

# THE EVANGELIST AND SPIRITUAL AWAKENING

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*In the previous article on a "Premier African Evangelist", we were introduced to a remarkable African evangelist of one hundred years ago. In this article the present day church is challenged to continue engaging in bold and biblical evangelism. But we are reminded that powerful evangelism can only grow out of a spiritually awakened church. This article was originally presented to the delegates of Amsterdam 2000 Conference of Itinerant Evangelists, July 29 - August 6, 2000.*

## INTRODUCTION

Spiritual awakening is a special work of the Holy Spirit among a people in creating an unusual awareness and openness to Jesus Christ as the Saviour and Lord. Spiritual awakening is usually attended by supernatural activities of God, as acts of love, and demonstrations of His power. Spiritual awakening is usually preceded by or includes revival amongst God's people. Revival is primarily God's activity in His Church, whilst spiritual awakening is what God does in Church and society, usually resulting in unprecedented harvest.

Revival results in:

- An exalted view of God and His glory among God's people. This is made possible by an act of grace on God's part in opening the spiritual eyes of His people (Eph. 1:3).
- A renewed hunger for holiness.

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- A deepened commitment to obeying God.
- A deepened commitment to evangelism and the fulfillment of the Great Commission.

Revival is the sovereign act of God. However, God prepares His people for such revival. The people of God must always be ready for revival. This readiness or preparedness for revival and spiritual awakening is our responsibility. This is what we need to address.

The leadership of Nehemiah illustrates how God's people can partner with Him in His acts of revival.

### **NEHEMIAH AND REVIVAL**

After Nehemiah had successfully helped the Israelites rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, he turned to the rebuilding of the lives of the people themselves. As a result of being in exile for so long, the people of Israel forgot about the laws of God. They had been influenced by the culture and laws of Babylon and Persia. The reason their forefathers were taken into captivity was because they had turned their backs to God. Now on their return, their children had to revive their commitment to Yahweh as their God and Father.

There were three 'goings' into exile, three returns from exile, and three rebuildings. There was the rebuilding of the temple, the walls of Jerusalem and the spiritual lives of the people of Israel. We know that the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem really began with Nehemiah turning to God in prayer when he received information on the dilapidated state of the previous wall and the disgrace it brought on God's people. Prayer also played a central role in the rebuilding of the lives of the people of Israel after their return from captivity.

#### **Prayer and Revival (Neh. 8:1, 6; 9:1, 2; 10:29-33)**

If prayer does not precede a revival, it is usually the first blessing of a revival. When God wants to do something amongst His people, He first blesses them with a commitment to extraordinary earnest prayer.

Nehemiah spontaneously engaged in fasting and prayer to seek God's intervention in reversing the humiliation the people of Israel were in because of their disobedience. *Fasting and prayer always go with revival.* It is a sure way of humbling ourselves before the Lord to declare our total dependence and trust in Him to act in particular situations. When we humble ourselves through fasting and prayer, we are declaring to God that we have no hope apart from His intervention.

We do not need to fast to get God's attention. But when we engage in proper biblical fasting, we cannot but humble ourselves before God. The real secret of fasting and prayer is that it allows us extended periods of seeking God's face and God's hand of blessing in particular situations. Fasting is not simply staying away from food. It is also the minimising of routine activities in order to spend more extended quality time with God. This includes our routine work, excessive entertainments and other routine activities that can prevent us from having extended unbroken fellowship with God. The biblical principle seems to be that when we draw near to God through prayer and fasting, He also draws near to us. (James 4: 6-10)

The other reason why prayer and fasting are important is that even though God can do anything in His sovereign power, many times He chooses to do certain extraordinary things in honour of our faith. Some spiritual victories are only won through prayer and fasting. Through our moments of fasting and prayer, God brings us to the level of faith where we see more clearly from His perspective, so we are able more precisely to ask Him to destroy strongholds and bring extraordinary victories. The discipline of fasting simply allows us to concentrate on God for extended periods of time. Whenever we do that for extended periods, in attitudes of worship and reverence, our vision of God's glory becomes clearer and weightier. Our minds and hearts are purified and we are able to exercise faith in God for the right things.

