

The Spiritual Dynamics of Missions

by J. Edwin Orr

The Holy Spirit is the Lord of the harvest, guiding and empowering believers to fulfill the Great Commission.

Duration: 30:15

Scripture: Isaiah 6:8, Matthew 24:14, Matthew 28:19-20, John 4:35, John 16:8, John 19:30, Acts 1:8

Topics: "Missions"

Description

In this sermon, John of Medgar emphasizes the importance of prayer for a revival of religion and the advancement of Christ's kingdom. He reminds the congregation of the words of Jesus, who promised that the Holy Spirit would convict the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment. Medgar also highlights the three main agencies for the evangelization of the world: the Word of God, the people of God, and the Spirit of God. He emphasizes the role of the Holy Spirit as the Lord of the harvest, who directs and guides believers in their mission to spread the gospel.

Transcript

This morning we have Dr. Orr, J. Edwin Orr, the World Authority on Missions. It is my privilege to be an associate pastor of the People's Church in Canada for about ten years. And that, of course, is a church with a great missionary burden and passion that's been a challenge to other churches, including, for example, Park Street in Boston.

So I've had this burden on my heart for a long time. We know well the words of the Great Commission. We are told to go into all the world, make disciples of all nations, teach them to observe all things that the Lord Jesus commanded us.

Dr. S. P. Gordon once told a story that when the Lord Jesus Christ went back to heaven, the archangel said to him, Master, is the work complete? And he said, It is finished. But who's going to carry it on? And the Lord said, Peter and James and John and the rest of my disciples. But after they're gone, those who believe in me threw their word.

But supposing they failed? Well, said Christ, I have no other plan. I've told that story many times to illustrate a certain point. But this morning it struck me with great force.

It's only half the story. If the Lord had depended on the disciples alone, the Christian faith would have died out. But you see, the Lord Jesus told his disciples, It is better for you that I go away, for if I do not go away,

the paratrooper cannot come to you.

But if I depart, I will send him to you, and when he has come, he will convict the world of sin. He will guide believers into all truth. He will glorify me.

And the Holy Spirit is the Lord of the harvest. Now I take it that many people here have performed military service. I did my four years in World War II.

Perhaps you remember, regarding military command, that the commanding officer always had an adjutant and an executive officer. If you wanted to see the commanding officer, you went to the adjutant and stated your business. You approached the commanding officer through his adjutant.

On the other hand, when the commanding officer wanted something done, he gave the order not to the adjutant, but to the executive officer. He would say to his executive officer, Major, I want you to see that every man has issued special rations, good footwear, because we're ready to move tomorrow. That was not the job of the adjutant, but rather of the executive officer.

Now I'm taking this as an analogy, and remember, analogies are not meant to be carried too far. We approach our Heavenly Father through the Lord Jesus Christ. He ascended to His Father, He's there making intercession for us.

That's His work at present. But the executive officer of the Godhead is the Holy Spirit. He is the Lord of the Harvest.

You say, how do you interpret that? It was the Holy Spirit who said directly to the church at Antioch, separate unto me Barnabas and Saul for the work unto which I have called them. Paul and Silas had made their plans to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit forbade them because in His grand strategy He wanted them to open up Europe, and He called them to Macedonia. The Holy Spirit is the Lord of the Harvest.

Now I take it you agree with me that for the evangelization of the world, we have three main agencies. The Word of God, the people of God, and the Spirit of God. We need all three.

The Word of God has been committed to us, but of course someone has to print it, someone has to distribute it. The people of God are all too fallible. Sometimes they make mistakes, sometimes they even forget to do things, sometimes they're indifferent.

But the Spirit of God is God Himself. He is Deity. There isn't time to talk about the mystery of the Trinity, but the Holy Spirit is God, and He is the Lord of the Harvest.

Now a certain famous Christian in the nineteenth century taught that all we need to do is to preach the Word, and he made a remark to say that's the only Spirit that we know. In other words, the Holy Spirit only works through the preaching and the teaching of the Word. This man, whose name I have not mentioned, was a great debater, and he felt that if you were to debate with an atheist, everyone who heard your debate, if you made a good case, would accept the gospel.

It doesn't always happen that way. But the Holy Spirit is the power of God. The Lord Jesus Christ said to the disciples, when they said, Are you going to restore the kingdom of this time to Israel? He said, It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has kept under his own direction, but you will receive power.

The word there is *dunamis*, dynamic. You will receive power after the Holy Spirit has come upon you. I was talking to a man in Tennessee not so long ago, and he said, Yes, that means that they were told to wait, and then on the day of Pentecost, when they were contributed to the church, they had a blueprint, and they should go ahead with it.

