

Les and Sermons :: Mighty Outpourings Of The Holy Spirit The Greatest Need Of This Hour! by Oswald J.

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Do we really believe that we are living in the last hours of the last days of this age, and that God's promise is going to be fulfilled? Let us read it again: "And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out My Spirit upon all flesh..." (Acts 2:17).

This is the dispensation of the Holy Ghost. Pentecost was the birthday of the church. But if Peter could speak of Pentecost as the "last days," then we are living in the "last hours" of the last days. This is Saturday night in the history of the church. It is the eleventh hour.

God has declared that in the "last days" He would pour out of His Spirit. That promise was partially fulfilled on the day of Pentecost. But it remains for us to see the final and complete fulfillment. Let me again remind you that this is still the dispensation of the Holy Spirit.

Have we, then, Scripture to warrant the hope of another great outpouring of the Spirit of God as we enter the "last hours" of the last days of this age? I believe we have. It is my deep, deep conviction that God is waiting to pour out His Spirit once again, and that wherever He can find a people who will meet His conditions, He will give flood tides of mighty revival! And the outpouring of the Holy Spirit is, I am convinced, the greatest need of the hour!

But is this outpouring for a select few? Is it only for spiritual leaders, and for men alone? By no means. Thank God, His Word is absolutely clear and conclusive. "I will pour out of My Spirit," He declares, "upon all flesh." Yes! Upon old flesh and young flesh, upon rich flesh and poor flesh, upon high flesh and low flesh — "all flesh."

"...And your sons and your daughters shall prophesy...and on My servants and on My handmaidens I will pour out in those days of My Spirit; and they shall prophesy" (Acts 2:17-18).

Not only the men but the women; not only the old but the young; not only the high but the low. Daughters will prophesy, and handmaidens as well.

All may claim a part. It is to be a great universal outpouring for all peoples everywhere. Anyone may seek it, any church expect it. This is the solution of all problems. Not money, but the outpoured Spirit! Not how to get the attention of the people, but how to secure the operations of the Holy Ghost. Not better preaching, but Holy Ghost preaching. "I will pour out of My Spirit upon all flesh." This, my brethren, is the greatest need of the hour!

"This Is That" (Acts 2:14-18)

Now there was no mistaking what had happened. "This is that" was Peter's verdict. It had been foretold long, long ago. "This is that." It was a definite, genuine, real experience. Something happened, something so wonderful, so amazing, so unusual that not one could possibly be deluded or deceived.

It was no more "believism" but a sure enough, wide-awake, soul-satisfying experience. Things happened. Something came of it. It bore immediate fruit. There was a true outcome. It was not for self but for others. It did not send them in to seek manifestations. It sent them out to do things for God.

Ten-Day Prayer Meeting

How did it happen? What was its cause? Just two things. First, a ten days' prayer meeting. Not a play-meeting, but a prayer meeting. We are so busy these days that God cannot get our ear. We will not be quiet and still long enough for Him to speak to us. Prayer, real prayer, hours of unbroken, uninterrupted waiting on God, seems to be largely an experience of the past. But they waited. God got them still. Do you grasp it? God secured their attention for ten days. Peter forgot his fishing. Matthew his tax collecting. Business was suspended for the time at least. Everything that might detract had been set aside. They "continued with one accord in prayer and supplication" (Acts 1:14). Thus God got them ready. They were now prepared for the mighty outpouring of the Holy Ghost.

And That Is Still the Secret — Prayer!

Get alone with God. Be quiet long enough for Him to talk. Pray until you are prayed through and prayed out, until you have prayed about every problem. Then when God has settled your problems let Him give you the new vision.

Stay in His presence until you can see things through His eyes, until you can see what He wants you to see. He will speak to you about hindrances and obstacles that you never dreamt existed. He will show you what is the matter — if you wait long enough. Therefore, do not be impatient at the delay, but pray on and on and on. Delay is not denial. They prayed!

Then — They Believed God!

That is the second condition — faith. They put their trust in His Word. What was that Word? It first occurs in Luke 24:49: "Behold, I send the promise of My Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high."

