

## *When the Holy Spirit moves – Part 1*

A farmer went into his Bank Manager and announced that he had some bad news and some good news. *“First, the bad news...”* he said, *“I cannot make my mortgage payments and that crop loan I've had for the past 10 years - I can't pay that either. Not only that, I won't be able to pay you the couple of hundred thousand I still have outstanding on my tractors and other equipment. So I'm going to have to give up my farm and turn it over to you for whatever you can salvage out of it.”* Silence prevailed for a minute, then the Bank Manager said, *“So, what's the good news?”* The farmer smiled broadly and said, *“The good news is I really like you and so I'm going to continue banking here.”*

Sometimes you have to work hard to find the good news in the midst of the bad news. I think that farmer had an uphill battle to find any good news, but he gave it his best shot! Our world certainly has many problems and we don't need to look very far to find the bad news. Everywhere we turn there is bad news – even within the Church. I have read many reports and surveys about the decline in members across the Church in our nation. I have spoken with many other leaders in many denominations who seem despondent and mellow as they watch their Church families shrink and the average age of their members rise day by day.

We switch on the television for some light relief only to be confronted with wars, famine, natural disasters, a global pandemic, political unrest in America, the United Kingdom and even at home here. Almost every day we see the underbelly of fallen humanity in organised crime, domestic violence, poverty and homelessness and the rapidly declining moral foundations of our nation.

It is not surprising therefore to hear the question on many people's lips within the Church, *“What is God doing?”* This is not a new place for we humans to find ourselves. It has happened countless times throughout our history. We get to the end of ourselves and our resources and find our world is still in a mess and we start wondering if God is even there. All of that is normal and very human but it's what we do next that will determine how long we find ourselves in such a helpless place. It's what we do next that is the key to our future.

We have a choice when we get to the end of ourselves in the face of evil and moral decay: **we can complain and blame or we can confess and repent.** We can complain and blame others for the state of the world or we can confess and repent of our sin and the sin of humanity. I may not be personally or individually responsible for all the woes of the world, but as a disciple of Christ and a member of God's family I must share the responsibility for fixing all that is broken.

God is sovereign and God could just step in, wave His hand and fix everything in our lives, our Churches and our world. Why doesn't He do that? The simple answer is found in one word: partnership. God has always been committed to a partnership with those who are made in His image and so His plan from before the foundation of the world was that healing, salvation, reconciliation and peace will come to this world as He works in and through His children, His ambassadors, His army of faithful followers who are filled with and empowered by His Holy Spirit.

We all want healing in our land and in our world and God promised a very long time ago (see 2 Chronicles 7:14) that He would bring such healing to our land when we His people, who are called by His name, humble ourselves and pray and seek His face and turn from our sin ... then God will hear, forgive and heal.

God the Holy Spirit always moves in response to God's people and He has not stopped moving at any point since the birth of the Church. We can read the book of Acts and Paul's epistles and see how the Spirit of God moved in response to the obedience, submission and prayers of God's people. Then in every generation since then the Holy Spirit has continued to move but more often than not we don't notice because we are not looking to the horizon – we are preoccupied with this fallen world and all its problems. If we decide to focus on what God is actually doing in our world rather than on what we, in all our 'wisdom', think God is *not* doing, our whole perspective changes!

First of all, we see the complete truth about our world and not just the dark side. Secondly, we see that in spite of the unrestrained evil unfolding in one part of the world, at the same time, evil is being forcefully driven back elsewhere as the Spirit of God moves with power in an unprecedented way. Our finite minds can't fathom how God can move so definitively in one place and appear to not be moving at all in another. But such challenges are beyond our pay grade, as they say, and we simply need to seek the Lord and ask Him to show us His hand at work in the world and teach us to pray.

So today I begin a series in which I will share some of the good news – to inform you, in case you didn't know; to encourage you, in case you thought God was sleeping on the job; and to challenge you to face the question we all should face every time we hear a sermon, read a Christian book or article or study the Bible. At every point we need to be asking, "*How then shall I live?*" In other words, "*What is God saying to me, to my family, to my church and to my community?*" What is my response to this teaching, this revelation, this unfolding reality before me?

