

Five Things A Church In Revival Will Have Acts 8:5-21

Adapted from "Four Things a Church in Revival will have." John Gaston @ Sermon Central.Com

The story is told of an elderly woman named Norena, who lived in southern Florida. When a hurricane hit that area, her home was one of many that was severely damaged. Norena received an insurance settlement, and the repair work began. However, when the money ran out, so did the contractor, leaving an unfinished home with no electricity. And all Norena could do was just live there, in her dark unfinished home.

The astonishing part of this story is that the hurricane was not Irma but Andrew - a hurricane which struck in 1992. Norena lived in her home for 15 years without power; no heat in her home when the winter chills settled over southern Florida; no air conditioning when the mercury climbed into the 90's and the humidity clung to 100 percent. She did not have one hot shower. Without money to finish the repairs, Norena just got by with a small lamp and a single burner... for 15 years!

Her neighbors did not seem to notice the absence of power in her home. But acting on a tip, one day, the mayor of the Miami-Dade area got involved. It only took a few hours of work by electrical contractor, to return power to Norena's house. CBS News reported that Norena planned to let the water get really hot, and then take her first "bubble bath" in a decade and a half. "It's hard to describe having [the power]... switched on," Norena told reporters, "It's overwhelming."

"How many Christians, true believers, have lived their entire lives without ever knowing what it is like to have the overwhelming Power of the Holy Spirit turned on within them?" To be quite frank, I believe that some of us have had that Power turned off for so long, that we would not even recognize it if it came back to us!



Acts, chapter eight, is about Philip's wildly successful evangelistic campaign in Samaria. A place and people so despised by the Jewish people of that day, that Jews would walk miles out of their way just so as to not have to walk through Samaritan territory. Jews thought of the Samaritans as pagan half-breeds. But surprise! The Samaritan People were very religious; very orthodox in their practice of an earlier version of the Hebrew faith. They thought of themselves as true Israelites (remnants of the tribe Ephraim and Manasseh). They honored the Five Books of Moses, the Ten Commandments, they practiced circumcision, kept the Sabbath and all the major Hebrew holidays. But they rejected the authority of the Temple in Jerusalem or its priests, having established their own temple and priesthood in the area of Mts. Ebal and Gerizim where Moses had built an altar to God and there ordered the people to worship (Deuteronomy 27). So the evangelistic campaign in Samaria was actually a revival! A revival that we can take notes from for our own revival.

First here are some important extra details to note from this section of scripture:

Now those who were scattered went from place to place, proclaiming the word.

Acts 8:4

- the persecution in Jerusalem that was designed to exterminate the church was turned by God into the vehicle for its revival and enlargement!
- The scattered Christians went everywhere, preaching the Word. They didn't hide-out in fear. They even went to those they'd been prohibited from going to before (Mt. 10:5).
- Philip chose the metropolis of Samaria, the former rival capital of Northern Israel (the northern 10 tribes). And God sent them a great revival.
- And finally notice the Apostles in Jerusalem were so impressed with the revival that they had come to verify that they witnessed all the way home!

Now as we look at the events surrounding this Samaritan revival we can find five lessons for our own revival.

1. Christ is preached.
2. The people were hungry
3. There were miraculous Spiritual confirmations
4. There was great joy.
5. The devil is still present

I. CHRIST IS PREACHED

Philip went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed the Messiah to them.

Acts 8:5

History is full of those people who preach themselves, or some manmade doctrine, or the wrong answer to people's problems. Simon the Great was that kind of a person and this was his territory; his milk cow. He impressed a lot of people with sleight of hand and fakery but it was only for his own profit. Simon only pointed people to himself. Philip

pointed them not to himself, but to Christ. You often tell the real from false teachers by where they place their emphasis

Neither did Philip beat around the bush. He didn't get caught up in theology. He didn't get sidetracked attacking certain sins. Instead, he pointed the people straight to the answer – to Jesus!

It's only the preaching of Christ that can set men free; it is only the preaching of Christ that can revolutionize a person's life and change their base nature, making them desire to live for God. Simon knew the real thing when he saw it. And he wanted this real thing for himself. He believed, he was baptized, he followed Philip around so he could see and learn more.

