
Theology of Missions 3

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We began with the heartbeat of theology, which comes right out of our faith. We have a missionary God, and we are saved because in His Son He came as a missionary. By grace He offers us salvation, not only from sin, but to a new life—a new creation—making us conform in this sanctification process to what He wanted us to be in the beginning. Inevitably then as a part of this recreation, we become an extension of the body of Christ. Therefore, missions is inevitable as we live in expectancy of the day when finally this Gospel which has saved us, this Gospel of the kingdom, will reach the ends of the earth and God will gather His people from every tongue and tribe and nation to praise Him for ever. Because this is our faith, we are by the very nature of our being—missionaries.

But that raises the question, “what does it mean in terms of our life?” We recognize that we are now to be the outreach of our Lord in this present age but how can we be a part? This necessitates a move from *being* to *doing*. As discussed yesterday, the Great Commission, I believe, is the way Jesus summed up our responsibility—to make disciples, and He Himself gave us in His life an explanation of what that means.

While there are diversities of gifts and callings, everyone in the body of Christ is a part of this missionary work. Some will be called to be pastors or evangelists, some will have a very clear vocational ministry as cross-cultural missionaries. But everyone is called to go about the work of our Lord in reaching the world He loved and gave Himself to save. The Great Commission is not a gift; it is not a special call; it is a lifestyle. With this commitment, missions becomes the focus of all Christians as we live in that expectation of seeing finally this Gospel of the kingdom reaching to the ends of the earth.

This cannot be done in our own strength or power. Before Jesus left His disciples, He told them to tarry until they were filled with power from on high, and they would receive that power when the Holy Spirit would come upon them; and they would become witnesses, beginning where they were in Jerusalem—but they were to go to Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth. This was simply amplifying what he had been teaching them—how the Holy Spirit would take what He had been doing and bring it into their lives so that they could continue His ministry. He would not talk about Himself but about the things of Christ. He would guide them; He would teach them; He would be their Counselor. Just as Jesus in the flesh had been their Counselor, now the Holy Spirit would take that role in their lives and through it all, He would glorify Jesus. That is what the Holy Spirit is doing; and as Jesus is lifted up, people are drawn to the Father. The whole work of the body of Christ today is being expressed in that ministry of the Holy Spirit.

The work of the Holy Spirit becomes powerfully evident in times of great revival throughout the history of the Christian Church. So in the real sense, the study of missions brings us into the dynamic heartbeat of revival.

The word “revival” in the Old Testament simply means “to come alive.” Though it is used about 250 times, it is seldom translated as “revival.” More often it is translated “saved,” or “restored,” or “heal” or “renew.” Sometimes though, you will read the word “revival.” For example, in Psalm 85:6, “Will you not revive us again, O Lord, that your people might rejoice in You.” We see, “coming alive” is when we recognize that God alone is the One who is our life. That is the end of man—to behold His glory; and that is where we find our joy, not in ourselves but in our God who is a missionary God. Revival brings that into focus. We come alive to what God made us to be when He created us in His image, that we might know Him and love Him.

That does not always seem to be the experience of His people, however. And so those who have enjoyed spiritual life can grow distant and cold. In the picture of the valley of dry bones in Ezekiel, you notice that

these bones were once alive but now their flesh is gone. But the Spirit comes upon them, breathes life into them, and they begin to live and move and have their being again in God. That is revival!

In the New Testament you find it on the lips of Jesus when He speaks of the prodigal son, who was once in the family of the father, went away from home, spent his inheritance in pleasurable living, and finally he came to himself; and as he was returning, his father saw him coming down the road, and ran to meet him—the child who was dead is alive again. That is revival. Another word which can be translated revival is used by Paul when he speaks of the budding of a tree. It has been dormant during the winter but as spring time comes the sap rises and that limb that has been dry for many months now begins to take on new life—and you have revival. Or again he uses the word when speaking to Timothy about stirring up the gift that is within you. This is the figure of a fire that has just about gone out; but you put in the poker, and stir up those coals, blow upon them and then slowly those embers begin to catch fire and there is revival—coming alive again. That is what we are speaking of when we say God wants His people to live in the fullness of this joy of being alive. The joy of who He is and what He is doing in this world. And indeed that is what Jesus wants us all to be living in and enjoying in our lives.