Are Christian Churches shrinking everywhere? Are radical Islamic extremists really taking over the world? Has God forgotten us or turned His back on us? What in the world is God doing? Is the Holy Spirit still moving like He did in the beginning? Well over the next few weeks or so we will take a look and see.

Today I want to take you to a place where God has been very busy for a long time and the fruit of this move of the Holy Spirit is almost beyond belief. Let's see what happens when the Holy Spirit moves in the largest nation in the world: China.

But let's also ask God to speak to us and our situation as we grasp the magnitude of His work in the least likely place in the world. Follow the link below and watch this video with me before reading on in this sermon.

<https://www.gunnedahbaptist.org.au/files/videos/CBN.CHINA.mp4>

So how do you respond to a report like that? What does that say to us today, here, in our little patch of the kingdom? What does that say about God's ability to transform hundreds of thousands of lives in one of the most traditionally anti-Christian nations in the world? How do we comprehend the magnitude of this move of God across communist China? At the very least it should strengthen our faith and remind us that the Holy Spirit is still moving. But of course, the underlying question will always be, "*Why there and not here?*" Some of us already know the answer – others will find out soon if you continue with us on this journey.

So how many people do you think are coming to faith every week right now in China? Would you be amazed to learn that 5,000 people every week are coming to faith in China? Yes? Well, perhaps you would be gob-smacked to learn that over 10,000 people are coming to faith in Christ every week in China! Yes? Well, friends, believe it or not, the Spirit of God is moving far more than even that! The latest reports coming out of China put the conversion rate at 30,000 people a week. That is 130,000 people a month or over 1.5 million people a year who are becoming Christians. That would equate to the entire city of Brisbane turning to God in less than two years!

How has that even been possible, especially in a country which is still officially anti-Christian? Well, I will let our friends at Open Doors ministry answer that question. Watch this next video:

<https://www.gunnedahbaptist.org.au/files/videos/OPEN.DOORS.CHINA.mp4>

Somebody once said, “*You don’t need God until you **need** God.*” The millions of people in China who are now part of the family of God really needed God. They were without hope, living under communist oppression and even the hint of them turning to a foreign religion would mean death to so many of them. But they cried out to God for their nation, day and night, for years and years and years, because they needed God and only God could do something about their plight.

Outside of China, in the comfort of Australia, New Zealand, America, Great Britain, Canada and many other western nations, I fear that we don’t really **need** God. Our countries are built on Judeo-Christian foundations and until recently, we would have all referred to ourselves as ‘Christian’ countries. Persecution, of the kind the Chinese have endured, is almost non-existent and we can run the Church week by week without the manifest presence of a miracle-working God. We’ve been doing it for years! Perhaps this is one reason why the Holy Spirit is moving in such a deep and profound way in China more than our nation.

Of course there is no formula for revival. These sovereign moves of God throughout history have always been somewhat unpredictable and yet there is one common thread running through every single revival in history, including the one happening as we speak right now in China, and that is prayer! Persistent, persevering, passionate, believing prayer. Deep down we all know that prayer is important, but most of us have little understanding of just how important?

Sometimes people prayed for years, even decades, before the dam wall finally burst and the mercies of God came in like a flood. So before we re-examine our own church and community, seeking the Lord’s help in determining our place in Christ’s mission, I want us to look at what God has already been doing and what factors are operating on the ground in Churches locally and those supporting revivals remotely by giving and prayer.

When the Holy Spirit moves, whole societies are transformed in ways we could never imagine and God is calling us all to get on board and trust Him to break our nets and sink our boats. We need God to exceed all our expectations and when the Holy Spirit moves, that’s what happens: lives change, communities are flooded with the presence and power of God and whole nations are completely transformed.

Let’s always praise God for the movement of His Spirit across the world in so many areas and let’s remember that the Holy Spirit Who is moving with such power across China is the same Holy Spirit within us and hovering over this nation, this community, this Church and our own families. So whilst it is fitting and appropriate for us to rejoice in such a move of the Spirit in China, we also must ask the Lord to give us the wisdom, the discernment and the courage to embrace what we need to do before we see such a move of God’s spirit here in our nation.

Let those who have ears to hear, listen to what the Holy Spirit is saying to the Church today.