



CORPS RESOURCES



THE PLACE OF REVIVAL IN GOD'S REDEMPTIVE PLAN

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THE MISSION OF GOD

To understand revival it is necessary to step back and look at the bigger picture of what God is doing in the world. True revival, driven by God, is part of God's larger purposes; his *missio Dei* which has been documented in scripture. From the time when God promised Eve that her seed would crush the head of the serpent (Gen. 3:15), and to Abraham that all people would be blessed through him (Gen. 12:1-3), God has been at work to restore all creation through the messiah. Revelation 21 depicts the final goal of God's work, to make everything new (v5); and to prepare for himself a bride (v9) who is the new Jerusalem (v10), which will shine with the glory of God (v11) as he will dwell with his people (v3).

We currently live in the tension of the kingdom of God being 'here but not yet'. In Jesus the definitive action necessary to bring about the reconciliation of God and humanity was completed. Atonement ended the enmity between God and humanity, providing us access to relationship with God. The atonement was the complete defeat of Satan and evil by Christ.

THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

When Jesus finished his ministry on earth, he said to his disciples that he would be sending the Holy Spirit who would prove the world wrong about sin, righteousness and judgement (John 16:8-10). We live in a world that disagrees with God's assessment of sin, righteousness and judgement. The work of the Holy Spirit is to convict people so that they come to repentance. Repentance literally means "change of mind" [1].

The age of the church was inaugurated with the pouring out of the Spirit upon the disciples at Pentecost. Jesus is the one who baptises with the Holy Spirit (Mt 3:11; Acts 1:5, 11:16). The pouring out of the Spirit is linked closely with Jesus' ascension. Scripture consistently testifies "that the Holy Spirit will come only when Jesus has been glorified and seated at the right hand of the Father (John 7:37-39; 15:26; 16:7; Acts 1:4-11)" [2]. When the Spirit is poured out in Acts 2, Peter interprets it as a sign that God's promise to pour out his spirit has been fulfilled in the resurrection and ascension of Christ (Acts 2:32-33).

Given that there is no indication in the gospels that Jesus fulfilled the ministry of baptising people in the Spirit, and the connection between his ascension and the pouring out of the Spirit, it would seem that the pouring out of the Spirit to this day remains the role of the ascended Lord Jesus.

The mission of the Spirit and the church in the time before Christ's return is to proclaim the gospel that Jesus is Lord and has become the all sufficient mediator between us and God. The proclamation of the gospel calls people to repentance, and to receive God's free gift of grace. Revelation 22:17 says it well, "The Spirit and the bride say, 'Come!' And let him who hears say, 'Come!' Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life".

REVIVAL IN GODS LARGER PLAN

This is the larger context within which revival fits. It is not different from God's normal activity in essence of what it is designed to achieve. Rather, revival is a "powerful intensification by Jesus of the Holy Spirit's normal activity of testifying to the Saviour, ...convicting, converting, regenerating, sanctifying and empowering large numbers of people at the same time" [3]. Therefore, in genuine revivals Jesus will be the focus of attention, as the Holy Spirit "exalts Jesus and the doctrines of his saving grace" [3]. This is the normal work of the Spirit, however what is different in a revival is that "it is an unusually powerful manifestation of the normal work of the Holy Spirit - which is to awaken, convict, convert and confirm" [3].

The term 'revival' indicates that it is a process of making awake that which has fallen asleep. Another term used for a similar process is that of 'awakening', which is used of the outpouring of the Spirit on those who have not previously known him. Thus the focus of revival is the church, the "enlivening and awakening of church members who have fallen asleep or who are just about to nod off" [3]. Revival then is becoming aware that the church "is asleep to the power of God, living on the memory of God and not the power of God" [3]. The church is not necessarily unaware of the need for change, or for various methods of church growth. Rather the church is asleep to God and to his power (for example read 2 Timothy 3:1-5).

Thus the essence of revival is not the spiritual gifts that may be in operation. Rather the essence of revival is the awakening of the church to the power of God through the operation of the Holy Spirit. The product of the revival over time should then reveal a heightened level of spiritual fruit being seen in the church. However, at its basis revival is the process by which God awakens his people.

This is also a key to discerning whether a spiritual movement is of God or not. Satan can and does counterfeit the spiritual gifts, however he cannot counterfeit the fruit of the Spirit [3], love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23). These are long-term fruits of revival that indicate the genuine operation of the Holy Spirit.

However, anything that God does for his people is never intended for them alone. From Abraham on, the blessings of God are supposed to flow through God's people to the rest of the world (Gen 12:1-3). Likewise, in Psalm 67 the writer prays "May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face shine upon us... that your ways may be known on earth, your salvation among all nations" (v1-2). It should be expected then, that the outworking of genuine revival in the church is the extension of God's kingdom into the rest of the world; that is the awakening of the spiritually dead (Eph 2:1-5). "Revival is for the greatest good of the wider community in which the church is incarnated as salt and light" [3].

NOTES

- 1 Goetzmann J. Conversion, Penitence, Repentance, Proselyte/metanoia. New International Dict of NT Theology [CD ROM].
- 2 Kapic KM, Vander Lugt W. The ascension of Jesus and the descent of the Holy Spirit in patristic perspective: a theological reading Evangelical Quarterly. 2007;79(1):23-33.
- 3 Piggin S. Firestorm of the Lord. Cumbria, England: Paternoster Publishing; 2000.
- 4 Photography credits to Mateusz Stachowski and Job Wisbey