Though God answers the prayers of individual intercessors, unusual power is released when believers unite in *one accord* to beseech God's face and hand on particular issues. God visits, works with, and dwells with believers who are united in prayer.

Behind every supernatural and extraordinary move of God are people who have dedicated themselves to earnest prayer. It seems that the spirit of prayer is the first blessing of God to prepare His people for extraordinary blessings. Jim Cymbala referred to this truth in his marvelous book, *Fresh Wind, Fresh Fire*.

The history of past revivals portray this truth in full color. Whether you study the Great Awakening, the Second Great Awakening, the Welsh Revival, the 1906 outpouring on Azusa Street in Los Angeles, or any other period of revival, you always find men and women who first inwardly groan, longing to see the status quo changed – in themselves and in their churches. They begin to call on God with insistence; prayer begets revival, which begets more prayer.<sup>1</sup>

To prepare for great spiritual awakenings, we need to commit ourselves to extraordinary united praying. If revival has any link with spiritual awakening, it is a revival characterised by extraordinary united prayer. Prayer prepares the hearts of God's people for His blessings.

### **The Word of God and Revival (Neh. 8:1-13)**

The second element that must characterise our preparation for revival is a commitment to base our lives and ministries on the Word of God.

The Holy Spirit uses the Word of God in our lives in three areas. First, He uses the Word in our lives to convict us of our sins. Second, He uses the Word of God to help us in confessing our sins and following the ways of God. Thirdly, the Word of God provides the basis for entering into covenants with God regarding what we are repenting from, and the things we are consecrating our lives for.

**a. Conviction:** The Word of God is an instrument for reflecting to us not only the will of God, but also where we are in relation to God's will. When we know where we truly stand in relation to God's will, we are usually convicted by how far we are from God's

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<sup>1</sup> Jim Cymbala, *Fresh Wind, Fresh Fire* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1997), 58.

standard. The Holy Spirit plays a direct role in bringing the sensing of conviction on us.

The first thing we learn about the role of the Word of God in rebuilding the lives of the Israelites is the attitude of the Israelites towards the Word of God. The people of Israel listened to the Word of God with attitudes of reverence. *When Ezra opened the book of the law, the people stood up* (Neh. 8:5). Ezra praised the Lord, and the people lifted their hands shouting, "Amen, Amen!" Then they bowed down and worshipped the LORD with their faces to the ground. The people then stood up and listened to Ezra as he read the law. The people of Israel here demonstrated reverence for the Word of the Lord. They worshipped Him, and humbled themselves in God's presence as they read the Book of the Law.

This was probably due to the fact that they had lived many years without the freedom to read and live by the Book of the Law. They had an awareness of the unique place of the Word of God in a sense that we have missed in contemporary Christianity. The people of Israel did not read or listen to the Word of God casually.

This reminds me of an experience I had in Manila, Philippines, during Lausanne II in 1989. When a speaker opened the Bible and was going to read it, the Russian Christians present stood up as the Bible was read. They sat down later and listened to the speaker's exposition. For the Russian Christians, the Bible could not be read like any other book. It is the Word of God. When the Bible was being read, God was speaking to His people. It was, therefore, appropriate that when God was speaking, His people would listen with reverential attitude.

Most of the remaining participants were probably too familiar with the Bible. They had different versions at home. This 'over familiarity' can lead to the eroding of our high regard for the Word of God. The point here is not to make a sweeping claim that postures say everything. There could have been Russian Christians standing who were doing so without an inner reverence for God's Word. Equally, I believe many participants seated had tremendous reverence for the Word of God. My observation here is rather general, but the point I am making is still valid. The action of the

Russians, which most likely was a reflection of their attitude towards the Word of God, has left a powerful impression on me.