I said, Not a blueprint, power. Now, not many of us here, I suppose, in the great metropolitan area know much about farming, but we have our ideas. Supposing you were talking to a farmer in North Dakota, and you say, You've got a lot of grain ripening.

How are you going to get it in? Oh, we're going to start bringing it in in August. What power are you going to use? He said, I've got the best tractor that money can buy. Now, with that in mind, I want to ask you, do you think the Holy Spirit is a tractor for us to use? Some people think they can use the Holy Spirit.

He is not the tractor of the harvest, he is the director of the harvest. If you were to go to a big harvest field, you'll find a foreman in charge, and the foreman says, You go and work over there, you go and work over here. No, no, you come back here.

You take a week off. He orders people around, he places them. Why? Because he knows the harvest.

Any farmer in the San Joaquin Valley knows the truth of this. Someone has to be in charge. And the Holy Spirit is the Lord of the harvest.

I'm tempted as a historian to give you a little bit of church history, but I must forbear, because time, of course, runs away with us. You could say the Apostles exercised their greatest ministry up to about, say, A.D. 80. For 300 years after that, we have the persecuted church, a pure church, but in A.D. 380, Christianity was made the official religion of the Roman Empire.

And now they began to use force to compel people to believe. There were still faithful souls persuading, but there were many who used force. There are stories that you can document of missionaries in those days burning down heathen temples and provoking riots.

You could even take the example of the Teutonic Knights who invaded Lithuania and told the Lithuanians, You must become Christians. They said, What's our choice? Either baptism or the sword. Well, who wouldn't want to be baptized if he was going to have his head cut off? But for a thousand years, as Latter-day Saints calls in a kindly way, the thousand years of uncertainty, the church wavered somewhat.

And then, from the days of Wycliffe onward, there was a recovery of evangelical truth. Wycliffe gave us the scriptures, Martin Luther and the others helped reform the church according to the scriptures, the Puritans were concerned about scriptural doctrine, and then Wesley and Whitfield spoke about the experience of the heart, and then there seemed to be already coming a missionary explosion. It is one of the mysteries, isn't it, to wonder why the reformers did so little about foreign missions.

But around about 1780, there came a missionary explosion. I would say the outstanding figure of that time was William Carey. I once heard a missionary expert, a distinguished alumnus of Fuller Theological Seminary, speak on William Carey, showing what a splendid man he was, how he collected information, evaluated and applied it, and so forth.

Carey was a genius. But again, that was just part of the story. And I'm going to take you a little bit further back.

In the 1740s, a godly Presbyterian in Edinburgh wrote a memorial, an appeal for prayer for revival, and he sent it to Jonathan Edwards in New England. Jonathan Edwards replied by writing a book. The title of the book was, A Humble Attempt to Secure Explicit Agreement and Visible Union of God's People in the Union of Prayer for the Revival of Religion and the Extension of Christ's Kingdom Overseas.

That was the title, not the book. They had the idea, mobilize prayer, not only for the revival of religion at home, but for the missions abroad. And at that time, there wasn't a missionary society in existence, if you make an exception of, say, the ASPG, which was a kind of chaplaincy.

I'm speaking of Protestantism. John Edwards died, and John Erskine, 1780, reprinted his book, his memorial, and John Edwards' reply. And he sent a copy down to John Ryland, Mr. Baptist, living in Northampton.

John Ryland was a rock-ribbed, Calvinistic Baptist. He was the one who told William Carey, sit down, young man, when God decides to evangelize the heathen, he'll do it without your help. John Ryland gave this little booklet to Andrew Fuller and John Sutcliffe, two Baptist pastors who were keen for revival.

John Sutcliffe had a layman working in this congregation called William Carey, a shoemaker. And these men organized a union of prayer. They persuaded every Baptist church in the Midlands, then every congregational church in the Midlands, then throughout Great Britain, then the Episcopalians and the Presbyterians and others, to set aside the first Monday of each month for prayer, for the revival of religion and the extension of Christ's kingdom overseas.

For seven years they prayed, and then the year after John Wesley died, 1792, there came a great visitation of the Holy Spirit in Great Britain, and out of that movement came the missionary societies, the British and Foreign Bible Society, the Religious Tract Society, and all these great movements that we take for granted today. You could say that the pioneers came out of a movement of the Holy Spirit in revival. What area did it tackle, first of all? China was completely closed.

The Emperor of China said it was forbidden for any Chinese to embrace the Western religion. In Japan and Korea, they were completely locked out, they weren't allowed to land, and any Japanese, for instance, leaving Japan and returning again, was executed on the beach without further inquiry. Africa was a dark continent.