Philip "*proclaimed the Messiah*". The Word "proclaim" (vs. 5; kerusso) isn't the normal word for evangelize, but "to be a herald," to announce the arrival of the Messiah ("The one anointed by God") This was the clue to reaching the Samaritans. As the woman at the well told Jesus, the Samaritans had long been looking and longing for the Messiah... not the political liberator sought by the Jews, but the one promised by Moses; a prophet leader who like himself would lead the people on their journey back to a right relation with God. The message of Jesus was the Messiah they had been looking for. *So the crowds with one accord, listened eagerly*"

One pastor told of going to a Hindu temple and asking the Hindus how they hoped to get to heaven. He then summarized their view for them in asking if they thought it was like a mountain with many paths that led to God. They said, "Yes, that is what we think." Then he said, "What if I told you that because we can't get to Him by any of those paths, instead, God came down the mountain to get us?"

That is the message which Jesus brought to the world, and that Philip shared. All other religions are our attempts to get back to God. Jesus the Messiah was God coming to get us! To give us freely what we could never buy for ourselves – forgiveness and peace with God. And, as proven by the woman at the well, this was just the message that the Samaritans were hungry to hear and they eagerly listened. They were ready for revival because they were hungry for revival.

II. THE PEOPLE ARE HUNGRY

The crowds with one accord listened eagerly to what was said by Philip, hearing and seeing the signs that he did,
Acts 8:6a

Jesus had already warned his disciples that, depending upon their hunger for God, people would respond in different ways to their message; so wherever welcomed, the disciples were to stay and share; and if not welcomed, they were to quickly move on, not wasting time on those who were not interested.

In Athens they dismissed the Gospel with a "we will hear you later,," but in Antioch in Pisidia they were hungry for it, "*almost the whole city came together to hear the Word of God*" (Acts 13:44). In Berea, they "*studied the Word daily to see whether these things were true*" (Acts 17:11). And in Samaria they were eager to hear Philip. Our attitude toward the Word determines what we will receive from it!

Are we hungry for God in our lives? Do we want our lives to change?

Sometimes when I hear "nice sermon pastor," often with the added – or implied – "I hope they were listening" (whoever it was they thought needed to be listening) I quietly smile, but I want to reply "*and I hope you were listening!*" Because the only people we can really ever change is ourselves; we can't change anyone else. As the aphorism declares, *you can lead a horse to water, but you can't make him drink.*

In Charles Schultz's cartoon, "Peanuts," Lucy was saying that if she was in charge of the world, she'd change everything. Charlie says, "That wouldn't be easy. Where would you start?" Lucy looks directly at him, points her finger & said, "I'd start with you!"

We need to quit hoping that other people will hear and respond, and start concentrating on how WE can hear and respond. Are you hungry for revival for yourself? If not, then start asking God to make you hungry. A hunger for revival needs to precede revival.

That is why Jesus declared, "*They that hunger and thirst after righteousness shall be filled.*" (Matthew 5:6). Our desire is important. God says, "*You shall seek Me and find Me when you search for Me with all your hearts*" Jer. 29:11. We must desire God: have a longing, a craving for God.

If you're spiritually hungry, you'll go to the Word of God. A person can't say they're hungry for God, if they're not getting into God's word.

And, If you're spiritually hungry, you won't be satisfied with "just enough." Real hunger can't get enough! That's why I titled our weekday Bible study, "Something More," after Oliver Twist asking for more food; if the Sunday worship is all the Bible you get in one week, then you are not very hungry.