In addition to their reverential attitude, the Levites helped explain and make clear to the people the meaning of what was being read (Neh. 8:8). Having the right attitude is important to understanding God's Word. *It is also important that we have the skills to properly interpret the Word of God, so we understand its meaning.* The right attitude and the proper interpretation of God's Word prepare us for the convicting ministry of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

When we are convicted, then we are able to respond by turning to God in confession.

**b. Confession:** The Israelites confessed their sins based on their understanding of how they broke their part of the covenant with God. The confidence to confess and ask for forgiveness from God is also based on their understanding that God never breaks His covenant with men. Even when we are faithless, He remains faithful. God is always ready to forgive and restore us when we confess and truly repent of our sins.

The Israelites did not only confess their known sins, but also the sins of their forefathers. Their forefathers went in circles with God. When they sinned and came under God's discipline, they would confess and repent. After they were forgiven and blest by God, they would go back to their sins. In their confessions, they seem to link God's material blessings with obedience that invites blessings, and poverty and oppression to discipline from God in response to their disobedience. We seem to have lost this connection in our time. Our contemporary understanding of prosperity and progress in life is that it is due to man's achievement.

We have also lost the humility to accept the sins of our lands and forefathers. Instead of acknowledging the wrongs of our forefathers, we seek ways to justify them through theologies that are more influenced by our humanistic interests than the nature and will of God. The implication is that our repentance before God is not total and in-depth. Total repentance covers all the sins that God may be holding against a people. Our repentance seems to be more on our own terms, rather than the terms of God.

Genuine repentance is always characterised by the resolve to turn from ungodly acts to godly acts. When the Israelites confessed their sins, they renewed their covenant with God by resolving to change and live in obedience to God's law. Their resolution was serious and as such was under oath. It is nothing like our heartless confessions that are not characterised by changed lives.

The East Africa revivals started in 1929 when Dr. Joe Church ( a missionary from Gahini, Rwanda) met Mr. Simeoni Nsibambi, a health worker in Kampala. These two men deplored the dryness of the church and spent time in pouring their concerns out to the Lord in prayer. They confessed their sins to one another and resolved to learn and live by the truths in God's Word. They also committed themselves to preaching the gospel to all those around them. Over a short period of time, this commitment to repentance, and obedience to God's word spread across East Africa. Those who were part of the revival had 'walking in the light' as their emphasis in every aspect of their lives. This emphasis on personal holiness soon impacted the culture. The traditional practices of witchcraft were abated. Idols were totally destroyed when people turned to God in response to the gospel. There was no excusing of idolatry on the premise of maintaining African Christian identity.

The kind of repentance that brings revival is radical. It does not compromise with sinful attitudes and actions. It would require nothing short of that kind of commitment to experience revival in our time. *We must turn from all idols to Christ. We must renounce our allegiance to the idols of ancestral spirits, materialism and the human self.* Jesus Christ must be the only Lord of our lives. We need to commit ourselves to living the Christian life on the terms of Christ based on the Word of God. This requires covenanting with God about things that we would no longer return to and things that we would now dedicate our lives for. Our lives need to be dedicated to obeying the Lord's Greatest Commandments and His Great Commission.

**c. Covenanting:** Nehemiah and Ezra led the Israelites to covenant with God in respect to areas of their lives that were of concern to God.

The Israelites referred to these resolutions *as a written binding agreement with the seals of the leaders*, the Levites and priests affixed to it (Neh. 9:38). The agreements or covenants of the Israelites covered three main areas. These were the areas where they themselves and their forefathers had sinned against God. *One area was no longer to give their daughters in marriage to non-Jews.* God's purpose for requiring the Israelites to set themselves apart from others and not to give their daughters in marriage to non-Jews was more religious and spiritual than ethnocentric or racist. We know this because this did not apply to non-Jews that had accepted Yahweh as their God. All those who had accepted Yahweh as their God irrespective of race were part of the Israelite community.

The main reason for commanding the Israelites not to marry people from other tribes was to prevent them from turning to other gods. The wives they would marry from other tribes would naturally influence them and cause them to turn their allegiance away from Yahweh to other gods. God's desire was to keep the Israelites away from breaking His first commandment of not worshipping other gods beside Him.

