

## Revivals And Church History :: The " Breath of Heaven "

**The " Breath of Heaven " - posted by EAGLEFLYING (), on: 2017/1/14 18:30**

Let us adjust the sails of our spiritual life to catch the first breeze that comes from Heaven!

Â By Stephen F. Olford

Â What would happen if the Breath of Heaven, the Spirit of the living God, struck some of our churches? Pentecost will always be associated with the wind of God. Luke dramatically describes the moment and movement of that wind in the familiar word: "When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly a sound came from heaven like the rush of a mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting" (Acts 2:1,2).

Again and again throughout Scripture the sovereign operation of the Holy Spirit is compared to the wind. Think, for instance, of the words of God to the prophet Ezekiel when He commanded him: "Prophecy unto the wind, prophesy, son of man, and say to the wind, Thus saith the Lord God; Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live" (Ezekiel 37:9).

We love to recall that evening scene when Jesus talked with the puzzled theologian Nicodemus. To make His point with regard to the work of the Holy Spirit within the human personality, Jesus used a familiar phenomenon. As he was speaking, light evening breezes were probably playing on their faces or sighing in the trees and the Lord said, "The wind blows where it wills, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know whence it comes or whither it goes; so it is with every one who is born of the Spirit" (John 3:8).

The wind of God's Spirit, the wind of revival, blows suddenly, searchingly and sovereignly. I once heard Dr. G. Campbell Morgan say: "We cannot organize revival, but we can set our sails to catch the wind from heaven when God chooses to blow upon His people once again." What do we mean by "setting our sails"? I want to suggest, from the verses before us, that setting our sails for the wind of revival involves preparation, supplication and expectation.

Preparation  
"When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place." Before He went to the cross, the Lord Jesus told His disciples to go to Jerusalem and wait there until they were endued with power from on high. His actual words were: "Behold, I send the promise of My Father upon you; but stay in the city, until you are clothed with power from on high" (Luke 24:49). And in obedience to that command they went into the city, to an upper room, to wait upon God.

In every sense of the word this was a period of preparation. It involved a oneness of mind. "They were all with one accord in one place." Eleven times in the New Testament and on ten occasions in the book of the Acts we read that they "were of one accord." This unity of mind seems to be an essential factor in the preparation for the wind of revival.

Some time ago I read through Dr. Edwin Orr's Second Evangelical Awakening in Britain. In this magnificent work he tells how revival swept the British Isles one hundred years ago. Analyzing the substance of his entire treatment, I came to the conclusion that two indispensable conditions for revival are unity and prayer. In the beautiful Psalm 133 we read: "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!" Having stated that fact, the psalmist goes on to say, "It is like the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, even Aaron's beard: that went down to the skirts of his garments." Then changing the analogy, the writer continues, "As the dew of Hermon, and as the dew that descended upon the mountains of Zion: for there the Lord commanded the blessing, even life for evermore."

What is the Holy Spirit saying to us in this psalm? It is that if we want the oil of fragrance, the dew of freshness, and the fullness of blessing that come with a heaven-sent revival, it will be only as we dwell together in unity! Remember that high priestly prayer of our Lord when He looked into His Father's face and said, "I pray that they may all be one; even as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be in us" (John 17:20,21). It is only when Christians come together in oneness that the wind of revival begins to blow upon the church and God's presence and power are sensed and seen among His people.

In this work of preparation there was also an openness of heart. A self-examination was carried out in that upper room. They rehearsed from the Scriptures and their own experience the tragic story of Judas, the traitor in the camp, the man who ministered with them, who walked with the Savior, who held the treasury, and yet whose heart was not right before God. In their attempt to find a successor to him, they prayed, "Lord, who knowest the hearts of all men, show which one of these two Thou hast chosen to take the place in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside, to go to his own place" (Acts 1:24,25).

It was a prayer for examination and for judgment. There was an openness of heart, and God will never send revival while there is sin unconfessed, and hearts are closed to the blaze of His glory and to the light that reveals evil.