You can study this concept all through the Bible. Start with the fourth chapter of Genesis, where you have the first recorded reference to prayer. You recognize the situation. The offspring of Adam had not been faithful and you see the result of that in the sickness and the decay and the death of man. The son of Seth is born, and in recognition of the tragedy, the peril of their condition, he calls his son Enosh. It is very interesting because the word literally means “sickness” or “weakness.” Already you can see dissension in the human race; already one of the sons of Adam has murdered his brother, and unless in some way this propensity for evil can be restrained, the whole human race will be annihilated. And so Seth calls his new son Enosh—“weakness, helplessness.” But then the chapter adds, “men began to call upon the name of the Lord.” Usually that is the way it

begins—out of some distress, out of calamity. It is when the night closes in that we recognize the stars, though they had been there all along. You can trace this theme through the Scripture.

Often though revival does not come. Take the situation in the sixth chapter of Genesis. The world has become so sinful that God decides He will destroy that generation through the flood. But there was one man who was righteous in his day. God is never without a witness. And so he takes Noah and his family and his sons and their wives and starts all over again. Seldom do we learn from history, however, and soon you see the human race returning to their former degradation. You move across the years until the arrogant people started to erect a monument to their strength, to their power, Babel. Well, God moved in to confound them in their pride, and they were scattered – which is a way of explaining the diversity of the many languages across the earth. You see humanity had a bent to evil, and in our natural state unless there is God's intervention and our response, we always take the path of least resistance and begin to worship our own image. Still God is faithful, always seeking, always wanting to bring the nations to know Him whom to know aright is life everlasting.

So our missionary God speaks to a man living in the up in the land of the Caldees. He calls him to come out, and follow Him. You know that beautiful experience of Abraham, moving out as God leads, raising up a new posterity, and given again the promise of the Great Commission: to make of him and his seed a posterity that will be as great as the stars of heaven and as the sand on the seashore. God is not going to be defeated. But as we have seen so often before, we soon turn to our own way.

Moving to the era of the Pharaohs and, the suffering of Israel, God brings a leader who now rallies the people in revival that comes in the form of the first Passover. And as the people paint on their doorposts the blood of their sacrificial lamb, God brings deliverance. But again they turned quickly to their former ways. Something of a new reformation happened when the Law was given at Sinai, but how quickly when Moses was gone did the people turn back, and soon were worshiping idols.

You have that incident at Mt. Hor. When again for a brief moment, it seems revival comes when the people recognized the serpents sting of death was the result of their waywardness and they confess their sin to Moses. Thankfully, God honored that prayer, and told Moses to make a serpent in the likeness of these snakes, “Make it out of brass; put it on a pole; lift it up on high in the camp, and everyone who looks upon it will be saved.” What a demonstration of God’s grace. That is the illustration that Jesus used thousands of years later when he was teaching Nicodemus what it really means to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ—“as Moses lifted up that serpent in the wilderness.”

Can you see a picture in your mind of those afflicted people trying to bring their loved ones within sight of that pole that was lifted up in the camp much like a cross. “Look,” they are told, “You don’t have to come and bring a sacrifice at the altar; you don’t have to go through some ritual of coming forward or lifting a hand or even lifting a finger—you just have to look at what God has done.” That’s faith—absolutely trusting the Word of the Living God. Yes, we have these epochs that recur through the Old Testament.

We come to the period after the Israelites had entered the land and the people have finally conquered all they need. But disregarding the full command, they took just what was needed for their temporary pleasure, and rested. Joshua knew the danger, and at the close of his ministry, confronted the people with a choice. “Serve the gods of Egypt, or the God our Lord.” Then to make clear his own intention, he said, “I want you to know that as for me, I am going to serve the Lord with my family.” He drew a line, and there was a revival through Joshua that continued until the death of the elders. It is one of the longest recorded revivals in the Old Testament.