*A second area of covenanting was regarding the Sabbath day.* They had become rather casual with the Sabbath day. Things had degenerated to the point where they were doing business on the Sabbath. The Sabbath day was like any other day for the Israelites. The Sabbath was meant to be the day on which the Israelites were to cease their normal duties and remember the God who created the things they worked. It was the day to remember the Creator rather than to continue to be caught in the busyness with the creation.

This continues to have relevance for us. We have been invited to enter the Sabbath of the Lord. According to the writer of Hebrews, this means we cease from our own labor and give ourselves to the Lord's work. The implication here is that our career choices need to be in response to God's calling. We should no longer just work for the benefits that will accrue in our interest. We should consider our works as part of our worship. Those who live with the certainty of knowing that their works are in the centre of God's will, no



doubt they will experience a special rest in their souls. They have only one desire, that is to please the Lord in all that they do.

The Sabbath also gives us the opportunity to remember that all of creation is God's work. Humankind has been given the privilege to be stewards of God's creation as well as to enjoy it. It is for this reason that during the Sabbath, the people of God are encouraged to reflect on the needs of the poor among them. The poor who are indebted to them in some cases are relieved of the responsibility of having to pay for their debts. In essence, the Sabbath day is about turning from selfish pursuits to setting time aside to reflect on God and His purposes. It is the opportunity to rediscover our purpose and significance in life.

*A third area where the people of Israel entered into a repentance covenant with God is in the area of honouring the LORD with the firstfruits of their earnings (Neh. 10:35). They will ensure that they do not neglect the house of God (Neh. 10:39). People who want to experience revival and spiritual awakening must be generous in giving to the Lord's work. This is one clear way in which we place God first in our lives. We cannot experience the supernatural grace of God in our individual lives, churches and nations unless we put God first in everything. Giving to the LORD's work is a practical demonstration of the pre-eminence of God in everything that we do.*

When we have put our personal lives in order as individuals and as communities of God's people, we can pray and ask God for revival in our lives and nations.

In summary, the three areas where the Israelites entered into covenant with God in obedience to God's demands have to do with worshipping God only, and honouring God first. The avoidance of inter-ethnic marriage and the observance of the Sabbath were both meant to ensure that the Israelites worshipped God only. The main issues remained avoiding the redirection to other gods that marriage to non-Jews could cause. In the same vein, the observance of the Sabbath was supposed to help the Jews remember to give their allegiance and worship to the God of creation, rather than worship the creation. Honouring God with the first fruits of one's labour on the other hand was supposed to help the Jews

remember to put God first in all things. The blessings with the material things of this world come from God. We acknowledge this truth by giving the first fruits of everything we work for to God.

There are two tendencies that interrupt our experiencing of revival and spiritual awakening. The first challenge we face is our tendency to go back to our old ungodly ways after we have seen some initial signs of God's work in our midst. We are unable to sustain our spiritual concentration on God long enough to see deep and long lasting transformation of the situations we bring before the Lord. There is also the tendency on our part to begin to take credit for what God has done. God does not share His glory with any other person. Our two natural tendencies of spiritual relapse and the stealing of God's glory are the two enemies of sustained revival and spiritual awakening. *Revivals and spiritual awakenings are usually short lived because people turn their backs to their covenants once they get comfortable in the midst of God's blessings.*

Spiritual leaders are needed who will encourage prolonged faithfulness on the part of God's people for the special outpouring of God's blessings during revival to have deeper and more permanent effects. Nehemiah invited Ezra to help him provide the necessary leadership for the spiritual renewal and rebuilding of the people of Israel.