Latin America was closed by intransigent Spanish and Portuguese governments. India was scarcely open. Don't forget when William Carey landed in Calcutta, the British authorities harried him out of the place, and he took refuge under the Danish flag.

One area of the world was comparatively open, that was the South Seas, but alas, the people there were cannibals. The beaches were littered with picnic rubble and rubbish, human bones and skulls and the like. Now they went to the South Seas.

They started in Tahiti and Tonga and Hawaii, and the first thing was what we call a people's movement. There was a chief in Tonga who decided to become a Christian. He made a club of a banana plant, softwood, so that he wouldn't kill anyone.

And he, as chief, went to the priestess in the village and knocked her out with the banana stalk. The people were frightened. They thought surely the fire of heaven would fall upon this sacrilegious chief.

But when nothing happened, he got together the wooden gods and the idols of the village and he spoke to them. He said, I believe in being perfectly fair, so I'm going to tell you what I'm going to do. I'm going to burn you.

Now if you're gods, you better get out while the going is good. And none of them moved. So he set fire to them.

The result was that island became Christian. But the missionaries said while they had turned from idols to serve the living God, true conversion was wanting. In the 1730s, there came an outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon Tonga that completely transformed that community from a pro-Christian community to vital Christianity.

And the same thing happened in Hawaii with the congregational missionaries. They arrived in Hawaii to find a people who were turning towards God. They wanted to become Christians.

But the missionaries in the 1830s began to pray for a baptism from on high. And in 1838, it came in Hilo on the big island of Hawaii. Titus Cohen, a congregational missionary from New England, baptized after six months probation, 1,755 in one day.

7,905 during the revival. And when that movement was completed 20 years later, 19,000 of the converts still stood true. And King Kamehameha declared Hawaii a Christian nation.

So the Holy Spirit is lord of the harvest when it comes to what we call people's movements. He provokes them, and he meets their needs. There was not a great awakening in all throughout the United States, 1858-59.

I'll say very little about it, except to say that when Moody died, he said, I would like, before I go hence, to see the whole Church of God quickened as it was in 1857, and a wave going from Maine to California to sweep thousands into the kingdom of God. That revival won a million outsiders to the churches in one year out of a population of 30 million. Besides, countless millions of Christians revived.

That sent out other pioneers. It's interesting that when the revival reached Great Britain, in the west end of London, there were two young men working in the slums. One founded one of the greatest home mission organizations in the world, the Salvation Army, William Booth.

Half a mile from where he was, was Hudson Taylor, working in the Twig Folly Mission. And in the heat of the revival, he founded the China Inland Mission, one of the epoch-making missionary forward movements. You'll find the greatest Methodist missionary to ever go to India was Bishop James Thoburn.

He came out of that revival. You'll find the great pioneer of the Congo, George Grenfell, came out of that revival. There was another moment of the Holy Spirit in New England in the 1880s.

Now, Mr. Moody was a layman, but he was not well educated. He said on one occasion to his friends, How do you spell this word Philadelphia? I can get as far as F-I-L-A. What comes after that? Moody was not only a poor speller, but a poor grammarian.

Consequently, he kept away from university students through modesty. Luther Wishart, leader of the student groups in the universities, begged Moody to hold meetings for them, but Moody turned him down. Someone persuaded Moody to speak at Cambridge, an aristocratic university.

And there came an outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Perhaps you've heard of Stanley Smith, Orsman of Cambridge, who became a great medical missionary, Sir Monica Beecham, D.E. Hoste, who became second in command to Hudson Taylor, the brothers Paul Hill Turner, W.W. Castles, who became Bishop of West China. Perhaps the best known name was C.T. Studd, the Babe Ruth of English Cricket.

They formed the Cambridge Seven and turned the British universities upside down. When Moody came back, Luther Wishart said, Now what about us? So they arranged for a meeting at Mount Hermon in Massachusetts. Two hundred and fifty Christian students registered.

One young man, Robert Wilder, begged Moody's permission to speak to the students. Moody said, I'm sorry, Professor MacCosh is to speak tonight. However, all right, if you insist, you can speak to him over at the dinner table.

Robert Wilder said, My father went to India and has come back to die. But he says the fields are so ripe for harvest that he's praying that a thousand university students will go to the mission field. Out of the two hundred and fifty, one hundred volunteered.

In the next year, two thousand. And the student volunteer movement was born. In a generation, thirty thousand went to the field.

The queen of the talent. That was a great outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Those were the students who said the evangelization of the world in our generation.

What they meant by that was each generation has a responsibility for evangelizing the world. But now when we come to our own century, we see something else that's remarkable. The indigenization of Christianity.