We do not have time to go through this whole sequence, but you can see the pattern. God raises up a leader who sounds the cry for revival. People repent and promise to obey the law, and in their faith rejoice in God. You’ll see it with David as he takes the ark up to the city of the King and the rejoicing of that procession. There is another high moment when

the temple was dedicated by Solomon, and the Word was given by the Lord; “If my people who are called by my name will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sins and will heal their land.” But the promise was soon forgotten.

After the kingdom was divided because of the rebellion of the people in that little southern kingdom of Judah, there are revivals recorded: under the King Asa, Jehosaphat, Hezekiah, and Josiah. We can be grateful for these seasons of refreshing from the Presence of the Lord, but they did not last long, and soon the people would return to their former ways. Though God was long-suffering, the day came when His people were carried away into captivity. Yet even when they were in Babylon, God loved them, and was seeking a way to call them back to Himself. And revivals came again under Nehemiah and Ezra—great times of blessing. But the weakness of human nature repeats itself again and again. That is story of the Old Testament—up and down—and down a lot more than up.

Thankfully there is always a faithful remnant who never bow their knees to Baal. Though often without encouragement from the priests, those unheralded moms and dads revered their God and sought to teach their children to keep the law. Remember that the responsibility of discipling ultimately rested with the parents? It was written in the Law of Moses that they should be talking about it when they got up in the morning, through the day, and before they went to bed at night. They were to write it down on the doorposts of their houses. The home was the center of religious instruction. Thank God there were those who were faithful. Out of these faithful ones came great leaders and when they used their influence and their authority, their leadership reached out to others. So usually submerged, there was always an undercurrent of revival in the nation.

As we come to the New Testament, we have the coming of the long awaited Messiah. He would finally fulfill God’s plan to raise up a people and a kingdom from every tongue and tribe and nation—a Son of man who would establish a kingdom that would never perish, encompassing all the peoples of the earth. In the fullness of time, the Promised One comes.

As He begins His active ministry at the age of thirty, He goes over to the other side of Jordan where already a large number of people are gathering, listening to the voice of the greatest prophet yet. John the Baptist is thundering the Word of God, calling people to repent and to prepare the way for the coming of the Lord. That is where Jesus begins his active ministry—in a revival. And by being baptized by John, He puts His personal seal upon this new movement of reformation. It's there that He is identified by the prophet as the Lamb of God who will take away the sins of the world. The Jewish people for many thousands of years have put their faith in the blood of the sacrifice, which was the seal of the covenant that God would bring redemption. Literally they identified with that blood, pouring out themselves as it were unto death. Represented in these offerings was the expectation of a perfect sacrifice which God Himself would make. Can you imagine how the announcement of John would thrill your soul? At last the Lamb of God has come. He is here in your midst. He is going to take away the sins of the world. Everything that is foreshadowed for thousands of years in ceremony, in type, and in prophecy is present in Jesus, the Nazarene.

Everything is ready. Jesus can immediately enlist the followers of the Baptist, who is willing to decrease in order that Jesus can increase. He will turn over what he has started to the Lord. All He has to do is exercise His authority. He could raise the dead, gather a great army, sweep down upon Jerusalem and on to Rome to take the world by storm. That would have been nothing for Jesus—the king of glory. Why does He not do it? This was the kind of Messiah most people were looking for. This is the kind of Messiah the world is still looking for—someone who can deliver us from any adversity, from any suffering, any persecution, who can satisfy all our self-serving desires? But that is not the kind of kingdom that Jesus reigns over. He is making a church that is holy, that is beautiful, in the likeness of His own image.

So what does Jesus do in this introduction to His ministry at the revival—the greatest revival Israel had known for over 400 years, where

people are gathered not just from Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and Galilee? He walks away. Incredible! Almost unbelievable. When the stage is set for a great mass movement—a crusade that will certainly succeed in raising up an empire—Jesus walks away.