Then Jesus gave it again in Acts 1:4-5: "And being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith He, ye have heard of Me. For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence."

And finally in Acts 1:8: "But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto Me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth."

It was to these promises they pinned their faith. Not to a feeling, nor to a hope, nor a desire, but to the living Word of God. They knew, knew without a doubt, that their Lord's Word would be fulfilled. And they waited.

Mark you, it was not a take-it-by-faith, an intellectual presumption. Ah no! It was real faith, faith that waited, faith that expected, faith that reckoned with God.

What mattered it to them that they had tarried seven days and received nothing? Did they not have His promise? And was He not true? But why did they not simply believe that the Spirit had been outpoured, and commence work?

Ah! They Wanted Something Real!

And besides there would have been no outcome to prove it. It would have been a hollow thing. The outcome they sought would be manifest to all. Jesus had said "until." We, too, may wait, wait in believing prayer, "until" the Spirit is poured out upon us and on the Christless masses to whom we minister.

But what will happen when the Holy Spirit is outpoured? What may we expect? Perhaps if we were to find out what took place as a result of the first great outpouring our question would be answered. What God did once He can do again: and what God did following the outpouring on the day of Pentecost, to a greater or lesser extent, He will repeat in this our day. Let us see, then, some of the things that followed that mighty outpouring.

Supernatural Boldness and Power

First of all, the disciples were given a supernatural boldness. What an amazing difference between the Peter who denied his Lord in the face of a little Jewish maid, and the Peter who stood forth like a rock and charged the thousands before him with the murder of the Son of God. Such Holy Ghost boldness is certainly not natural.

In the second place, there was supernatural power. That, of course, had been the promise. "Ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you." Not a power within themselves imparted by God apart from the all-powerful One, but the power that operated through them from the indwelling Spirit of God. And, oh, the result, the marvelous result of that power! Notice now what happened.

Amazement!

"And they were all amazed" (Acts 2:12). That was the first thing — amazement. It was written on every face. Men mar

veled. "What meaneth this?" The question was on every tongue. They were astonished, stunned, amazed!

Ah, my brethren, when has anything happened in our meetings that has caused amazement?

Have strangers gone out to tell their friends and relatives of the wonderful works of God? And if not, why not? Simply because there has been nothing of a supernatural nature. People are used to the natural. It is commonplace with them.

Is not our religion supernatural? Then why not look for God to work along supernatural lines? Why? Because the Spirit has not been outpoured. Ask God for a mighty outpouring of the Holy Ghost and something extraordinary, unusual, supernatural will take place. And then, but not before, men will be amazed. We have been content with the natural, the ordinary, too long!

Yes, and no advertising will be necessary when the Holy Spirit is outpoured. Nor will there be any difficulty in getting people to attend the meetings. Once let something happen that amazes, and there will be no room for the crowds that will flock to see what is taking place.

People will tell one another about the amazing things that God is doing, and the building will be thronged. But it will take the supernatural to do it. They were amazed. God grant it in this our day!

Conviction on Sin!

But not only were they amazed; they were convicted. "Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?" (Acts 2:37). Ah! The Holy Ghost had been at work. That had been their Lord's promise. "When He (the Holy Ghost) is come, He will convict the world of sin..." (John 16:8). And so He did!

No sooner had He been outpoured upon the disciples than He began to convict the unsaved. And the conviction was real. It made them cry out, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?"

And so it has been, and so it ever will be in every genuine outpouring of the Holy Spirit. There will be conviction of sin!

Men will be pricked in their heart as on the day of Pentecost. This is the great lack in the work of today. There is little or no conviction. Converts, so-called, come smiling to the inquiry room, and accept Christ in such a matter-of-fact sort of way that it means nothing.

It is easy, oh, so easy, to pile up numbers in a campaign where there is no conviction. That is what we need today—real, old-fashioned conviction that makes people cry out in agony. "What shall we do?" God save us from modern evangelism that seldom, if ever, sees it!

