

Sermon Series: **POWERFULL: The Work of the Spirit through us**

Sermon Title: **When God Moves**

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Scripture Text: **Matthew 22:29**

We are in a series called **POWERFULL**. We are looking at what Scripture says about being men and women who rely solely on the Spirit to accomplish this work. Last week the Spirit moved powerfully here and in the West as well. Interestingly, Shelly and I were doing a conference for another network in Montana last week and the Spirit moved mightily there as well. I preached the Gospel, many were healed and the power of God was manifest. So this week's installment is very fitting because we are going to look at the whole topic of biblical "*revival*".

This is a good time to remind ourselves of what kind of church we believe God wants us to be. Jesus made a statement in response to some Jewish leaders called Sadducees (they were theologically liberal and didn't believe in anything supernatural). They tried to trick the Lord regarding the resurrection. Notice how Jesus responded to them. Let's read **Matt 22:29**: "But Jesus answered them, "You are wrong, because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God."

He told them they were wrong because they didn't know two things—the *Scriptures* and the *power of God*. According to Jesus, both of these belong together if people are to avoid error. The Pharisees erred because they didn't know the Scriptures (they were deficient in their knowledge of God's Word) and they didn't know God's power (they limited what God could do). *As New Testament believers, I believe both of these are our heritage* (must be people who know both the Scriptures and the power of God).

Sadly, we rarely see churches that have this balance today. We see some churches where the Word is taught faithfully, but there is little or no power (some of these churches deny the power of God completely). Other churches have much power with the gifts in evidence but because there is no faithful teaching of the Word and the Word is not properly honored, they tolerate all kinds of unbiblical teaching. *The good news is, we don't have to choose one or the other because they are not opposed to one another*. In the Old Testament, two ministries worked together (Ezra and Nehemiah). Ezra was the scribe of the Lord and returned to Israel to teach the Word. Nehemiah whose name means "*God is Comforter*" represents the Holy Spirit and his work of building.

We believe that God has called TCC to be a church that equally embraces the Word of God and the power of God. We don't believe we have to choose between them (People think we do because they are viewed as being in opposition). For example, let's look at it from the standpoint of corporate meetings. For some, the key event on Sunday is the sermon while for others, it is worship or the time of ministry. So, there are some who tolerate worship so they can get to the Word, while others tolerate the Word so they can receive personal ministry. We must learn to be a church which embraces both. Everything we do and believe must be judged by the Word of God. Yet we are convinced that God's Word teaches and we should expect powerful manifestations of the Spirit in our midst thru the manifest presence and gifts of the Spirit.

This morning, I want to talk about the power side of the ledger. For the last year or more this elder team has been crying out to God for "biblical" revival to come to TCC (a true awakening of people). There are times recorded in Scripture and Church History where the heavens were rent and God poured out his Spirit in significant ways on his people. Obviously, the book of Acts records a phenomenal outpouring of the Spirit in the first thirty years of the Church's advancement. The First and Second Great Awakenings were such a time as well. In Wales, at the beginning of the 20th century there was an incredible outpouring of the Spirit. All of these times were times of heightened experience of God's power. As a result of the Spirit moving several things begin happening:

For example, as a result of the power of God moving a series of meetings often occurs (meetings for prayer, evangelism, Bible teaching, repentance). When the Renewal occurred several years ago there were special meetings. All of these are important but we must not think that special meetings in themselves signify revival. (Drive past the church with the sign, “Revival” Next Week).

When the Spirit moves often many miracles will occur such as powerful healings, etc. (these are gifts that operate in the Church anytime). But in times of revival, these manifestations are often greatly increased. During the First Great Awakening people would fall out in the pews, scream, and sometimes be in a trance-like state for days. But these phenomena, in themselves, should not be understood as revival, though they often accompany it.