And what does He do? He starts gathering some disciples. O yes, He preaches sometimes to great crowds, numbering into the thousands. Certainly He ministers to people in their needs, while continually preaching the Gospel. The people recognize that He cares and they are responding.

But you don't make disciples just by handling great crowds or crusades. You make disciples like you raise children—every day. So He begins to address from the beginning of His ministry one of the great failings that you have seen in the revivals of the Old Testament, for they failed to reproduce leaders who have the heart to continue the work of God. In most instances, as soon as the leader died, or in some instances even before, the people soon returned to their former ways, and the last state was worse than the first. Knowing this problem, Jesus addresses the need. If we truly want to reach the world, if we want to see God's Word fulfilled in creation when He gave the command to populate the earth, if you want to really see the seed of Abraham multiply to the ends of the earth, then you've got to address the need of developing men and women who have a vision for the kingdom—disciples who will give their lives to perpetuate that vision, and develop others who will carry on until the whole world hears the Gospel. That's what you do in the Great Commission.

As Jesus is about to leave, He makes clear to His disciples what His strategy has been, so there will be no possible misunderstanding. In effect, He says, "You go now and you do what I have been doing with you." They could understand exactly—they are to go out now and make disciples as Jesus has been discipling them.

Then after giving the command, He concluded with that promise: "Lo, I will be with you always, even to the end of the age." As He had taught them, by the Holy Spirit, they would go forth with the presence of Jesus Himself. Indeed, He would be within them. By His power, they "will do

greater works” than those they had seen Him do. Have you ever thought about that promise in John 14:12? “Everyone who believes in me will do My works, and greater works than these.” He is speaking to the whole church. I don’t see the church producing greater miracles or coming up with greater insights, or preaching greater sermons. But in the sense of bearing fruit, I can see the church gathering the harvest in an infinitely greater way than Jesus Himself ever saw. He offered the sacrifice; He gives us the privilege of bringing in the fruits. And this will happen He said, “because I am going to the Father, and I am going to ask him to give you another Counselor—the Spirit of Truth. The world does not know Him, but you know Him because He has been with you and He shall be in you.” Another—not another theory, not another doctrine, but another Counselor just like Jesus. Everything you have seen in Him— His holiness, His power, His love—is also true of the character of the Spirit. The only difference is between the visible Word in Christ and the invisible presence in the Spirit. But the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Christ and that is how we can go forth. We will never have to be alone.

Another Comforter has come—the *Paracletos*. And so He tells His disciples, “What you have been hearing me say these many years and what you’ve seen in the life that I have lived, you must have the power from God to do. You cannot do this in your own strength. So go back to Jerusalem and stay there until you are endued with power—power from on high. When the Holy Spirit comes upon you, you will truly be endued with power, and then, go forth as my witnesses.”

Those disciples obeyed Jesus. After His ascension into heaven they went to that upper room—back to the place where they had heard Him earlier give that great discourse in John 14, 15 and 16—that teaching on the Holy Spirit.

It was now the time of Pentecost, which is the feast to recognize the first fruits of the harvest. People were bringing in their gifts to lay them on the altars. But there was to be another harvest—a spiritual harvest that would begin at Pentecost. When they gathered the feast was not yet

completed, so for about ten days they waited in that upper room. I suppose they had the freedom to come and go.

We are not really told very much about what transpired in those days. We do know that they finally came together in one accord – they were all united. What a testimony of the way of love has knit them together into a body in harmony with their Lord. I suspect that while they were there, they all had some things to make right. Helping that spirit, I can imagine Peter with tears streaming down his face confessing how he had denied his Lord – how he panicked, and three times scorned Him. It was humiliating, I know, but he got it all out. I can think of James and John apologizing for the way they wanted to sit at the right and left hand of the throne, and asking forgiveness for their pride. I do not know everything that transpired, but they came together in one mind.