#### **Leadership and Revival (Neh. 13:1ff)**

In the case of the people of Israel; Nehemiah had to provide strong leadership to get them back on track with the covenants they made with God. Nehemiah had returned to Babylon after the rebuilding and dedication of the walls. In coming back to Jerusalem later, he discovered the Israelites had broken all three covenants they had made with God. The people had neglected the house of God, they were trading on the Sabbath and the men had married women from Ashdod, Ammon and Moab. Nehemiah's response was firm and quite controversial. He beat some of the men and pulled out their hair when he discovered they had married non-Jewish women. He physically drove Tobiah out of a room given him by Eliashib in the house of God. He purified the priests

and Levites, and made sure they went back to their duties. The giving of offerings to the house of God was restored.

This kind of leadership is needed to sustain revival and spiritual awakening. God's people need spiritual leaders who are intolerant of ungodliness. We need leaders who are dissatisfied and angered by the ungodliness of our times. We need leaders who are bold enough to point to us how we are displeasing our Lord. In this age of tolerance, Christian leaders are generally nice people who are angered by nothing. They are accommodating of everything. The result is that we have given new names to our sins instead of calling a spade a spade. When Africans are involved in syncretism we say they are making the gospel more African. When North Americans are involved in self-worship and ungodly sensuality, we say they are simply experiencing the by-products of the value of freedom and liberty. When Europeans are demonstrating apathy and coldness to the gospel we explain it by saying they are living in a post-Christian era. I would rather call it a neo-pagan era. We need to be careful about using words that are too polished for spiritual states that should be very disturbing to us.

Who will tell us when we are displeasing God and are inviting His indignation? We need Nehemiahs for our time. The Church needs leaders who are dissatisfied enough with the status quo to call us to prayer and repentance so we can experience forgiveness and fresh visitation from God. When the Church is purified and empowered by the Holy Spirit, then we are able to see what He is doing and participate in it. That is when we are able to say with Jesus that our Father is working still and so we must also work in bringing in the harvest. A compromised Church cannot see the spiritual awakenings around her. When the Church is pure in heart, then she shall see God at work (Matt. 5:8; Heb. 12:14).

Our repentance and pursuit of revival must seek to place Jesus Christ above everything else. The Christian life is not Jesus plus, it is Jesus period. The church needs a rededication to the sufficiency of God's Word for all matters relating to life and godliness. Secondly, the church needs to return to the truth that Jesus Christ is the only mediator between God and man. He is the only Saviour.

Revival is not simply a return to a past experience of God's blessings, but a return to the Person, Purpose and Power of Jesus Christ. For instance, the American church's pursuit of revival must acknowledge that as much as the founding of the country was based on Christian principles, it was not Christian enough to be a canonised experience that will be the current aspiration in regards to revival. Revival in Europe must not only be a return to the times of Wesley, Muller, Whitefield, etc. We must seek a higher standard that is based on the nature and revealed will of Christ. The ways of Christ are always higher than our past experiences. Our aspirations for revival do not always impress our Lord because they do not go beyond past experiences to capture the higher will and nature of Christ. Let us trust God for a fresh outpouring of His Spirit on His people everywhere.

We need to claim His promise through the prophet Isaiah.

"Forget the former things. Do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing. Now it springs up. Do you not perceive it?" (Isaiah 43:18)

*We have compromised and as such become complacent. We need a wake up call from God. Given our human nature, God sometimes has no other option but that of taking the things that have become idols in our lives away from us. Persecution becomes an inevitable instrument of God to wake His people up from their complacency and indifference. This is not to imply that every suffering is caused by God to wake His people up from spiritual slumber. However, at times that is clearly the case. At times in human history, we are confronted with the paradox of persecution bringing untold suffering on a people, and yet at the same time bringing open doors that are unprecedented.*

### **Suffering as an Instrument of Revival**

History is filled with examples of persecution bringing sufferings on a people and yet at the same time giving them unusual opportunities to accelerate the evangelisation of nations. The persecution and the scattering of the early church that is partly

reported in Acts 8 facilitated the spreading of the gospel among the Gentile nations.

