

FIRESTORM!

Seventh in a series by Dr. Rick Perrin on *Revival* from Acts 2:1-21, 41-42
“This is what was spoken of through the prophet Joel: ‘And it shall be in the last days,’ God says, ‘that I will pour forth My Spirit upon all mankind.’” Acts 2:16-17

D. L. Moody was a large man with a huge chest, short neck, a round face, full black beard, and gray eyes. He had only a fifth or sixth grade formal education. He never could spell and often fractured the rules of English grammar. He was born in Massachusetts, but after he became a Christian in 1855 he moved to Chicago. At first he worked as a clerk in a shoe store and gradually developed a ministry among boys and girls in the Chicago slums. A church grew up on Chicago Avenue around his children’s work, and Moody became something of a local celebrity—something like John Fling was in Columbia. He was known as an evangelist full of zeal. He was preaching at his church one night in October 1871, when the air filled with the sounds of horse-drawn fire engines racing through the streets. Mrs. Leary’s cow had kicked over a lantern and the rapidly spreading flames had set the entire city ablaze. All of Moody’s work was burned. He was thirty-four.

The next year found Moody in Great Britain where he preached a few times, and two or three churches invited him to return for an extended mission. So, in June 1873 Moody and his song-leader, Ira Sankey, arrived in Liverpool to discover that no one had made any arrangements. A druggist in York invited him to come to that city. And from there he traveled to the industrial town of Newcastle. He preached a few times and then went on to Edinburgh, Scotland. There, as Moody preached, the Holy Spirit fell on sleepy Presbyterians. In 1874 he returned to England for a mighty climax in London, and there in 1875, thousands came to faith in Christ—rich and poor alike. He returned to the United States with similar results, then went back to England, and finally again, back to the U. S. Some estimate that over his lifetime, D. L. Moody preached to or talked with 100,000,000 people about Christ—and that was in a time without radio or television.

In one meeting he held up a drinking glass and asked the congregation, “How might I get the air out of this glass?” A man responded, “Suck it out with a pump.” “That would create a vacuum,” Moody replied. “It would shatter the glass.” Several others made similar suggestions. Finally Moody smiled and said, “Let me show you.” He picked up a pitcher of water and poured water into the glass. “There,” he said. “The air is out of the glass.” And then he made his point: Victory in the Christian life does not come by sucking out a sin here and there, but by being filled with the Holy Spirit.

For several weeks we have been talking about revival and about the tools that God uses to bring revival about. Today we will examine the work of the Holy Spirit. Please turn with me to the book of Acts, chapters 1 and 2. There are three things I want to show you. **1. The command to wait for the Spirit, 2. The coming of the Holy Spirit, and 3. The call to be revived by the Holy Spirit.**

1. The command to wait for the Spirit. In the first part of Acts chapter 1 Luke recounts how Jesus, before he ascended to heaven, told his apostles not to leave

Jerusalem, but, verse 4 says, “*to wait for what the Father had promised.*” What had the Father promised? Verse 5 says, “*You shall be baptized by the Holy Spirit.*” Why did Jesus say the apostles must wait for the Spirit? There are a couple of reasons. The first reason is that we have a tendency to try to do God’s work in our own strength. Jesus was warning the disciples not to try to build the church by their human abilities, natural talent, or by the sheer determination of their wills. You cannot produce spiritual results by the power of the flesh. In John 6:44 Jesus spoke about spiritual work. He said, “*No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him.*” The apostle Paul reminds the Thessalonians of this when he writes to them in I Thessalonians 1:5. “*Our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit.*” There will never be true revival unless the Holy Spirit produces it. Preaching the gospel or teaching people the things of God requires physical and emotional effort. But hearts will only be changed by the work of the Holy Spirit. So Jesus says, Don’t try to force it. Many Christians

the Old Testament and the New Testament, the Holy Spirit does the same basic things. He convicts a person of his sin, regenerates that person, leads him to repentance, enables him to exercise faith in Christ, and applies salvation. But in the Old Testament period, the Holy Spirit led the church by dispensing upon one person the necessary gifts of leadership. He raised up one man to be king—like David—or to be a prophet—like Elijah. One man led all the people. But from the day of Pentecost on, the Holy Spirit comes on all Christian believers and he endows each Christian with at least one spiritual gift—for example, a gift of teaching or faith or service or administration. The whole church then must act together and each person must exercise his own gift so that the whole body is involved, not just one person. We see this in Acts 1:8. *“You [plural] shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, even to the remotest part of the earth.”* One of the evidences of revival is the unity of the church—the church working together. This frustrates some Christians. When the church is slow to move they set out on their own to do their own ministry. But we are to wait until God chooses to act.

2. The coming of the Holy Spirit. Now we move into Acts 2. Verses 1-4 tell us, *“When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly there came from heaven a noise like a violent, rushing wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them tongues of fire distributing themselves, and they rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit was giving them utterance.”* The day of Pentecost took place seven weeks after the Passover and was one of the major religious celebrations of the Jewish year. The apostles had remained in Jerusalem just as Jesus commanded and they were doing what he had told them to do—praying, talking and planning. They were waiting. On that day approximately 120 followers of Christ—men and women—were together, perhaps in the upper room. Suddenly the Spirit came.