So we see that preparation involves a oneness of mind and an openness of heart, but it also calls for an obedience of will. Those 120 disciples gathered in the upper room were fulfilling the command of the Master who said, "Stay in the city, until you are clothed with power from on high" (Luke 24:49). Obedience is always a prerequisite to the filling and flooding of the Holy Spirit. The Word tells us that the Spirit is given to those who obey Him (Acts 5:32).

Are you longing for revival? Are you praying for the wind of God to blow upon the Church of Jesus Christ? Then set your sails by way of preparation to catch that heavenly breeze! Remember that it will involve a oneness of mind, an openness of heart and an obedience of will.

#### Supplication

"These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication" (Acts 1:14). There was nothing spasmodic or intermittent about their praying. On the contrary, there was a constancy in prayer. Prayer is rarely mentioned in the Word of God without an emphasis on continuance. Jesus said, "Men ought always to pray, and not to faint" (Luke 18:1). The Apostle Paul exhorts us to "pray without ceasing" (1 Thessalonians 5:17).

Prayer is not only an activity, but an attitude of life. If we would pray always and without ceasing, then our whole life should be one of continuous prayer for whatever God would say or send. Many people imagine that prayer is the overcoming of the reluctance of God to give; whereas, in point of fact, prayer is the adjustment of our lives to God's will in order that He might be able to send the blessing He is waiting and longing to grant to His people.

Bishop Lightfoot says, "It is not in the moving of the lips, but in the elevation of the heart to God that the essence of prayer consists" and it is surely in this sense that we should put into practice the injunction to "pray without ceasing."

It is not possible for us to spend all our time with the words of prayer on our lips, but it is possible for us to be all our days in the spirit of prayer, realizing our dependence upon God for all that we have and are, realizing something of His presence with us wherever we may be, and yielding ourselves continually to Him for the doing of His will.

Where there is such an inward state, it will find outward expression in verbal prayer, and in this connection we should notice the frequent ejaculatory prayers throughout Paul's letters. Prayer was so natural and so continual with the great Apostle that it found its way inevitably into his correspondence. (Dr. Leon Morris).

Unity in prayer "These all continued with one accord in prayer" (Acts 1:14). We have already spoken of the importance of unity in mind and in heart, but this must be carried into our prayer life as well. Jesus said, "If two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of My Father which is in heaven" (Matthew 18:19). Have you ever put that promise to the test?

Dr. James Little tells the story of the 1857 revival in New York City and area. There was a man whose soul was moved with a deep longing for an outpouring of the Spirit in that great city. The spiritual land around him was arid and parched, and his cry was, "Turn again our captivity, O Lord, as the streams in the south" (Psalm 126:4).

Desiring that others should join him in concerted prayer, he displayed a little card in the window of a room on Fulton Street which read: "If anyone is interested to pray for revival, come in and join me." The first day he prayed alone. Then others began to join him, until the room became too small. The burden for revival had begun to spread until hundreds had caught the spirit of intercession and supplication.

Four young men in County Antrim, Northern Ireland, knelt in united prayer in a schoolroom. They longed and prayed for revival, and God met them in such a way that the whole of Ireland was affected. Indeed, that was the beginning of the 1859 revival that has influenced the country ever since.

Other instances could be cited to further prove that God honors unity in prayer. But in addition to this, there must be a fervency in prayer "These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication" (Acts 1:14). Prayer has a general connotation of waiting on God, whereas the word "supplication" suggests the beseeching and petitioning aspect of intercession. It is the laying hold of the Lord which will not let go or let up until something happens. This is how Elijah prayed, and James, in citing this man of prayer, writes: "The prayer of a righteous man has great power in its effect" (James 5:16).