Some mistake revival for **moral recovery or renewed national political** involvement. While it is true that there are many moral problems in our country, correcting these moral ills is not in itself revival. Evangelism is not revival though it is greatly enhanced by it. If these are not revival then what is it? While the word “revival” is not found in Scripture the word “revive” is. That simply is a Hebrew word which means “to live again”. This is why revival first hits the Church. People who once were barely alive are being made alive again in true revival. “Will you not **revive us again, that your people may rejoice in you.**”

*“This is what the high and lofty One says—he who lives forever, whose name is holy; I live in a high and holy place, but also with him who is contrite and lowly in spirit, to **revive** the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite”* The root idea of the Hebrew word “revive” refers to “breathing”. Other English words used are “restore, preserve, heal, and flourish”. John Armstrong says,

Revival, in the corporate sense, should then be understood as a powerful work of God’s Spirit coming upon large numbers of people at the same time. By this visitation of God spiritual concerns become the absorbing passion of a multitude. In this sense revival is the living God mightily visiting a locality, a nation, even a continent. The effects of the moving of God the Spirit will be the renewing of Christians in spirit and in truth, as well as the conversion of unbelievers. Such genuine revival is always a possibility with God regardless of how dark the times might be.

WHAT ARE THE MARKS OF TRUE REVIVAL?

So the essence of revival is that the Holy Spirit comes down upon a number of people simultaneously. It is a visitation that brings “awakening” to large numbers of people. It is God moving among His people, renewing and refreshing their lives through the Holy Spirit. Many of us have never been in such times. So if we have never been in seasons like this, how can we really know if revival has come? What are the genuine characteristics of a move of God? Here are some (not all) of the characteristics of real revival:

(1) Heightened Sense of God’s Presence

True revival brings an awesome sense of the presence of God. It is a time when both believers and unbelievers become consciously aware that God Himself is present in a powerful way. “*Oh that you would rend the heavens and come down, that the mountains might quake in your presence.*” Now this can be confusing because God is present in every place (omnipresence). *That is true, but it is also true that God is present in some places in a way that He is not in others.* This is what is often referred to as his “manifest” presence.

It is God coming to His people in a way that exceeds the normal experience—God breaking into the conscious awareness of people with sovereign majesty. David Brainerd, while preaching to the American Indians said:

The power of God seemed to descend upon the assembly and with an astonishing energy bore down all before it. I stood amazed at the influence that seized the audience almost universally, and could compare it to nothing more aptly than the irresistible force of a mighty torrent.

In the Welsh Revival of 1904 a notoriously sinful miner went to one of the chapels to investigate. When he opened the chapel's door he was overwhelmed with a sense of God's presence and cried out, "Oh, God is here." It is manifest in that his people are aware and are conscious of his presence. God is always there but it is a time when many are conscious of his presence in an extraordinary way.

(2) A Deep Conviction of Sin

When God's presence is so manifest, something else is manifest—the *depths of our sinfulness*. We shouldn't be surprised by this. When Isaiah had his vision of the holiness of God, he cried out "Woe is me. I am ruined. For I am a man of unclean lips and live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty." In true revival, both saints and sinners come under deep conviction of sin. In some revivals, conviction was so great that preachers had to stop because people were crying out in agony.

A person who experienced the Manchurian Revival said,

I cannot describe the scene. It made one think of the Judgment Day. God had come down among us. All knew it and every heart was open before Him. For myself, I had the most intense realization of the holiness of God, and of my uncleanness in His sight.

Even pagans were attracted to the meetings. One person who was not saved said, "Whenever I entered I felt some mysterious power seize me, impelling me to confess my sins, and it was only with the utmost difficulty I could drag myself away." You can't be in his manifest presence and not see your own condition before Him. Someone said, "The Holy Spirit is a Comforter." That's true but he often wounds before he heals.

