

Why Isn't Revival Happening More Often?

Revival is a fond topic these days. We love talking about past revivals, reading about them and applying lessons derived from them in sermons and Bible studies. We look up to eyewitnesses of past revivals and enjoy listening to their accounts of what happened when the fire of the Holy Spirit came down upon believers.

There is still the elephant in the room, though: Why is revival so rare? While we believe that the Holy Spirit is always busy at work through the church all over the globe, we elevate revival events above the rest primarily due to the rarity of such events. Ideally, would it not be better for the church if revivals were to happen more often?

Since I live in Toronto, the household name for revival is the Toronto Blessing, which started around 1994 and lasted a few years. Whenever a prayer is lifted for Toronto, many would mention Toronto Blessing and prophesy for the old wells to be dug up again. But many years have passed since and despite many anniversary services being held in its honor, a repeat of the past revival in today's Toronto seems unlikely.

I would like to humbly submit a theory: The reason we are not seeing more revivals happening is because we have grown comfortable without them.

The church is quite a resilient organization, especially in North America. There are more than 1,500 megachurches in America, each of which offers dozens of different ministries, employs hundreds of paid staffs and serves thousands of attendees. While megachurches are also affected by various government restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic, they have proven to be "too big to fail." Comparatively, smaller

ministries and businesses across North America suffer due to the lack of resources to adapt.

A much different picture exists outside of North America, especially in nations where Christianity is far from being majority or even under intense persecution. In these nations, churches tend to be smaller in size (even operating in homes instead of church buildings) and government restriction on religious gatherings due to COVID-19 is merely another form of restriction among other existing reasons. Many of these repressed churches have been relying solely on the provision of the Holy Spirit for survival long before the pandemic arrived, as well as for growth despite intense persecution.

At every day of Pentecost, we are not only celebrating a religious festival but more importantly the birthday of the church of Jesus Christ on earth, as without the Holy Spirit's presence there would have been nothing but a band of scared disciples hiding from religious authorities. The early church was bold enough to declare the following proclamation:

"For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us – " (Acts 15: 28, NIV)

This is a bold proclamation, as the Holy Spirit was seen by early disciples as walking side by side with the early church, guiding and empowering them in every step.

I would like to propose a hypothetical situation: If today the Holy Spirit were to leave the world as a reversal of the day of Pentecost, what would happen to the church? For pastors and teachers in the church, would you continue teaching and preaching every Sunday? Singers and musicians, would you continue to sing and play music during worship sessions? Would prayer meetings still run? Would street evangelism, hospital visits and prison ministries still happen? Would Sunday services and multi-site broadcasts still happen?

I do not wish to discount the work of many servants of God who

have labored tirelessly to bring honor to Jesus, as well as the impact these faithful ministers have to the world, for great their reward would be in heaven. But I wish to bring into our attention to whether we can do our ministry at all without the Holy Spirit's empowerment. Have we fallen into the comfort zone of going through the motions, relying only on our own abilities to sustain our service?

So when the Holy Spirit comes down to stir revival movements in the world, might we see His work as invasive or disruptive to our comfortable routines? When the topic of revival comes up, could we reminisce about the glory of past revivals but wonder whether it needs to happen right now? Or are our hearts desperate for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit to happen again upon the believers, just like He did two thousand years ago?

I pray that the church of Jesus on earth would reaffirm our "Pentecostal roots" and walk side by side with the Holy Spirit as before. {eoa}

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