A contemporary case is the effects of the AIDS epidemic in Africa and other countries in the world. It is a very serious disaster that requires all the attention we can give to eliminating it from human experience. Yet at the same time, it has confronted us with the effects of our ungodly lifestyle. The governments of many countries are opening their public schools to the teaching of ethics, morality and in many cases Christian living. This is an unusual development. Many Christian organisations are now involved in responding to the AIDS epidemic in public institutions at the invitation of governments.

In Malawi, for instance, the government has opened the door to all the three million youth in the nation's primary and secondary schools to be trained in Christian ethics and morality. The same situation exists in many other African countries. We have open doors right now to help build a Christian foundation for many of these countries by teaching the youth the Way of Christ. This is one of the few times in history that governments are openly inviting the Church to help provide the answer for a national need.

It, however, needs to be stated that God does not need our human suffering as an instrument for revival. God does not need evil to do good things among His people. God, however, demonstrates goodness to His people in spite of evil. The point being made is that God's ability to use human suffering as an instrument for revival should not be mistaken to mean that He needs human suffering as an instrument for revival. It is rather characteristic of humans that suffering helps us put the brevity of this life in perspective, and as a result be more open to things that are spiritual and eternal.

For the Church to help society with such problems and also make the most of the accompanying opportunities to proclaim the gospel of Christ, she has to cease being part of the problem. We need to pray for God's fire of purification to fall on the Church afresh. Only a revived Church can make the most of the open doors that result from spiritual awakening. Spiritual awakening occurs when

society as a whole acknowledges the need for God's intervention in human affairs.

### **Results of Revival**

When the Church is revived, there will be:

- Repentance on the part of the believers,
- Renewal in the lives of believers,
- Reconciliation among believers, and
- Reformation in society.

A notable example of the results of revival is in war torn Rwanda. Emmanuel was given a copy of Dr. Bright's book on revival, *The Coming Revival*. When he read the book, he knew that the revival being referred to by Dr. Bright was also needed in Rwanda to bring healing and reconciliation to a land that is being destroyed by ethnic hatred. He shared the book with some Pastors. Tutsi and Hutu church leaders decided to fast and pray for 40 days to seek God's face for revival, reconciliation and healing for Rwanda. Many church leaders and their members joined in the 40-day fast. The Christians who were part of this were convicted of their sins of ethnic hatred against one another. They confessed their sins to one another, and also forgave one another. The process of reconciliation and healing between Tutsi and Hutu Christians began. This is a great testimony to the non-Christian community on the power of the gospel and the relevance of the Christian faith to the challenges facing Rwanda as a country.

It all began with Emmanuel's decision to take the initiative to encourage his fellow Rwandese Christian leaders to join in fasting and praying for revival, reconciliation and healing for their land.

A revived Church becomes a beam of light in society. When the Church is revived and is right with God, she can bring transformation to many areas of society as a whole. Revival, therefore, leads to social and moral reformation. The reformation is possible because of the many who come to know the Lord as a result of the faithfulness of the revived in preaching the gospel of Christ. Reformation, however, requires the willingness of Christians to impact society through involvement. The East Africa

revivals resulted in improvements in agriculture, education and health. This was because the leaders of the revival emphasised Christian stewardship in these areas. However, the revivals failed to make a direct impact on politics. It was the belief of many of the pioneer revivalists that Christians could not be involved in politics because they were not of this world. Christians can only be salt and light of the world through involvement.

When spiritual awakening occurs, there is usually an accompanying great response on the part of non-believers to the gospel message. We do need the grace of spiritual awakening around the world today, but more particularly in parts of the world that seem to be closed to the gospel. Some of these areas are Europe and Japan. We need to join in praying together to trust God to open peoples' hearts to the gospel in these parts of the world.

### **EVANGELISM AND SPIRITUAL AWAKENING**

**God is Always Doing the Supernatural in Evangelism (Jn. 5:17).**

Our Lord Jesus, when questioned by the Jews about healing the invalid at Bethesda on the Sabbath, said, "My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working" (Jn 5:17). By this statement Jesus was underscoring the important truth that God is always at work. Especially in the area of evangelism, God is always at work preparing hearts for the gospel. We should learn to maximise the opportunities we have to reach people for Christ, even as we pray for more open doors.