Hunger is a sign of health. A person who's not hungry is sick; whether it's from poor diet, lack of exercise, depression, physically ill, or physically dying. **In the same way, lack of**

spiritual hunger is a sign that there's something wrong in our lives. We need to Get OUR HUNGER BACK

Whatever you focus on, whatever you value/desire, will cause a hunger for that thing to develop. God will always meet us on the level of our hunger for Him, but **you have got to be hungry for God. Are you?**

III. Revivals also receive MIRACULOUS CONFIRMATION

One indication of the miraculous was that people were being saved, changed. We need that! Even Simon Magnus recognized the truth when he saw it. He believed, was baptized, and started following Philip around soaking up what he could learn from him. As you can tell with his request to purchase the Holy Spirit, Simon had a lot to learn. But I believe he was on the right path. More on Simon later. When you trust Christ as your savior, something miraculous happens: your perspective changes, you begin to see the world through God's eyes rather than our own.

A 12 yr. old was chatting with her pastor about her wish to be baptized. Pastor asked, "Mary, have you been born again?" "Yes, Pastor, I have," she replied. "Mary, before you were born again, were you a sinner?" "Yes, I was," she answered without hesitation.

"And, Mary, now that you've been born again, are you no longer a sinner?" She was thoughtful for a few moments. She knew that she often made mistakes, said things she shouldn't and had weaknesses she longed to overcome.

Finally she said, "Yes, Pastor, I'm still a sinner!" "Well, now, Mary," asked the minister, "what is the difference? You say you were a sinner. Then you were born again. Now you're still a sinner." Mary replied, "yes, but I am different." "You see, Pastor, **before I was born again I was a sinner running after sin. Now I'm a sinner running away from sin.**" (unknown). With revival, people are miraculously changed.

A second proof of the miraculous was in healings of sicknesses and diseases and demonic deliverance. Acts records that the crippled and lame could walk again. Evil spirits came out "*crying with a loud voice,*" indicating that they came out with great reluctance, against their wills, but were forced to submit because they were overcome by a superior power (Mark 1:26; 3:11; 9:26).

You say, I haven't seen any lame walking except on Saturday night late t.v. with all the religious hucksters – every thinking person knows they are fake – and I haven't witnessed a single screaming demon leave a possessed person. **If that is revival why haven't I seen such here?**

It is because of our world view. As I mentioned two weeks back, we are essentially spiritual atheists, we believe in God and angels, because we have been taught so from

birth. But we don't really believe in the Devil or in evil spirits possessing people. So the Devil is too smart to pull those stunts around us. I truly believe there are still such people among us, but we are blind to them, because their demonically inspired activity is more subtle, cued to our world of unbelief.

I remember when I was in Ethiopia preaching a Sunday sermon, in the midst of the sermon a woman started speaking very loudly in tongues; It was a bit disruptive. But I went on with the sermon while half watching as the Church Elders quietly removed her from the sanctuary. After the service I asked what had happened to her and was told the Elders had taken her to a side-room and had prayed over her to determine if her spirit was from God or the devil. "*And if of the devil?*" I asked. *Then we would exorcise the demon.* I don't know if I was too spooked to ask any more, but I never found what had happened to her. As my time teaching time came to a close, I mentioned to one of my pastor/translators my disappointment in not teaching a segment I had prepared on the Devil, but was politely told, "you don't know enough to teach us about the devil; we live and do battle with him daily."

We westerners are largely blind to the power and workings of the devil in our midst, so he is quite free to do his worst. **Psychologist M. Scott Peck** wrote the book "People of the Lie," about his professional quest to find a truly evil, devil indwelt person. He did. And he concluded that perhaps as much as 5% of the people psychologically misdiagnosed as "mentally ill" were actually just evil, perhaps demon possessed. And the more shocking part of his finding was that they all acted fairly normal, moved about freely in society, were all very religious, and often active in a local church. No surprise there, because it is in God's wheat field where the devil tries to sow his weeds. And often times it is very hard to tell them apart except by the fruit their life bears.

Nevertheless, every great revival, even here in America, was accompanied by miraculous signs; people healed, demons dispossessed, those long held enslaved by sin breaking out in fits of laughter, barking, dancing, weeping. Poor quiet, shy, highly educated, Jonathan Edwards had to come to grips with these miraculous signs and explain to his fellow skeptical clergy.

But miraculous release doesn't always have to be screaming demons and the lame dancing. We have plenty other bad habits and enslaving sins from which we can be released ... if we seek revival, if we are hungry for God in our lives, we will see miraculous changes in our lives and in others.