There is far too much of lightness and frivolity, too many jokes and amusing stories, in present-day work, to permit conviction. No wonder the Holy Ghost is unable to do a deep and abiding work. Enthusiasm is too often worked up by the singing of light, song-like hymns set to music that appeals to the feet rather than to the heart. The grand old hymns that produce real conviction of sin are ignored. Spirituality is judged by the amount of noise made and the light, surface enthusiasm of the congregation. How can the Holy Ghost convict in such an atmosphere?

Well might we sing and pray as never before:

"Strike the stoutest sinner through,

Start the cry, 'What must I do?'

Make him weep till born anew,

Through the land."

Holy Ghost Conversions

Conviction is not conversion. It is possible to be deeply convicted of sin and still never be converted. Unless conviction

n leads to conversion it has failed in its object. In a real outpouring of the Holy Ghost there are genuine conversions. Souls are truly born of God and saved.

And apart from the fruit there is no real blessing. If the experience received does not result in an outcome such as this there is something radically wrong.

People were really saved. They had passed from death unto life. And since God is "not willing that any should perish" (2 Pet. 3:9), therefore it is His plan and purpose that men and women should be saved. If we are not getting true converts it is an evidence that there has been no outpouring of the Spirit, for when He comes, He regenerates.

"And they continued steadfastly" (Acts 2:42). That is to say, they did not backslide. The real reason there are so many backsliders is because there are so many who have never had a true forward slide to Jesus Christ. Their conversion has been that of the head instead of the heart.

They have never possessed what they professed. And then they say: "I tried it all and found it a failure." You see, they got nowhere. And it is always harder to win them the second time than it was the first.

It may be they have been pointed to an experience which they are told to seek, and then, resting on feeling instead of upon the Word of God, they sooner or later backslide. They lose the glow of their experience.

Applying the Word of God

to the Conscience

Charles G. Finney was probably the greatest revivalist since the days of the apostles. His sermons were largely on sin and its consequences. He appealed to the conscience through the Word of God. Hence, his converts stood. Only fifteen percent, we are told, ever backslid. Eighty-five percent remained true.

Whereas, with even so great a preacher as D. L. Moody, some seventy percent, it has been estimated, went back. And in Wesley's work, including all the holiness groups that have sprung from it, though one of the mightiest of all time, the one great cry of anguish is over the vast army of backsliders. The preacher has to continually plead with the backslider to return.

But today is even worse. A prominent leader who is doing a deep spiritual work declares that if ten percent stand he is thankful.

"They continued steadfastly." Surely, then, there is room for deep heart searchings as to the cause of so much backsliding. Surely it behooves us to ask God to test our work and see what it produces. Ought we not to be able to come back five, yea, ten years after, and find our converts standing true?

If not, then, what is the use of it all? Our meetings only harden and make it more difficult for the next worker. Better far to have a little fruit, a few results, and have them genuine, than to have a multitude of professions, but no true conversions.

Signs and Wonders

Following the outpouring of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost, mighty signs and wonders were displayed, miracles performed, the sick were healed, supernatural guidance was given, and angelic deliverance wrought. Such is the power of a holy church.

"And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles" (Acts 2:43).

The individual signs, wonders and miracles were far too numerous for Scripture to mention so the whole report is summed up as follows: "And by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people...in so much that they brought forth the sick into the streets, and laid them on beds and couches, that at the least the shadow of Peter passing by might overshadow some of them.

"There came also a multitude out of the cities round about Jerusalem, bringing sick folks, and them which were vexed

with unclean spirits: and they were healed every one" (Acts 5:12-16).

What an amazing experience! But such is the power of a holy church. The Spirit has been outpoured, and as a result mighty miracles were wrought. "And they went forth, and preached every where, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following" (Mark 16:20).

And so has it been in every true revival all down the centuries. Wherever the Spirit has been poured out, miracles of healing, signs and wonders have taken place. It mattered not whether the leaders and preachers of the revival believed in it or not; the Holy Spirit was present and He worked in a supernatural way. John Wesley records a number of such cases. So also in the Irish Revival of 1859. Finney saw the miraculous in his meetings.