(3) True Repentance

Another mark of true revival is that sin is forsaken. People are transformed and no longer live the way they formerly did. There is one mark we should insist on in testing whether something is real revival—it *always leaves in its wake transformed lives!* We should not settle for meetings that touch us but leave us unchanged. We will take and appreciate those times but we should press on to holiness of life. In times of true revival the gift of repentance is in full bloom. Brokenhearted, Christ-centered confession characterize a true move of God. There may be weeping in meetings but weeping in itself is not actual evidence of revival. *Repentance and the fruit of the Spirit which cannot be imitated is the real fruit of true revival.*

I was saved in a time of revival. And the evidence of that is it left in its wake millions of changed lives. Zechariah said, "I will pour out on the house of David and inhabitants of Jerusalem the spirit of grace and supplications." Later he said, "They shall look upon him they have pierced and they shall mourn for him as one who mourns for an only child." Revival, true biblical revival produces real mourning over sin. Sometimes we experience real joy and we call it revival. But without transformation we are in danger of being deceived because that is the mark of true revival. Sometimes we have a change in conduct but no joy and that can just be moralism. True revival brings mourning which leads to repentance and transformation which fills us with the joy of Christ.

(4) Hunger for God's Word and Prayer

When God moves in revival, prayer becomes as easy as breathing. We often say that prayer brings revival but it is more accurate to say, *'true revival brings heightened prayer.'* When people are aware of his presence, they want to stay there forever. There is a continual crying out to God and an intense desire to seek Him. True revival convicts us of our worldliness (how many things we have turned to for comfort and security other than God). Another aspect of revival is it makes people hungry for God's Word (they can't get enough of it. This includes not only reading the Word of God, but listening to it preached. In normal times, it is rare to have preaching which is conscience-searching, heart-disturbing, life-transforming. But when God moves, people become immediately open to the preached Word like never before.

In other words, revival heightens the desire to hear God speak through his Word both in personal reading and preaching. Many modern Christians think *"I can't wait till revival comes and we can dispense with preaching."* True revival enhances preaching so that people beg the preacher to preach on the great themes of God's holiness, man's depravity, Christ's atoning love, the need for repentance, the satisfaction of Christ. Get this: *Christians fall in love with good doctrine in true revival.*

(5) Concern for Others

There is one more final aspect of revival that must be mentioned. It is increased love for people. When the Church begins to act more like what she was designed to be, it spills over to the world with great power and has great effect. That's why the result of revivals has often been the building of hospitals, teaching the illiterate, clothing the naked, feeding the hungry, etc. Revivals have an ethical aspect. For the church though it means deeply loving and longing for sinners to be saved. People who are transformed begin to share Jesus' heart for sinners (seek and save that which is lost). That is why true revival always spills over into the world. Deep conviction that the Church needs to bring the Gospel to the world.

What can we do? Can we bring revival? The answer is, No. Revival is in the hands of a sovereign, holy God. But there are things that we can do in the meantime. Let me focus on one—*prayer*. We can ask God to work in each of us first, independently of others. We can make each of these marks of revival a point of prayer for ourselves. And since "faith without works is dead" we can then act on the basis of what we have prayed.

1) *We can ask God for his manifest presence.* Then, when we are alone we can practice the presence of God. Have times when we retreat to be alone with God. We can also be sensitive to his presence in our meetings. Ask God for the gifts of his Spirit to flow through us.

2) *We can ask God for a deeper conviction of sin.* Become sensitive to when the Spirit is convicting us.

3) *Beg God for the grace of repentance.* We need God to turn our hearts to him in repentance. When we are convicted it is not enough to ask God to forgive us but to realize the need for grace to change us permanently.

4) *Hunger for God's word and prayer.* Believe that God will give me that hunger. Make time daily for God to speak to me through his Word and to respond in prayer.

5) *Ask God for concern for others.* Let God broaden our hearts and make them wider for more love. Practice that on people in our immediate sphere.

The questions below are to use during House Church Group Discussions.

1. What does Jesus say to the Saducees in Matthew 22:29?
2. How does Matthew 22:29 apply to the New Testament church?
3. What is revival?
4. What are the marks of revival?
5. Since revival is in the hands of a sovereign holy God, what is our role?