And along with salvation and release from spiritual captivity there is also the HOLY SPIRIT ANOINTING that accompanies revival.

Now I must admit that this is a controversial section, **why did supposedly saved, baptized, people not receive the Holy Spirit until the Apostles arrived to lay hands on them?**

Charismatic theologians say that this proves a secondary "baptism of the Holy Spirit." I disagree. **I believe that the Spirit came upon these people in a delayed manner, because this was still a transitional time between the Spirit only temporarily and now fully coming into all believers.**

More importantly, this laying on of hands by Jewish believers did much to break down the barrier of hatred that had long separated these new Samaritan believers from their Jewish Christian brothers; and similarly proving to these Jewish Christian leaders that the Samaritans were not pagan half-breeds but full-fledged Christian family. After this event, the experience of Peter with Cornelius became the normative pattern: Peter preached the Gospel, they believed, were filled with the Spirit, then they got baptized (Acts 10:44-48).

So as I said a few weeks back, that with your initial rebirth into God's family you have already received all of the Holy Spirit you are ever going to get, but the questions remain:

- **Does the Holy Spirit have all of you?**
- Have you resisted letting God's come into all the areas of your life?

Perhaps this is why you have not felt the Spirit's power in your life. **Get hungry again for God. Pray for hunger, ask for revival, and revival will come, and you will be amazed with how miraculous life can be.**

IV. THERE IS GREAT JOY

So there was great joy in that city.

Acts 8:8

"There was great joy in that city" WHY?

Because GOOD NEWS CAME TO THAT CITY. We hear so much bad news, it's refreshing when Christians have a positive, uplifting message to share. We need to have a word from God to a discouraged, defeated world! Think of all the local, national news you get on t.v. (not counting sports and weather) other than the "made in America" conclusion on ABC – How much good news do you here? The story of Jesus is the essence of Good news: God loves you so much, he came into your world to seek and save you. And when he finds you, like the shepherd with his lost sheep, with great joy he puts you on his shoulders and carries you home. And you, having been found, also have great joy, knowing you are forgiven and have peace with God, and a place in His family. What can be more joyous than that?

David said, "*Blessed is the one whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered.*" (Ps. 32:1). **It feels good to be forgiven.**

Jesus said not to rejoice that demons are subject to you, but "*rejoice that your names are written in heaven.*" **It feels wonderful to be God's child.**

Jesus also said, "*Abide in Me...that My joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full*" (Jn. 15:7,11). **There is great joy in knowing Jesus!**

V. But even at revivals, the Devil is always present

Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was given through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money,

Acts 8:18

Poor Simon Magnus, I think he has long gotten a bad rap from the commentators. They want to say that Peter accusing him of being full of poison and wickedness proves he was unsaved, when this may have been more a reflection of Peter's brash act-before-thinking narrow-mindedness than Simon's reality. Let's face it. Simon had a lot to unlearn from his sorcery days, he was still too close to the devil. But he had believed, had been baptized, was seeking to learn. But he had not yet received the Spirit, or he wouldn't have asked to buy it; so how could he have known better. That Simon immediately took Peter's accusation to heart and asked Peter to pray for him, tells me that Simon was on the right track and just had a lot of growing to do.

But the truth is that the Devil will never be far from any real revival. The last thing he wants is Christians getting so excited about their faith and proclaiming the word everywhere they go. So as you pray for your own personal revival, or this church's revival, watch your back. Heed Paul's warning to put on the whole armor of God in your life: the belt of truthfulness, the breastplate of righteousness, the shield of faith, helmet of salvation, the sword of the Spirit which is God's word, and have your feet always ready to carry the Good News that you know to the ends of the earth; with Jesus – as promised – walking right beside you. If God is with you, who can stand against you? Certainly not the devil.

Our world today, desperately needs revival.

Are you hungry for God?

Do you want a revival here at Bedford Presbyterian Church, in this town?

Then join me in praying for revival here and now!

I promise you that it will be a miraculous time for us all.