

Seize the Moment

Historically, revivals have brought both spiritual and social change.

As Christians worldwide mark the 100th anniversary of the Azusa Street Revival, I am looking toward the future with a sense of expectancy. I am convinced that this year America will enter another great move of God, one that could be likened to a Third Great Awakening. But in order to realize God's complete purpose for this move, the body of Christ must seize the moment.

Although the Azusa Street Revival influenced the known world of its day, most modern scholars agree that it could have had a more powerful and lasting effect on America. Unfortunately, its major purposes were never fully understood in 1906.

The concept that a revival can "misfire" or achieve only a fraction of its intended purpose is seen in Matthew 23:37-38 when Jesus said: "'O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing! See! Your house is left to you desolate'" (NKJV).

In that passage, Jesus was lamenting that though God had sent prophets with a revival message of deliverance, the word went unheeded. If they had responded, the Lord could have taken Jerusalem to higher spiritual ground and protected its inhabitants from calamity.

Throughout U.S. history, God has sent at least one major revival each century to help the nation navigate into His deeper purposes. The First Great Awakening in the 1730s and 1740s brought most Americans into a unified understanding of

the Christian faith. Baptists, Methodists and Presbyterians flourished alongside more established denominations as the church demonstrated spiritual unity without conformity and persecution.

This revived Christian community developed a burden for education, and founded colleges to equip believers to take the gospel to every corner of the world, including the marketplace. They also began to realize that the church had a responsibility to create an atmosphere of social justice for Native Americans and African-Americans.

In many ways, the Second Great Awakening, from 1790 to 1840, built upon the virtues of the first. This revival reminded the nation of its calling to know Christ and His power, helped advance voting rights and social equality for women, and emboldened those working to end slavery.

No one knows all of God's intentions for a specific revival. But as we study the pattern of past revivals, we can project what could have been done. Based upon this speculative approach, I believe the following five things should have been accomplished in the revival at Azusa Street:

1. The American church should have become fully integrated.
2. The entire church—black and white—should have been the catalyst for the U.S. civil rights movement.
3. The body of Christ should have developed female leaders.
4. The church should have advocated women's suffrage in the early 1900s.
5. Christians should have called for the reform of deplorable working conditions in Northern factories, a situation that led to the establishment of trade unions.

When the next revival begins, I hope we will see it as an opportunity for God to get the church back on track and restructure society. If we don't seize our moment, we may have to wait for another revival cycle. Let's begin praying now to discern God's full, breakthrough purposes for our individual lives, our churches and our nation.

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