In his prison letter to the church at Colosse, the apostle Paul asked Christians to pray that a door would open for him to proclaim the gospel of Christ clearly (Col. 4:3). This example of Paul suggests to us that we need to pray for doors to open for the proclamation of the gospel. It is our responsibility as believers to pray for spiritual awakening so that doors would be opened for the gospel in unusual ways.

Our expectation for and prayer for spiritual awakening should not mistakenly cause us to take lightly the open doors that we have now. The Spirit of God is at work and has prepared many hearts

for the gospel. Our responsibility is prayerfully to see where God is at work and join Him in making the most of the opportunities.

**We Need to have our Spiritual Eyes Opened so We can Discern what God is Doing, and What God Wants to Do Through Us (Eph. 1:17,18)**

“The LORD will reveal what He is doing to those who fear Him” (Ps. 25:14). When we experience personal revival and are walking closely with the Lord, He is willing to confide in us what He is doing in our world. We have the example of Elisha and his servant at Dothan. When the Israelites were surrounded by the Arameans, the servant of Elisha lost all hope when he compared the size of the Aramean army to the number of Israelites who were surrounded by the Arameans. The servant of Elisha could not see the angels and chariots of the Lord that surrounded the Arameans. Elisha prayed that his servant’s eyes would be opened. When this happened, Elisha’s servant confessed that those who were for them were more than those who were against them (2 Kings 6:15-17).

Revival in the Church opens the eyes of Christians to see what God is doing. The responsibility of the Church is to walk in holiness before the Lord. Holiness, as a result of revival and spiritual renewal, is a prerequisite for discerning what God is doing (Matt. 5:8; Heb. 12:14).

God chooses those who understand the times and know what should be done to maximise the opportunities as His instruments for extraordinary harvests. The hand of the LORD will be on those He chooses to anoint for special tasks related to evangelism.

**Once We Understand What God is Doing, We Need to Seek Obediently, Creative and Effective Ways to Partner with Him in Evangelism (Jn 5:19).**

In partnering with God in evangelism, we need to *seize* every opportunity (Eph. 5: 15,16). *Open doors have a life-span*. They do not remain open forever. This is the reason why we need to make the most of them while it is still day. For the night comes when we may no longer walk through those doors as easily as we can today.



A good example is the opening of the former Soviet Union to the gospel towards the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. As the year 1987 approached, some Christians in Russia felt strongly that they should pray for the release of Christians from captivity to communism. There was an urgent call to prayer that brought Christians all over the world before the throne of God, petitioning God for one thing: religious freedom in the former Soviet Union. The conviction that underlying this call to prayer was that just as the Jews were liberated from captivity to Babylon after 70 years, God would also bring liberation to the Christians in the former Soviet Union after 70 years of captivity to communism (1917-1987). God answered this prayer and as a result the former Soviet Union opened up to Christian missions. Many Christian organisations joined in partnerships to make the most of this opportunity. Now there are already some restrictions to this open door to evangelism.

### **Challenges to Maximising Opportunities for Evangelism**

The practical challenge we face today with the unfinished task is not only that of getting God to act and open doors for evangelism. It is also that of asking God for boldness to step out in obedience to maximise the opportunities we have because of doors that God has already opened for us. The Lord Jesus said that those who love Him will obey Him. He promised to love and reveal Himself to those who obey Him (John 14: 21,23). Those who obey God are the ones who will know what the Father is doing and be able to participate in it. Christ is in the Father and the Father is in Christ. As we abide in Christ's love and obey His commands we are also in Christ who is in God the Father. It is amazing that those who are already indwelt by the Spirit of God and are living their lives in obedience to Christ's commands have God the Father and God the Son making their home with them.

