

When God Moves

A relatively recent phenomenon of the television entertainment culture is the explosion of reality TV shows where relatively unscripted, non-professionals compete, endure, live, or just make fools of themselves while the world watches through the lenses of the cameras. For the most part, they are quite unappealing to me, but I must be a little weird because they are immensely popular.

The only reality show I can remember while growing up was Candid Camera. On that show certain scenarios, meant to be humorous, were set up with a hidden camera to record people's reactions to them.

But now we're on a whole new level. We are now, if we're interested, able to look in on international competitions, courting, war games, remote survival, police chases, rescues, or just looking in on the stupid things people do every day. As I said, most of it is a waste of time and stupid to me. But one thing you can be sure of, when something is said or done, there is no doubt who said or did something with millions of eye witnesses to give testimony.

And the news media is just the same. When something significant or just stupid is said or done, the whole world will see it live or in a matter of seconds. The statement from our president "you didn't build that" profoundly irritated me the first time I saw and heard it, but now I've heard it dozens of times and it's not getting any better. It is impossible for the president or anyone to deny what he said. It is an irrefutable fact.

I wish it were as easy to look in on the reality of the greatest and most mighty works of God. I think it is a reasonable and important endeavor for true followers of Christ to ask questions and want to know what was going on among the people and what specifically brought about this great movement of God's presence and work. We certainly don't have cameras or video clips but we do have the perfect eye witness account as seen and experienced by God Himself and recorded in His Word.

In the next few weeks, I would like to lead us through an examination of some of the great movements or spiritual awakenings of God among people as recorded through the eyewitness lens in the bible. A year or so ago we studied the great awakenings in America, but this time we will stick exclusively to biblical events. And we're not particularly looking for the greatest physical miracles such as the flood, parting of the Red Sea or free food from heaven. We will be looking at the much more significant events that resulted in massive changes of heart among the people. There may have been consequential or complimentary miracles but the main event was centered around the greatest miracles of repentance, reconciliation with God, obedience and renewed passion for Him.

Early in the days of Samuel the prophet, before Saul was appointed king, Israel was experiencing a time of peace and prosperity. The Philistines had captured the ark of the covenant but had chosen to return it because of all the judgment it had brought on them.

1 So the men of Kiriath-jearim came for the ark of the LORD and took it to Abinadab's house on the hill. They consecrated his son Eleazar to take care of it.

2 Time went by until 20 years had passed since the ark had been taken to Kiriath-jearim. Then the whole house of Israel began to seek the LORD. **3** Samuel told them, "If you are returning to the LORD with all your heart, get rid of the foreign gods and the Ashtoreths that are among you, dedicate yourselves to the LORD, and worship only Him. Then He will rescue you from the hand of the Philistines." **4** So the Israelites removed the Baals and the Ashtoreths and only worshiped the LORD. **5** Samuel said, "Gather all Israel at Mizpah, and I will pray to the LORD on your behalf." **6** When they gathered at Mizpah, they drew water and poured it out in the LORD's presence. They fasted that day, and there they confessed, "We have sinned against the LORD." And Samuel [began to lead] the Israelites at Mizpah as [their] judge. **7** When the Philistines heard that the Israelites had gathered at Mizpah, their rulers marched up toward Israel. When the Israelites heard [about it], they were afraid because of the Philistines. **8** The Israelites said to Samuel, "Don't stop crying out to the LORD our God for us, so that He will save us from the hand of the Philistines." **9** Then Samuel took a young lamb and offered it as a whole burnt offering to the LORD. He cried out to the LORD on behalf of Israel, and the LORD answered him. **10** Samuel was offering the burnt offering as the Philistines drew near to fight against Israel. The LORD thundered loudly against the Philistines that day and threw them into such confusion that they fled before Israel. **11** Then the men of Israel charged out of Mizpah and pursued the Philistines striking them down all the way to a place below Beth-car. **12** Afterwards, Samuel took a

stone and set it upright between Mizpah and Shen. He named it Ebenezer, explaining, “The LORD has helped us to this point.”¹³ So the Philistines were subdued and did not invade Israel’s territory again. The LORD’s hand was against the Philistines all of Samuel’s life.¹⁴ The cities from Ekron to Gath, which they had taken from Israel, were restored; Israel even rescued their surrounding territories from Philistine control. There was also peace between Israel and the Amorites.¹⁵ Samuel judged Israel throughout his life.¹⁶ Every year he would go on a circuit to Bethel, Gilgal, and Mizpah and would judge Israel at all these locations.¹⁷ Then he would return to Ramah because his home was there, he judged Israel there, and he had built an altar to the LORD there. **1** Sam 7:1-17 (HCSB)

What was the greater intervention and mighty work of God, miraculous victory over the Philistines or Israel’s mass confession “we have sinned against the Lord” resulting in repentance and reconciliation with God, restoration, and peace?.... This is no small thing. Individuals, families, churches, communities, and nations who were once committed, faithful followers of God can gradually slip into complacency leading to rebellion and the consequential judgment of God, and this most frequently happens during times of peace and prosperity. It certainly seems to be the pattern throughout the old testament and it is certainly true in America.

God moves:

Unity Certainly throughout the ages God has done some extraordinary things through and with individuals even when the vast majority

were on a hard and steady track to destruction and judgment. For example- Noah and his family, Daniel and his three friends, and Joseph. But by far, when God moved in the most extraordinary and powerful ways, it was when at least most if not all of His people, those who would truly be identified as His followers, came together in agreement of their need to turn from their sinful ways and turn to Him. This was certainly the case during this period of Samuel's ministry.