Do not be surprised, my brethren, if miracles again happen when the Holy Ghost is outpoured. It would be amazing if they did not. Under such conditions, the extraordinary is to be expected. The reason many are prayed for today and not healed is because the power of the Holy Ghost is not present. Seek a genuine outpour and things will happen.

Persecution

"All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution" (2 Tim. 3:12). No sooner had the Holy Spirit been poured out on the disciples than the devil began to rage. Almost immediately they were brought into conflict with the priests and Sadducees. And the next thing they knew they were behind the bars.

Do not think that the priests and Sadducees are all dead. And when the Holy Ghost is poured out they will be the first to oppose. Persecution comes from the religious people, and generally from the leaders themselves. Every Spirit-filled man has found it so. Ah yes, my brethren, the priests and Sadducees are still alive. And if there is no persecution it is a sign that there is no Holy Ghost power.

Now what actually happened? They were questioned of course. And, oh, the answers that Peter gave! What Holy Ghost boldness! What fearlessness! And finally, since there was nothing else to do, they let them go, first commanding them never again to speak or teach in the name of Jesus. You can read it all for yourself in the fourth chapter of the Book of Acts.

Well, did they agree to the terms? Did they obey? Not for a moment. "Whether it be right in the sight of God," replied Peter, "to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard." Hallelujah! "So when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding nothing how they might punish them..." (Acts 4:19-21).

Now what is to be the plan of procedure? What would some counsel? I can hear them saying, "Be cautious. Keep quiet. Obey the rulers and do not preach any more for awhile. Wait till the storm blows over. Bow to authority and so escape further trouble."

But do they heed such worldly counsel? Not for a moment. No sooner are the disciples free than they hurry to their own company and report everything. Then they hold a great rousing prayer meeting.

"And now, Lord, behold their threatenings," they exclaim, "and grant unto Thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak Thy word, by stretching forth Thine hand to heal; and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of Thy holy child Jesus" (Acts 4:29-30).

Think of it—asking for greater boldness than ever! And praying for more signs and wonders, more miracles of healing, the very thing that had gotten them into trouble before. Yes, and God gloriously answers their prayer (Acts 5:12-16).

And then—well, then it happened just as predicted. They found themselves in jail again (Acts 5:17-42). And, oh, what an experience! I wish we had space to describe it, but you can read it for yourself. Enough that the upshot of it all was that once again they were reprimanded and warned, after which they were given a beating and then let go.

Oh, my brethren, I sometimes wish there were a little more persecution in the church today. The line of demarcation would be clearly drawn then. Mere professors would soon fall away, while God's true children would suffer and go through it. It would do us good.

A Spirit of Prayer Outpoured

The next thing I notice is that there was poured upon them a wonderful spirit of prayer. What a prayer meeting they had following the first release from prison! (Acts 4:23-31). How important they considered it! "We will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word" (Acts 6:4).

And on the night of Peter's deliverance from prison—oh, how they prayed! No time for sleep. No time for rest. Too much was at stake. And prayer, continuous, fervent, united intercession, could alone prevail, so they prayed, prayed until their prayers were answered! (Acts 12:1-17).

My friends, prayer has been the outcome as well as the secret of every mighty outpouring all down the centuries. Oh, the spirit of prayer that rested on the converts of the revival under Finney! And the early Methodists—oh, how they prayed! What a spirit of intercession possessed them! How fervently they pled with God while the hours passed unheeded! Think of William Bramwell spending thirty-six hours in fasting and prayer. Look at the all nights of intercession when thousands scattered throughout the world wrestled with God.

And when the Holy Ghost is again poured out there will fall upon the people a spirit of prayer. Prayer is the natural atmosphere of every true revival. Would to God we had more of it.

The Holy Spirit Fell

One of the most striking examples of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit is found in the incident of the household of Cornelius. Peter in describing the experience says, "As I began to speak, the Holy Ghost fell on them" (Acts 11:15).