Christ promises that such obedient Christians can ask whatever they wish and it will be granted. We have the Messianic prophecy of David to guide us in knowing what is probably the most important 'ask' before God. The Father told the Son, "ask of me, and I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth

your possession" (Ps. 2:8). *We know we are in the will of God when we ask Him for the nations.* Our preoccupation should be the taking of every land for Christ Jesus. We are to work obediently in partnership with the Spirit of God in taking every thought in every land captive to the obedience of Christ (2 Cor. 10:5).

If we are honest, we will agree that a major part of our real challenge is that many of the opened doors are in areas of the world that are not convenient mission fields. There are prices to pay to bring the gospel to these parts of the world. We should, therefore, ask ourselves whether we are really waiting for God to open doors to the gospel, or for Him to make the mission field convenient and safe. We have not been called to seek the sensation of the spectacular, but to simply live in wholehearted obedience to God through His Word. Our goal should be to have the Presence and Power of God go with us as we preach the good news. He has promised to be with us always until the end of the age (Matt. 28:18-20).

A good case in point is the situation in southern Sudan. The Christians and traditional African Religionists have refused to give in to Islam and the *sharia* law. They have had to risk their lives to the point of being literally deprived of the basics of life. Women who are weakened by starvation are being sold as slaves. Churches, schools and hospitals are being bombed by government forces. In spite of all this, most southern Sudanese would rather have Jesus than be ruled under '*sharia* law'.

The response of the worldwide Christian community to the fate of the southern Sudanese has not been encouraging. Are the doors not open in southern Sudan? Are we not really waiting for things to become safe in southern Sudan before we go? The Church was founded on the blood of the martyrs. There is no reason to assume that it would not require the same sacrifices for its on-going building.

The doors are open in Eastern Europe, Russia, China, Western Europe, Latin America and Africa. Even in the Middle East we are seeing remarkable moves by the Spirit of God. Through radio and television broadcasts many people in this region are hearing the good news of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Many who make

decisions for Christ are followed up by correspondence. It is reported that in one such Correspondence Centre alone there are 3,000 letters received each day from people who are inquiring about Jesus Christ. This response is so remarkable that it takes special trucks collecting the sacks with mail each day.

We have seen remarkable progress in world evangelisation in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In the year 1910 there were less than 10 million known Christians on the continent of Africa. Towards the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century there are about 350 to 400 million Africans who claim to be Christians. Yet at the same time there are about 150 to 200 million Africans who have not clearly heard the good news of the Lord Jesus Christ. My heart was warmed with a report I received regarding a partnership between the Nazarene Church and Campus Crusade for Christ in Africa. This partnership was based on the usage of the Jesus Film for evangelism and church planting. Campus Crusade provided the equipment and the training of workers, whilst the Nazarene Church provided the manpower and supervision. Within two years, there were 300 new churches planted in Africa with about 175,000 people in follow-up programmes. The Nazarene Church is planning to plant 12,000 churches by 2010 A. D. God is definitely at work right now around our world.

We need to pray that within the next two decades we can truly say that we have given everyone on planet earth multiple opportunities to respond to the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. Our task is not to seek the spectacular, but to be sure we are obediently taking the good news of Christ to all people in the power of the Holy Spirit. As we do this, God in His sovereignty will confirm the message with special evidences of His Presence and Power in ways that we will refer to as spiritual awakening.

To make the most of the opportunities available to us today we need to enter into partnerships that will maximise the resources God has given to us. The tendency for many of us to go it alone or to feel obliged to directly use the resources we have, instead of making them available to others who can be more effective is a great limitation to the fulfillment of the Great Commission. The

Church today has more than enough financial, human and material resources for the fulfillment of the Great Commission.

What is needed is for all of God's people to use all of God's resources to reach all of God's world. Our God is at work. We should be sure we are abiding in Christ who is in the Father. Then we will have the spiritual insight to know what God is doing and how we can partner with Him in reaching our world with the gospel.

**Let us together pray and trust God for a fresh anointing on His Church so that the revival and spiritual awakening that we will experience in the early part of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, if not before the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, will be like nothing we have ever seen. We pray that God will do a new thing.**

**Even so Come Spirit Come !!!**