

The Moravian Revival

by Andrew Davies

The Moravian Revival was a spiritual awakening that occurred in 1727 among the Moravian community in Saxony, Germany, characterized by a deep sense of the presence of God and a renewed commitment to faith and holiness.

Duration: 47:41

Scripture: Matthew 16:28, Mark 9:1, Luke 9:27, Romans 12:10, Ephesians 4:32, Philippians 2:2, 1 Thessalonians 5:11

Topics: "Moravian Revival"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the joy and happiness that comes from the presence of the Holy Spirit. He references a hymn by Bishop Gambold that expresses the deep love and connection between Jesus and his followers. The preacher also mentions Jesus' promise that some of his disciples would see him coming in his kingdom before they taste death. He emphasizes the importance of preaching about Christ and his sacrifice to bring blessings to the heathen. The sermon includes stories about a countess who found true joy in the Savior and a preacher who found solace in repeating verses from Bishop Gambold's hymn.

Transcript

Welcome, it is good to come and a privilege to speak about this great revival, the Moravian revival of 1727. The story begins on the 8th of June, 1722, when ten refugees, six adults and four children, arrived at Zinzendorf's estate at Berfeldsdorf in Saxony. They were from Moravia present, Czechoslovakia, and they were fleeing from Catholic oppression in their homeland.

By the later part of the year, and certainly by 1727, at least 200 Moravian refugees had settled there, we know that for sure. They called themselves the United Brethren, and traced their origins back to the Bohemian reformer John Huss, who had been martyred in 1415. Huss had left a large number of believers in Bohemia and Moravia, out of which this church, the Church of the United Brethren, had emerged.

And now, over 300 years later, their successors moved into Saxony, and quickly found themselves living in this estate of Count von Zinzendorf, and they formed themselves into a community, the Moravian community, called Herrnhut, there on Zinzendorf's estate. Zinzendorf himself was a young man of just 22 years of age when they arrived. He came from an Austrian noble family and had trained to be a lawyer, but his first love was the gospel, and he wanted to devote his life to evangelism and pastoral care.

And so in 1722, he had bought this estate at Berfeldsdorf in Saxony. He appointed as the pastor of the local church there an able preacher, Johann Roth, whose hymn we sang at the beginning of the service. And it was that estate that he made available to these Moravian refugees as a sanctuary and a home.

Zinzendorf had two concerns. The first was to care for the spiritual needs of the local Saxon community, as well as these refugees. And the second was to unite both communities into a loving, living church.

That was not to be an easy task. There were divisions among the settlers. Most of them, as I said, came from the United Brethren, but some of them had Lutheran, some Reformed, and some Baptist traditions.

So they argued and quarrelled over questions like predestination and holiness and baptism. And there was the further problem of integration into the local community with its different ethos and culture. Zinzendorf became very concerned about the disunity in the areas of tension, and he resolved to give himself to the task of uniting both groups together.

The first thing he did was to appoint some very able spiritual leaders, intelligent and gifted men. Johann Roth, the pastor, preached in such a way that we are told he called fire from heaven. Tobias Frederick was a skillful musician who wrote some beautiful hymns which the people sang.

John de Watville was a wise and loving pastoral advisor. And Zinzendorf himself catechised the people in a direct experimental way. So those four men led the community wisely, spiritually, and in a balanced way.

And then Zinzendorf, having appointed these leaders, encouraged the believers to unite doctrinally. That meant that they should give their earnest attention to the preaching of Pastor Roth. But he also urged them to stop arguing about predestination, and holiness, and baptism.

He told them to focus their attention on the things which they believe together, particularly the cardinal truth of salvation by grace through faith. And he preached to them and spoke to them about the atoning work of the Saviour. And in connection with that doctrinal agreement, he did succeed in obtaining their agreement to the Augsburg Confession of Faith.

So he appointed these spiritual leaders. He encouraged them to unite doctrinally. And thirdly, he also persuaded the people to enter into a brotherly covenant, and to accept the oversight of godly elders.

He drew up a series of community rules to which they all subscribed. And on the 12th of May 1727, they covenanted together to give themselves to the Lord and to each other. A contemporary author put it like this.

On that day, the 12th of May 1727, the Count made a covenant with the people in the presence of God. The Brethren individually engaged to belong entirely to the Saviour. They were ashamed of their religious quarrels, and were unanimously disposed to bury them in oblivion.

They also sincerely renounced self-love, self-will, disobedience, and free thinking. They were desirous of becoming poor in spirit. None of them saw the preference above the rest, and each one wished to be taught by the Holy Spirit in all things.

So there were those three steps that he took to try to achieve some degree of unity. But important though those decisions were, something else happened that was to be even more significant. Zinzendorf realized that the fundamental need of the community was spiritual.

Above all, they needed to experience and know the presence of the Lord among them. And therefore, all the things that they should do, the most important was to pray together. As a teenager, Zinzendorf had been a man of prayer.