Oh, for its repetition! If only we might see it again today! How often could such a thing be stated of our ministry? Has there ever been a time in our experience when we could truthfully say in giving a report of the service, "As I began to speak, the Holy Ghost fell on them"?

Something definite, something unusual, something extraordinary must have taken place. And it is this that we need today more than anything else in the world. It is unquestionably the greatest need of the hour. God can do more in five minutes when the Holy Ghost is poured out than we can accomplish in a lifetime apart from such a divine intervention.

Unless He thus works, our meetings are bound to be dry, lifeless and fruitless, but when the Holy Ghost is poured out the unusual at once takes place. It is easy then for souls to be saved, backsliders reclaimed and believers edified.

The Danger of Working

Without the Spirit

It is possible for a great church to carry on its work in such a way that it can give a substantial and even a glowing report at its annual meeting; its choir is faultless, its music superb, its minister eloquent, its official body prominent and capable, its management perfect, its audiences large and even overflowing, its building magnificent, and its expense completely and easily met.

It is possible for such a church to receive the very highest commendation from its sister churches, and to be considered eminently successful and even spiritual in the Master's work.

And yet—when it comes to the question of the number of souls saved, although it can report many additions to its membership, it can point to no one, or at the least very few, who have truly been "born again," and upon examination its membership will be found worldly and even indifferent to real spiritual results.

This then is the great danger, namely that outwardly the work of God can be carried on without the presence and power of the Holy Spirit, for, unless He has been poured out, all that is done is in the natural and counts nothing so far as the kingdom of God is concerned.

The Power of the Spirit

When Wesley finished messages he closed his eyes and called upon God to confirm His Word, to bear witness to His

truth, and set to His seal, and God did. He was immediately vindicated. Men and women dropped on every side under deep conviction of sin and with loud cries besought God to have mercy upon them.

Thus the bystanders knew that John Wesley was God's servant, that his message was divine, and that the Holy Spirit was present in mighty power; for no sooner had the great preacher concluded his sermons and called upon God than the Holy Ghost was poured out upon the people, resulting in the conviction and conversion of sinners.

It was so in the ministry of Charles G. Finney. A few words spoken in the power of the Holy Spirit made a lasting and a saving impression upon scores. In fact, everyone to whom he spoke concerning salvation during the first day following his remarkable anointing with the Spirit was sooner or later converted.

Wherever he preached – there was deep conviction of sin! Again and again, as he proclaimed the message, the Holy Spirit was suddenly poured out upon the people, so that large numbers were swept into the kingdom.

He was one day preaching in a schoolhouse. At first the people became angry, then suddenly everything was changed. The Holy Spirit fell, and in a moment every person in the audience was on his knees crying aloud for mercy. So great were the groans and cries of anguish that for some time the evangelist was unable to make himself heard as he attempted to point the stricken ones to Christ.

For Finney this was a common experience. He always preached with the expectation of seeing the Holy Spirit suddenly fall upon the people. Until this happened, little or nothing was accomplished. But the moment the Holy Spirit fell upon the people, Finney had nothing else to do but point them to the Lamb of God. Thus he lived and wrought for years in an atmosphere of revival.

David Brainerd had the same experience. For months he had labored among the American Indians with but little apparent effect. But, suddenly, one day while he was speaking, as in the case of Peter, the Holy Ghost fell upon the Indians, and in a moment they dropped to the ground and began to cry for mercy. Some continued in agony for hours before they were enabled to believe God and venture their all on the atoning blood of Jesus.

Thus at one meeting David Brainerd saw more accomplished than during all the months of his previous labors. How truthfully he could write in reporting what had taken place, "As I began to speak, the Holy Ghost fell on them."

Oh, what a challenge! What a glorious experience! Are we going to expect it? Do we really believe that we are living in the last hours of the last days of this age, and that God's promise is going to be fulfilled?

Let us listen to it once again: "And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of My Spirit upon all flesh..." (Acts 2:17).

May God make this real in your ministry, and grant again and again mighty outpourings of the Holy Spirit – and may we all seek Him fervently, through prayer and supplication, for this – the greatest need of this hour!