier revival began. It was initiated with the moving preaching of a Presbyterian minister named Stone. He was followed by an Anglican and the crowd was again moved, but when a Methodist by the name of McGee preached, the crowd was intensely moved. What happened is described as follows: "The Methodist preacher, whose feelings were now wrought up to the highest pitch after a brief debate in his own mind, came to the conclusion that it was his duty to disregard the usual orderly habits of the denomination, and passed along the aisle shouting and exhorting vehemently. The clamor and confusion were increased tenfold: the flame was blown to its height: screams for mercy were mingled with shouts of ecstasy, and a universal agitation pervaded the whole multitude, who were bowed before it as a field of grain waves before the wind," and "as the meetings progressed and the excitement grew more intense, and the crowd rushed from preacher to preacher, singing, shouting, laughing, calling upon men to repent. Men and women fell upon the ground unable to help themselves, and in such numbers that it was impossible for the multitude to move about, especially at night, when the excitement was the greatest, without trampling them. So those

who fell were gathered up and carried to the meeting house, where the "spiritually slain" as they called them, were laid upon the floor. Some of them lay quiet, unable to move or speak; some could talk, but were unable to move; some would shriek as though in greatest agony, and bounced about 'like a live fish out of water.'" I witnessed all of these phenomena several years ago when John Arnott preached at a meeting I attended.

It is interesting that various aspects of this behavior has been described in the great revivals throughout the history of our faith. It was especially manifest in the Welsh revival, in the South African revival and more recently in the Toronto Airport revival.

One of the products of revivals that have the more dramatic manifestations of the work of the Holy Spirit is criticism. Andrew Murray who was one of the great writers of Christian literature had revival break out in his church in Worcester, South Africa. He did all he could to suppress it for he, like all theologically educated reformed theologians, thought everything should be done in proper order. After he was chastised by someone who had witnessed similar scenes in America, he gradually came around and recognized that what he was seeing was "confusion" created by the Holy Spirit and should not be stopped.

The usual reaction of religious people and unbelievers to the outbreak of revival where signs and wonders occur is to be frightened, or repulsed by the strange manifestations. Most do not want to fall to the floor (rest in the Spirit), cry out for mercy, shout, laugh uncontrollably, speak in tongues or bark like a dog or roar like a lion. It all seems insane to most persons. Above all they do not want to think they will be out of control of their mind. It is interesting that many do not object to being out of control in a negative way when they imbibe alcohol or smoke marijuana, or go to a sports event, but do not want to allow the Holy Spirit to take control of their mind and guide and direct their lives in a positive way.

I have reiterated in the past that the thing that sets real Christians apart from nominal and cultural Christians is the presence of the wisdom, knowledge and power of the Holy Spirit in their lives. Real Christians have absolutely surrendered to the Lord and are obedient to his will. This is why they pray and study their Bibles more, worship more, are more altruistic and witness more, resulting in more conversions among the unsaved. It has been a characteristic of all revivals that thousands come to a saving knowledge of Jesus. One example in my personal experience was a service my wife and I attended at the Toronto Airport Church. On that night there were few signs and wonders, but 40 youth gave their lives to the Lord. It has been reported that the revival at the Brownsville Church in Pensacola has resulted in over 40,000 conversions. Even so there are all kinds of polemics against revivals like that at Brownsville especially if any manifestations of the charismatic movement are part of it. The easiest point of attack is in the areas of healing. Many times the evangelist will exaggerate his claims of miraculous healings. Thus every effort is made to

debunk their occurrence. This can be quite successful. Next the *argumentum ad hominem* (If you cannot attack what a person says attack him personally.) is used to destroy the reputation and impugn the character of the evangelist. One ministry called Wall Watchers looks at the finances of a ministry and the leader(s). This is the best way to impugn their character and to make their ministry appear to be of the enemy and not of God. Most of polemics include investigations by local newspapers, or such organizations as the Christian Research Institute led by Hank Hanegraaf. Thus for every testimony regarding the occurrence of signs and wonders in revivals there are those who attempt to refute the reality of their occurrence. Satan is behind this.

One of the points made by the opponents is that charismatic revivalists tend to ignore the word of God. One writer says: "The Bible is the sacred text of Christian Fundamentalists. Indeed, if there is one single thing which binds Fundamentalists together, it is their insistence that the Bible is to be understood as literally true. Further, Fundamentalists see themselves as the guardians of the truth, usually to the exclusion of other's interpretation of the Bible. Fundamentalism in other faith traditions similarly proclaims guardianship of truth." Since the occurrence of signs and wonders was predicted in the Bible, it is rather strange that the fundamentalists decry their occurrence. I am sure this occurred as a result of the writings of William Barclay who averred that the gifts of the Spirit were no longer needed or present after the third century, since after that time we are in the dispensation of grace. His dispensationalist views first proposed by John Nelson Darby and amplified by C. I. Scofield in his Bible commentary were the foundation for further elaboration by Barclay. In our time John McArthur and R. C. Sproul have been strong proponents of hard line dispensationalism.