During this time, they remembered that the Scripture said there should be the twelve, so they decided to select one to take the place of the traitor – that event occupies almost half of the first chapter of Acts. Someone may think that was not an important matter. What we are learning from this is that it does not matter whether it is important or not; if there is something that you know that is not in accord with the Word of God, you've got to make it right, however insignificant, however small it may be. If you believe it is written in this book, you've got to line up with the Word

As the feast of Pentecost was coming to its close, while 120 disciples were in this upper room, suddenly there was a sound of a mighty rushing wind which seemed to sweep through the place. Certainly it was an awesome display of power. Then there was a flame of fire that came down from above, and entering the room, it separated until a flame sat upon the head of each believer. What a beautiful symbolism! Jesus had sat down at the throne which means He is the king, He is in authority; and now the Spirit sits down on the head of His believers. He has taken control. Then they were filled with the Holy Spirit and went forth to declare the wonderful works of God.

The power is not in the wind; the power is not in the fire; the power is not in the tongues—the languages with which they speak so that everyone that was present can understand them in their own tongue. The power is in the Holy Spirit—the very presence of Jesus Christ who has come now to fill them with that character they had known earlier as they walked with him along the trails of Galilee. That is what has made the difference. Immediately you begin to see how the fear of people has vanished as they boldly go forth to declare their witness. When people acknowledge that this is strange, Peter seizes the opportunity to explain the reason for it, the preaches the Gospel. When the people ask what they can do to be saved, he tells them how—to be baptized, to be forgiven, and receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. About 3000 were converted—more in one day than Jesus had won in over three years. And everyday after that we are told that others are added into the church as they gave their testimony in the market and in the places where they lived.

The whole church was involved.. By the time you get to the fourth chapter of Acts, persecution has broken out, but the Christians are not afraid. As they met together, they prayed that the Lord would give them boldness to keep them witnessing. When they finished praying, the place was shaken and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit. Soon, there were 5000 believers, and when you get to the 6th chapter, even priests were coming out of the woodwork and becoming obedient to the faith.

Growth can create tensions, which became evident between the Arameans and the Greeks. To deal with the problem, they decided to select deacons—men of wisdom, men who were filled with the Holy Spirit. As far as I know that is still the basic requirement for any leadership position in the church. Stephen was one of those selected, and in the next chapter, after his bold sermon, he was stoned to death. We are told that as he died, looked up to heaven, full of the Holy Spirit and saw Jesus standing at the right hand of God. Jesus is generally represented as seated on the throne but now it seems that He rises to His feet and welcomes home the first martyr of the church.

By the time you get to the 9th chapter of Acts, the chief persecutor of the Sanhedrin, Paul of Tarsus, is converted on the Damascus road and is led blind into the city. Ananias comes and lays his hand upon him so that he might receive back his sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit. When you get to the 13th chapter, you see the Spirit-filled Paul boldly pronouncing judgment upon Elymas who was deceiving the people of God. When he bids farewell to the Christians in Antioch in Pisidia, again all of them are filled with the Spirit. This is the power in the Acts of the Apostles. The Spirit of revival is blowing through that church.

There were some misfits, of course. There is the account of Ananias and Saphira early in the 5th chapter—hypocrites. There is always going to be some form of hypocrisy among professing saints because of human nature, and the more who are attracted to the church, the larger will be the circumference. But don't measure the effectiveness of the church by its circumference; measure it by the core of Spirit-filled leaders. Multiply the core and the church will continue to reach out to the world. And revival—being filled with the Holy Spirit—is the norm. As Paul said of the church at Ephesus, “Don't be drunk with wine, but be continually filled with the Holy Spirit.” Revival brings this admonition into focus.

Think about those three years that Jesus ministered. On occasion large crowds attended His meetings, but we don't read of any great mass revival, which is astounding when you consider the great epochs of the Old Testament. In Israel, of course, when a king would get this vision, he would use his authority to command everybody to come and renew their commitment. If they did not line up, that would be the end of them. But Jesus was addressing the deeper problem in spiritual awakening. He is raising up a church that the gates of Hell cannot defeat, preparing men and women who will be equipped to win the world for God. You don't see the revival of Jesus until you read the fifth Gospel, the Book of Acts. There is the norm of the Church. When we live less than in the Spirit-filled reality of Pentecost, we are living less than what God wants us to be. Pentecost is the norm of the New Testament. I am not speaking of gifts or signs. I am talking about the reality of the living presence of Jesus Christ, filling the

heart of those who truly trust Him. Wherever you see the Church through the ages, alive and reaching out, you will see revival.