We must think for a moment how extraordinarily inhuman and unnatural unity is. We are by nature are so selfish, demanding, divisive and often down right mean that it seems an impossibility on any grand scale for even a small group of people, much less a church or a nation to come together with unity of thought and purpose. (i.e. the election of a president) So it seems, from the very beginning of a great movement among His people, that God must be at work convicting, leading, wooing, inspiring, and empowering individuals to effectively accomplish His purposes among the whole group. But we must choose to cooperate with God's leading and purposes.

1 I, therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, urge you to walk worthy of the calling you have received,² with all humility and gentleness, with patience, accepting one another in love,³ diligently keeping the unity of the Spirit with the peace that

binds [us]. ⁴ There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope^[2] at your calling; ⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism, ⁶ one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all. Eph 4:1-6 (HCSB)

¹⁴ Above all, [put on] love—the perfect bond of unity. Col 3:14 (HCSB)

If we truly have any hope to see a mighty moving of God in our life time, it must start with unity. We all must agree specifically on what we need to remove, tear down, cast off and repent of. And, we must agree to.....

Assemble- I get pretty irritated, and more importantly, I believe the Lord gets quite irritated, when people say, “I don’t need the church. I can worship the Lord right here in my own house by myself.” Certainly you can and should worship the Lord by yourself in your house, but if that’s all you do, it is guaranteed you miss out on every great and glorious thing that God ever has done or will do. God works primarily and most astoundingly through a unified assembly of His people. It doesn’t have to be a large group to start with but there is a special presence and power guaranteed when we assemble together in unity.

¹⁹ Again, I assure you: If two of you on earth agree about any matter that you pray for, it will be done for you by My Father in heaven. ²⁰ For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there among them.” Matt 18:19-20 (HCSB)

And be clear. It is not just about assembling at a certain place for a certain time. The purpose of assembly was and is about honestly and passionately fasting, confessing our sins, repenting

of those sins, praying, seeking the Lord and worshipping Him with all our hearts, souls, minds, and strength. Passive spectators may get a glimpse of a great moving of God, but only active participants will experience it.

Submit to Samuel's (God's) leadership. Samuel was God's spokesman. God spoke to the people through him. To submit, to honor and respect Samuel was to honor and respect God. This was probably difficult because I'm quite sure that Samuel, though God's prophet, was also quite human. But he was God's man.

Whenever God moves, whether studying the great movements of God in the bible, in America, or anywhere else there have always been human instruments whom God used to deliver His message and lead His people.

Unity and assembly are just the beginning. Once God has us all together, unified, clean and seeking Him, then He is ready to lead us somewhere, and most likely, it is somewhere new and exciting, somewhere we've never been before.

17 The elders who are good leaders should be considered worthy of an ample honorarium, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching. ¹⁸ For the Scripture says: **You must not muzzle an ox that is threshing grain, and, The laborer is worthy of his wages.** **1** Tim 5:17-18 (HCSB)

Reference: This is not just talking about financial support. It is also speaking of honor and respect. We have a crisis in America. Many elders or pastors are not walking worthy of the honor they receive and many members of the body of Christ are not

honoring those who are worthy. This is a double reason why we have not seen much movement of God in the churches of America.

His sovereignty/will One more element of a great moving of God that I think we need to discuss: God's sovereignty and will. God chooses to move or not move at times when we can't explain it in earthly practical terms.

There have been times in my ministry when I was sure I was doing everything I needed to be doing, crossing all my t's and dotting all my eyes ministerially speaking, but it didn't seem that God was not up to anything significant (drought). There have been other times, even when I've felt unprepared and unsure, that the windows of heaven opened up for a time in His church and even throughout a community leading to repentance, salvation, and spiritual renewal.

The point is that God moves when He chooses to move and sometimes in spite of instead of because of His people. Certainly our obedience and devotion to Him play a significant part but it is ultimately up to Him when and how to move. The truth is we should heed the call to unity and assembly, pursue holiness and righteousness seeking God whether He does anything extraordinary or not. He has already done the extraordinary- He put on flesh, lived among us, and rose again. What else could you possibly seek?

Would you like to see God do something extraordinary in your life... family... church...community... nation? **Pursue unity...**

¹⁴ Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. ¹⁵ Rejoice with those who rejoice; weep with those who weep. ¹⁶ Be in agreement with one another. Do not be proud; instead, associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own estimation. ¹⁷ Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Try to do what is honorable in everyone's eyes. ¹⁸ If possible, on your part, live at peace with everyone. ¹⁹ Friends, do not avenge yourselves; instead, leave room for His wrath. For it is written: **Vengeance belongs to Me; I will repay,** says the Lord. ²⁰ But **If your enemy is hungry, feed him. If he is thirsty, give him something to drink. For in so doing you will be heaping fiery coals on his head.** ²¹ Do not be conquered by evil, but conquer evil with good. Romans 12:14-21 (HCSB)

Assemble faithfully

²⁴ And let us be concerned about one another in order to promote love and good works, ²⁵ not staying away from our meetings, as some habitually do, but encouraging each other, and all the more as you see the day drawing near. Heb 10:24-25 (HCSB)

Honor and respect God-called, spirit-filled leaders

Wait on God- He's always on time. While you wait, be faithful and consistent.