His presence was manifested in three ways. The first was the sound of a violent, rushing wind. You know how the wind sounds when a storm is blowing up. But there was no physical effect, just the noise. The word *wind* and the word *spirit* come from the same root. So wind meant that the Spirit was there. The second manifestation was visible—tongues of fire. Think of Moses at the burning bush, or the presence of God in the fire that passed by Elijah at Mt. Sinai. Fire in Scripture symbolizes the judgment and cleansing of God. John the Baptist had said that when Jesus came he would baptize people with fire. (Matthew 3:11) Finally, the Spirit’s presence was manifested as the apostles began to speak in tongues, that is, languages they did not understand. There is only one place in the Bible where speaking in tongues is defined, and that is in verses 6-11. The Jews at the temple who witnessed this came from countries in every direction, with Jerusalem at the epicenter. These Jews understood Aramaic or Hebrew or Greek or Latin, but they each had grown up speaking a local language or dialect. Each could now hear the apostles speaking their childhood language. It was nothing less than a miracle. The apostles could not possibly know those languages. The miracle proved that the gospel the apostles proclaimed is true. But the tongues were also another indication by God that the church was from this point on to be made up of people from the entire world. The gospel is for everyone.

The manifestation of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost was a once for all time event. It never happened like this again. But the Spirit continues to come upon the church. When he does, what should we look for? This is what we'll see in the next section.

3. The call to be revived by the Holy Spirit. We must remember that all this was taking place in Jerusalem. The leaders of the Jewish church only two months earlier had sent Christ to the cross. They had murdered their Messiah. How far into sin has the church sunk when it rejects and seeks to overthrow its king? I think you will agree that such a blatant rejection of Christ merits the immediate wrath and judgment of God. But you will recall that as he was being nailed to the cross Jesus prayed, "Father, forgive them because they do not know what they are doing." As a direct result of Jesus' plea, the judgment did not fall on the church for another forty years—a whole generation. God in his mercy, through the apostles, was issuing a call to be revived. It was a call to come back to him.

There are three signs of revival given in the following verses. The first sign of revival is a concern for the world. As Peter spoke to the crowds that gathered, he told them in verses 16-17 that this manifestation of the Spirit was in fulfillment of the prophecy made by Joel: "*It shall be in the last days' God says, 'that I will pour forth My Spirit upon all mankind.'*" Everyone who believes in Christ will receive the Holy Spirit, and God's Spirit will be poured out all across the world. All nations will be included. Peter was instructing the church to understand that we must reach beyond ourselves. Someone has said that the church is the only organization in the world that exists solely for the benefit of people who are not members of the organization.

The second sign of revival is that people begin turning from their sin and receive Christ as their savior. As Peter began to preach the gospel he pointed to the presence of the Holy Spirit in verse 33. "*He has poured forth this which you both see and hear.*" In verses 12 and 13 there are recorded two responses by the people who were present in the temple court. Some asked, what's going on? What does this mean?" But other people treated the event with ridicule. They made jokes at the expense of the apostles: "They're drunk!" In verse 38 Peter cried, "*Repent and be baptized!*" Come and be forgiven! Receive the Holy Spirit and be part of the revived church of Christ!" In verse 40 he urged them, "*Be saved from this perverse generation!*" Some responded by believing and being baptized, according to verse 41. But some didn't. What makes the difference between the two? Was it the eloquence of Peter and the other apostles? No, for all saw the same evidence, listened to the gospel in their own language, and heard the same appeal. Were some better people than others? They were all sinful, weren't they? No, the factor that made the difference as to whether one person turned to Christ in faith and another continued to reject him was the working of the Holy Spirit. That day the Spirit moved 3000 to repent and believe.

There was a third sign of revival and the Holy Spirit's work. The people who responded by putting their faith in Christ changed their life priorities. Verse 42 tells us

that they sat under the teaching of the apostles. They made Christian fellowship an important part of their schedule. They attended worship regularly. That's the reference to breaking bread here. It's a description of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper. And they began to pray. A few days later the Holy Spirit worked in the hearts of another huge group and 5000 men believed. (Acts 4:4)

Conclusions. Let's wrap this up by drawing four conclusions about revival and the work of the Holy Spirit. First, revival does not consist in tweaking the program of the church or energizing worship, or offering the benefits of fellowship in a more attractive way. There are many who trot from church to church seeking more exciting experiences. Instead, revival is a work of the Holy Spirit that puts within us a desire to know God better. Do you feel hunger for God? In our society we are overloaded with input from TV, I-Pods, or talk radio, and as a result we are never still. I've heard of people who are starving to death who stuff their stomachs full of sawdust to stop the pain. In some ways, our culture is like that. It would be good for you and me to be quiet, to close off the sound and activity so that we can seek God, and His Spirit can work in our hearts.

Second, revival is not made up of one person or one congregation that turns to Christ. Instead, revival is a general movement that crosses a community or a nation or several nations with many people coming to Christ. Evaluate what is happening today. Do you see signs of revival? I don't. So what do we do? We wait for the Holy Spirit to move. And while we wait we study and worship and pray and share in Christian fellowship. Third, revival doesn't mean that that we are content with how far we've come as a Christian. Revival means we desire God more. That means we seek to get the sin out of our lives, not by sucking out a sin here and there, but by having our lives filled with the Holy Spirit. Ask God to fill you with his Spirit.

And fourth, Revival is not about being religious or just participating in the activities of the church. Martyn Lloyd –Jones, the great London preacher of the last generation, insisted that children sit with their parents in worship, and that they learn to be quiet. It didn't always work too well with his own children. His youngest daughter was about three and she saw her father bow to lead the congregation in prayer. She blurted out so everyone could hear, "Look! Daddy's gone sleepy-bye!" That's what can happen in church. There is a gap between verses 4 and 5 of chapter 2. In verse 4 they're in the upper room. In verse 5 they're in the public square. The gap contains the trip outside. When the Holy Spirit came upon the apostles they got up and went out to where the people were. Revival means Christians tell others about Jesus, and when the Spirit works they bring those new friends into the church of Christ. Revival means the church is expanding. That's where you and I do our part. Come and spread the word!

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