Converted at the age of four, he had chosen as his life motto the confession, I have one passion, it is Jesus, Jesus only. When he left his school at Halle at 16 years of age, he handed the famous Professor Franke a list of seven praying societies that he had established among the students. And when, on a European tour, he came across a portrait of the risen Lord displaying his wounds with the words, all this I did for thee, what doest thou for me, written beneath, he resolved to give his life to fellowship with his saviour.

So, as a man of prayer, he took steps to encourage the believers at Herrnhut to pray. Three daily meetings for prayer were convened at five o'clock in the morning, seven-thirty in the morning and then at nine o'clock in the evening. And small society gatherings of three to five people regularly met, they were known as bands, Moravian bands.

The people began to call on the Lord to visit them and to grant them to know his presence in a felt and in a real way. Those arrangements, all of them, were accompanied by a growing spirit of prayer and a sense of anticipation. There was a stirring among the people.

For example, when Johann Roth was inducted as minister on the 30th of August 1722, Pastor Schaefer, neighbouring minister, uttered these prophetic words, God intends to kindle light on these hills which is to illumine the whole country, of this I am most fully and firmly persuaded. Then again, Pastor Roth's preaching was accompanied by extraordinary authority. And on the 16th of July 1727, Zinzendorf was quite overcome during public prayer with emotion and with concern for a visitation of the Holy Spirit.

They told that he poured forth his soul in a heart-affecting prayer accompanied with a flood of tears. This prayer produced an extraordinary effect and was the beginning of the subsequent operations of the life-giving and energetic Spirit of God. On the 22nd of July in that year, ten of the brethren agreed together to meet for prayer and hymn singing, and they experienced an awakening.

On the 5th of August, Zinzendorf with twelve others spent a whole night in watching and praying. The following midnight, a larger meeting for prayer took place at which, we are told, great emotion prevailed. And during the next few days, a truly peculiar and overwhelming power of God was perceptible at the singing meetings in the evening.

On the 10th of August, about noon, Pastor Roth was conducting the meeting at Herrnhut when he felt himself overwhelmed by a wonderful and irresistible power of the Lord, and sunk down into the dust before God, and with him sunk down the whole assembled congregation in an ecstasy of feeling. In this frame of mind, they continued till midnight, engaged in prayer and singing, weeping and supplication. The next day, he invited the whole congregation to celebrate communion with him on the 13th of August, a Wednesday.

On the 12th of August, every home was visited so that all disharmony was removed, and everyone fully prepared in heart for that communion service. And then, on the 13th of August, 1727, the revival occurred. Let me read to you the account of it in the Memorial Days, a contemporary document which tells us about the history of the revival.

Before we proceeded to the church, a short discourse was delivered at Herrnhut on the subject of the Holy Communion. On the road to Berfelsdorf, parties of two or more might here and there be seen of those who held heart's conversation together. All those who had once been estranged one from the other cordially embraced each other and entered into a mutual covenant of friendship and love.

At the church, the service was opened with the hymn, And bind me, O my God, from all my bonds and fetters, during the singing of which a very wicked man who was present as a spectator was overpowered with a feeling of contrition. Pastor Roth then pronounced a truly apostolic blessing upon the two sisters who were to be confirmed, and the congregation added there, Amen. Immediately after, the assembly fell down before the Lord, and all melted together in tears began the hymn, My soul before thee prostrate lies.

It was scarcely possible to discern whether it were weeping or singing, but both were mingled together. There followed a time of prayer during which we prayed with full assurance of faith that God would be pleased to draw our two elders, Christian David and Melchior Nietzschmann, who were absent, into true heart's fellowship with us. But the two elders were away unavoidably in a nearby parish.

They returned two weeks later and immediately asked the congregation what had happened on the 13th of August, and I'm quoting, They had been, they said, at the orphan house in Savlat, and about ten o'clock in the morning, feeling an irresistible impulse to prayer, they had retired into the garret, where, kneeling down before our Saviour, they had been drawn into a most pleasing remembrance of the congregation, and shed a flood of tears. Never in their lives had they felt so well, and the thought immediately struck them, what may our congregation be doing just now? Oh, that they could know our present state of mind. Well, the service continued with the partaking of the elements, and the congregation returned home with what Memorial Days calls feelings of holy ecstasy.

Zinzendorf described what happened in address to a British audience twenty-seven years later. He said this, On this day twenty-seven years ago, the congregation of Herrnhut assembled for communion at the Belfeldsdorf church. They were all dissatisfied with themselves.

They had quit judging each other, because they had become convinced each one of his lack of worth in the sight of God, and each felt himself at this communion to be in view of the noble countenance of the Saviour. In this view of the man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, their hearts told them that he would be their patron and their priest, who was at once changing their tears into oil of gladness and their misery into happiness. This firm confidence changed them in a single moment into a happy people, which they are to this day, and into their happiness they have since led many thousands of others through the memory and the help which the heavenly grace once given to themselves so many thousand times confirmed to them since then.