I think you should now have realized where I am going with this commentary. It should be clear to you that the fire of the Holy Spirit is responsible for all great revivals. The Holy Spirit brings signs and wonders as well as evangelical fervor. Not only does He bring gifts, but he also brings a desire to encounter God. He does this not only by creating a desire to know God's Word, but a desire to pray to and worship him. It is through these means of Grace that he helps his children grow and mature in him as I pointed out in my last newsletter.

Sadly, we tend to lose our fire even when we have received the Holy Spirit, so it is necessary that we renew the Spirit in us. We need to seek renewal. We only do this if we realize our spiritual emptiness. In Jeremiah 29:13 God told us what we needed to do. He said: "You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart." But how do we seek him? The answer is in heartfelt prayer. All personal revival or any church revival begins with heartfelt prayer. I belong to a prayer group of ministers that exists to pray for revival. We do, but the prayer is not heartfelt. We all recognize the need for revival, but our one hour of prayer each week does not do it. Besides we only pray for revival as one item in our prayer agenda.

When I studied the history of revival I found that the people of God, wherever they were, desired revival with all their heart and prayed fervently. Sometimes they prayed for 2 or 3 years before it came. When it came, the church moved ahead against a corrupt and sinful world.

For me the time has come for us to stop sitting around lamenting the sinfulness of our world and to do something about it. We must fervently seek the move of God's Spirit. He wants to move, but we are his instruments and we are to be the means by which he brings revival. He will anoint us to do it, but we have to sincerely desire it. To create sincere desire it appears that in the past we had to have some stimulus to arouse us out of our lethargy. Revival comes when people are in need. These may be personal, local or national. People will pray for personal revival when they have spiritual, economic, moral or relational needs. We pray for local revival when our cities and towns are in danger from within and without. We pray for revival when our nation is threatened from without as it is by terrorism, or as it is today when it is being threatened within by the forces of evil. The only problem today is that we quit praying and sit purposeless and passionless. We need to wake up and realize the peril we are in.

I once heard a story about a pastor who was preaching a sermon based on Ephesians 5:8-14. It says "For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth, and find out what pleases the Lord. Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. For it is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret. But everything exposed by the light becomes visible, for it is light that makes everything visible. This is why it is said: 'Wake up, O sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.'" At one point in his sermon the pastor emphatically reiterated the command to **wake up!** in a loud voice. After the service one of his old lady parishioners came to him and said, "Pastor how can we sleep through your sermons if you keep hollering for us to wake up"? The lady exemplifies the attitude of most of the church today. They do not understand the peril that we live in. All around us there are enemies who wish to do us in. The antichrists have come. They are plural. This is something we know from the writings of the Apostle John who said, "Many deceivers, who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh, have gone out into the world. Any such person is the deceiver and the antichrist" (2 John 1-7).

I have realized on several occasions that I needed revival. On one occasion I was going to Madagascar and subsequently to Ethiopia for special teaching assignments. The Spirit was not manifest in my life, and I knew that I would not do a good job if I went in the state I was in. I, therefore, undertook to seek a new infilling of the Holy Spirit. As I drove to work three mornings a week I prayed, so I undertook to seek a new encounter with God. After six weeks of prayer devoted to the single subject, God refilled me and I went to Madagascar and Ethiopia for a successful but exhausting trip.

After all this, what should we do? Without doubt we need revival for in it we will be doing spiritual warfare and confronting the antichrists. We will no longer be deceived by the god of this world, for we will have on the full armor of God and will be able to take back the territory he has occupied. Souls will be saved, lives will be transformed and saved from hell, those who are estranged will be reconciled.

I have to admit that for revival to come we have to have a passion for souls. But how do we get the kind of passion (fire) that will move us to witness to all who will listen. One thing is to not want to see anyone go to hell. While I was in Boston over Christmas visiting my children who live there, I was listening to the Lord after I had been working on this commentary. All of a sudden I received an impression of what hell is like. It was revealed to me as an image of a black wall. It was moving in my field of vision and in time a door appeared. The door was very white and it stopped in front of me. Then it slowly opened and as I watched an intense blackness appeared. I did not hear screams of those being punished, neither could I see demons tormenting people. Instead I realized the enormity of the suffering that those who were condemned to be punished were undergoing. It was beyond anything I had ever seen in my patients or had personally experienced. It is indescribable. This realization continues to lay on my mind with a crushing heaviness. I really do not want anyone to undergo that kind of torment. So I now have no choice but to proclaim the gospel. I have to be a messenger to all who will listen. Will you become a messenger too?

As I have reflected on what I saw and felt, I realized that the suffering that seemed infinite was what Jesus experienced on the cross when "the iniquity of us all" was laid upon him. He suffered when he took our punishment. And I am sure that it was what it was like for him. I only got a glimpse of what it was like. I do not think I could have borne the full impact of his suffering. When I reflect on the knowledge that my sin caused him to suffer as he did when he took my punishment, I am filled with sorrow. This leads me to confess, repent and be forgiven and cleansed of all unrighteousness.