This kind of praying costs, for it involves fasting, discipline and persistence. Luke recorded a prayer meeting of this kind in the twelfth chapter of Acts. We read that "prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God" for the imprisoned Peter. Such was the fervency and faithfulness of the praying that before the night was over Peter was delivered from his prison cell and released to preach again the gospel of Christ. Are we prepared to set our sails by this ministry of supplication with constancy, unity and fervency? Only then can we expect to hear the mighty rushing wind from heaven.

#### Expectation

"When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly a sound came from heaven like the rush of a mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them tongues as of fire, distributed and resting on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance" (Acts 2:14).

We can pray all night and all day throughout the coming weeks, and appear outwardly enthusiastic, but if there is no expectancy in our hearts there will be no blessing. A man said to me some time ago that he believed that God could stem the tide of evil, but he didn't have the faith to expect it. It never occurred to him that this was a contradiction of terms.

True expectation calls for a faith that believes. Jesus had said to His disciples, "I will send the promise of My Father upon you" (Luke 24:49). They believed the promise. Indeed, one can sense the spirit of expectancy which characterized them as they knelt in prayer in that upper room. We also must exercise the faith which believes. Jesus said, "All things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive" (Matthew 21:22).

James reminds us that we are to "stand fast in faith, nothing wavering: for he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord" (James 1:6,7). "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God," declares the Apostle Paul (Romans 10:17).

There are a multitude of promises in the Old and New Testaments that give us the confidence to believe that God is waiting to send revival. One example is: "Be patient," says the Apostle James, "unto the coming of the Lord. Behold the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain" (James 5:7).

Do we believe that the latter rain of revival is to fall before Jesus comes back again? The promise is clear enough, but is our faith strong enough? Is it a faith which believes?

Expectancy also calls for a faith that receives "They were all filled with the Holy Spirit." God fills only the hearts and lives of those who have a receiving faith. Have you received this fullness? God's purpose for our lives is continuous revival, and continuous revival is equated with the continuous fullness of the Holy Spirit.

When we are first converted the word to us is: "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. From that point on the relevant exhortation is Ephesians 5:18, "Be filled with the Spirit." Have we the faith to receive the fullness which God is waiting to pour out?

Expectation further calls for a faith that achieves. We read: "They were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak as the Spirit gave them utterance" there were added that day about three thousand souls. Filled with the Holy Spirit, speaking with fearlessness, they stepped out to achieve results for God. And their expectation was not unrewarded. A large city was shaken, a great crowd was challenged and three thousand souls were converted in one day. Their whole ministry carried a relevance, an authority and a conviction such as men and women had never before witnessed. What happened on the day of Pentecost continued to happen through succeeding days and weeks, for we read that "the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved" (Acts 2:47); that is to say, men and women got right with God, not only on Sundays or on special preaching occasions, but every day, in homes, in the synagogue, in the marketplace and wherever unconverted men and women came into contact with those Spirit-filled, revived men and women.

So we have seen that our part in revival is to adjust the sails of our spiritual life to catch the first breeze that comes from heaven. Such adjustment involves preparation, supplication and expectation; or to put it in the words of Bessie P. Head:

O Breath of Life, come sweeping through us,  
Revive Thy Church with life and power;  
O Breath of Life, come, cleanse, renew us,  
And fit Thy church to meet this hour.  
O Wind of God, come bend us, break us,  
Till humbly we confess our need;  
Then in Thy tenderness remake us,  
Revive, restore, for this we plead.  
O Breath of Love, come breathe within us,  
Renewing thought and will and heart;  
Come, Love of Christ, afresh to win us,  
Revive Thy Church in every part.  
O Heart of Christ, once broken for us,  
'Tis there we find our strength and rest;  
Our broken contrite hearts now solace,  
And let Thy waiting Church be blest.  
Revive us, Lord! Is zeal abating  
While harvest fields are vast and white?  
Revive us, Lord, the world is waiting,  
Equip Thy church to spread the light.

Stephen F. Olford, Heart-Cry for Revival, rev. ed. (Memphis, TN: EMI Books, 1987), pp. 86-95. Used by permission.

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