It's not enough to send missionaries to preach the gospel. It's not enough just to get people converted and get them started in churches. We've got to build for the future that they may sustain themselves not only in their own church life, but in sending missionaries to other people.

And perhaps we can take a good example from Korea. Frederick Franson, the founder of the mission that is now called the Evangelical Alliance Mission Team, visited Korea in 1903. And he met with the missionaries in Wonsan.

There came an outpouring of the Holy Spirit that led to a cleansing of some of the missionaries' hearts and a great burden for prayer. This spread to some national leaders who you could say that in 1903 there was a kind of preparatory or pallid revival. I found out to my amazement when I was doing some research into this that in 1905 there was a great movement of the Holy Spirit throughout Korea.

Dr. Samuel Moffat, the present Dr. Moffat's father, one of the pioneers, reported from north to south they were flocking into the churches, wanting to become Christians, professing conversion. But in 1907 there came such an outpouring of the Holy Spirit that whole congregations were moved with great power. Nine-tenths of all the students in Christian colleges professed conversion that year.

When John Wesley died, he left behind in England 70,000 Methodists to carry on his work. Out of the revival of 1903, 1905, 1907, there were 79,221 permanently added to the churches of Korea. And Korea has had light visitations since.

Not all that's going on in Korea is revival. Korea seems to be in a cycle of church growth. But I would say that the great triggerings of the movement have always come through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

I would say the same thing about East Africa. I was talking to Leonard Beecher, the Archbishop of East Africa. He said when the Mau Mau terror was at its worst, when the Mau Mau were not only slaughtering European people, but cutting to pieces African Christians, the only ones who stayed true were the Abolokali.

They remained firm. And I imagine from what the pastor said this morning earlier, it was some brother from the East African Revival Movement that came here and was a blessing in Lake Avenue Congregational Church. That movement is still going on.

Now why am I emphasizing these things? Missions is not a matter only of the best methods and the best techniques and committee work and finance. The Holy Spirit is the Lord of the harvest. He knows the end from the beginning.

He knows where doors are going to open. He knows what people are going to respond. He knows where to send the people with the evangelism that's needed when people turn to God.

He knows all these things. And we should consult him more. I know Oswald Smith intimately.

I know something of his great burden for missions. But I would say that before his burden for missions, there comes a great concern for the Holy Spirit and the revival of the Church. And I would like to say to these men that represent so many churches from different parts of the state today that the secret is get your people filled with the Holy Spirit.

That's the answer. I talked to a Presbyterian minister in New Zealand who said he hadn't much use for evangelism. I said, what do you mean? Wasn't the Lord Jesus an evangelist? Oh, I mean mass evangelism.

This Billy Graham stuff. I said, what do you prefer? Oh, he said, I like visitation evangelism. With my tongue in my cheek, I said, how does that work? Well, he said, you get your people together and you train them and you send them out two by two to ring doorbells and try and get engaged in conversation.

And if you can't win them there, try to get them to come to the Church. I said, that sounds splendid. He said, I'm surprised you didn't know about it.

I said to him, how are you doing? He said, what was that? I said, how are you doing? He said, I can't get them to do it, he said. He couldn't get us Presbyterians to do it. And that's the secret.

Why is it so many churches have no missionary burden? They need to be filled with the Holy Spirit because as soon as they're filled with the Holy Spirit they have a missionary burden because the Holy Spirit has a missionary burden. Much as I would like to see revival in the United States I must remember God's word to Abraham in blessing thee I will bless thee and make thee a blessing. God has blessed nations only because he wanted them to evangelize the world.

This is a day of opportunity for us here in the United States. God has given us the wealth and the technology and the personnel. And we should pray, the Lord of the harvest secure, may I quote Jonathan Edwards explicit agreement and visible union of God's people in prayer for revival of religion at home and

the advancement of Christ's kingdom overseas.

Let us pray. Oh God, help us to remember the words of the Lord Jesus. When he has come he will convict the world of sin of righteousness and of judgment.

Help us to remember the words of the Lord Jesus. Ye shall receive power after the Holy Spirit has come upon you. And help us to remember that he is the Lord of the harvest not a tractor to be used but a director to be obeyed.

The Lord help us to realize that thou hast brought us here for a purpose. Help us each one whether a member of the church or a visitor from another church to submit ourselves to thee. The Lord, here am I. Send me.

Use me. For Christ's sake. Amen.

Let us sing that wonderful hymn Christ for the world we sing. We simply must do that. Christ for the world we sing.

The world to Christ we bring. And let's sing the first two stanzas. Music Christ for the world we sing.

The world to Christ we bring. Sing a song of truth and peace. The Holy Spirit goes with you.

The message of God is in your heart. Go in the name of Jesus and by his grace. Amen.

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