For the first 300 years, to a remarkable degree, this Spirit flowed through the church as it reached out literally to the ends of the Roman empire and beyond. But by the 4th century, the church had accumulated some wealth and finally it was recognized by the Emperor Constantine, becoming one of the official religions of the state. It seems then the vitality of revival began to leak out. Not that God was without a witness. You can see it in various ways through those times of Roman domination: you have the Monastic movement where people came together to seek holiness, and many of them became the means of reaching out to the poor and the neglected; in the 5th century you have a movement that for a while gathered around Augustine; in the 6th century it was with Justinian and Gregory; in the 8th century a leader named John of Damascus, called people back to what God wants them to be. Though not embracing the whole structure of the church, principles of revival sometimes break forth with vitality. Even into the Middle Ages you see movements like this with Bernard of Clairvaux, Francis of Assisi, John Wycliffe, Peter Waldo and the great Savonarola. Then came the Protestant Reformation which certainly recovered the theological convictions of Scripture. Strangely though, what we call the Reformation with Calvin, Zwingli, and Luther did not really produce missionaries. It was the Anabaptists persecuted by many of the Reformers, who were the real evangelizers of Europe in the 16th century. Revival groups began to gather and study the Bible and to pray, like the Moravians. What a tremendous missionary thrust they gave to the world. And then you have the Pietists, the Puritans, and later, the Wesleyans. These are basically revival movements, not in the official structure of the church normally, but representing that remnant that is always seeking God. These movements inevitably produced many missionaries. Out of that Puritan-Wesleyan missionaries came to America and many other parts of the earth. In the mid-19th century, you have the Student Volunteer Movement coming out of revival with Dwight L. Moody and others, multiplying in fifty years with no less than 20,000 missionaries actually reaching other countries.

Still you see the encroachment of the world upon the saints, crowding in, trying to draw attention on our self. But there are seasons of revivals. One that began in Wales about 1905 had a profound impact upon the Western world. About the same time, revival began at Azusa Street in Los Angeles, which really launched the modern Pentecostal movement around the world. In 1905, 6 and 8, a struggling church experienced a remarkable moving of the Spirit in Korea. Let me read a testimony of a missionary who was present.

The room was full of God's presence—a feeling of God's nearness impossible to describe. The whole audience began to pray—it was not many but one born of the Spirit—lifted to one Father above. God came to us in Pyongyang that night. Man after man would arise, confess his sin, break down, and weep. My last glimpse of the audience is photographed indelibly in my brain. Some threw themselves full length on the floor; hundreds stood with arms stretched toward heaven; every man forgot each other; each was face to face with God.

The overflow of God's spirit did not cease with the blessings of the people gathered there at Pyongyang. The account goes on to say that when the men returned home to their country, they took that Pentecostal fire with them. Everywhere the story was told, the same Spirit flowed and spread, practically every church throughout the Peninsula received its share of blessing. All through the city, men were going from house to house, confessing to individuals they had injured; returning stolen property and money, not only to Christians but to non-Christians as well. The whole city was stirred.

This was the revival that gave birth to the Korean church in power. And for a 100 years, it was the Spirit of revival that sustained that church and made it one of the great missionary churches of all time. I was there in 1999, at the conclusion of the Global Consultation on World Evangelization. At a meeting in the Olympic stadium I witnessed 80,000 young people stand to their feet and declare they wanted to get involved in the Great Commission. I regret to say that the revival today is diminished in the Korean Church. And if you talk to the old saints, they would say they are

earnestly praying that they can recover something of that heritage they had from their forefathers.

Revival is really the power of missions. We can have our courses, our planning sessions, our seminars, our lectures, but it's the Spirit of the Living God in Pentecostal power that makes God's people a mighty missionary people.