He called it the church's Pentecost. He said, A sense of the nearness of Christ was given to all at the same moment. The Saviour permitted to come upon us the spirit of whom we had hitherto not had any experience or knowledge.

Hitherto we had been the leaders and helpers. Now the Holy Spirit himself took full control of everything and everybody. And that awakening among the adults was also accompanied shortly afterwards with a similar awakening among the children.

Zinzendorf had felt concerned about the children, whose apathy toward spiritual things worried him, and he spoke to them about true repentance and faith, as a result of which some of them were triumphant way

on the 2nd of May, and who herself experienced overwhelming joy and assurance of her salvation on the 6th of August. On the 18th of August, the children, we are told, were filled with a universal flame of love towards our Saviour, and thereafter many remarkable traces of grace were discernible among the boys and the girls. Now that's what actually happened, the story of the revival of the 13th of August 1727.

And I want to consider with you, for the remaining of our time, the two great effects of the coming of the Spirit upon that community. You remember that in Matthew 16, 28, we are told what Pentecost would mean for the disciples. Jesus said, truly I say to you, there are some of those who are standing here, who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.

There would be people there in front of our Lord, who would be still alive, and they would see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom, they would see the Son of Man. That is what Pentecost meant for the disciples. Remember how our Lord took that up in John 14 to 16, and told the disciples that when the Spirit came, He would come.

They would see Him. I will come to you. You will not be comfortless.

The Father will come to you. Several times in those chapters in John 14 to 16, our Lord emphasizes the fact that the Spirit's coming would also be His coming, so that they would see Him, their risen Lord, in a quite unique and new way. If you've read any church history, you will have perhaps read the famous story of the association meeting in San Gaiso in 1859, when it was rather a dull, dead meeting, and the minister asked one of the elders to get up and to speak.

And the elder said that he'd had a dream the night before, and in his dream he'd gone halfway to heaven in order to ask that the Lord might send a representative to the association meeting in San Gaiso the following day. He'd seen someone coming from heaven to meet him, and so he'd said to this person, will you please go back to the Lord and ask Him if He will send us a representative to our association meeting? He saw the man going back to heaven and then returning. And the message which he brought with him was this, the Lord has told me to tell you that He's not going to send you a representative, but He's coming Himself.

It's just that that happens in revival. The Lord comes in a new way, and people, Christians, see the Son of Man in a fresh, vivid, and wonderful way. Remember that the disciples had already known the Lord Jesus with them and the Spirit dwelling with them.

But the Lord said that the Spirit would come and they would see Him in a new and marvellous way. And the first effect of the coming of the Spirit is that believers see Christ anew. They're filled with a new sense of joy, they're overawed and amazed by His presence.

Now that is precisely what happened to these Moravians. In November of this same year, 1727, Zinzendorf visited Jena and he spoke to the students and the teachers of the university there. He paid several visits to Jena in the following years, and as he spoke about the revival and about Christ, numbers of students and teachers were deeply influenced and affected, including two men, A.G. Spangenberg and Peter Bohler, two names for you to remember.

And what impressed these and others was the obvious sense of the divine presence which Zinzendorf brought with him. He obviously had been with the Saviour, and they were overcome and themselves began to experience the joy of the Saviour's presence. That happened to them.

The same thing happened, didn't it, to the Wesleys. Now it's worth just recalling that because you will know that when John and Charles Wesley were travelling to America in 1736, they met a party of Moravians on board the ship. And the entry in John Wesley's journal for the 25th of January, 1736, is well known.

These Moravians came from the revival. They were travelling over to America. And Wesley tells us in his journal that at noon our third storm began.

At four it was more violent than before. At seven I went to the Germans. I had long before observed the great seriousness of their behaviour.

Of their humility they had given a continual proof by performing those servile offices for the other passengers, which none of the English would undertake, for which they desired and would receive no pay, saying it was good for their proud hearts, and their loving Saviour had done more for them. And every day had given them an occasion of showing a meekness which no injury could move. If they were pushed, struck, or thrown down, they rose again and went away.

But no complaint was found in their mouths. There was now an opportunity of trying whether they were delivered from the spirit of fear, as well as from that of pride, anger, and revenge. In the midst of the storm, wherewith their service began, the sea broke over, split the mainsail in pieces, covered the ship, and poured in between the decks, as if the great deep had already swallowed us up.

A terrible screaming began among the English. The Germans calmly sang on. I asked one of them afterwards, Was you not afraid? Incidentally, that's not my bad grammar, that's exactly what Wesley wrote.

Was you not afraid? He answered, I thank God, no. I asked, But were not your women and children afraid? He replied mildly, No, our women and children are not afraid to die. And of course Wesley was terrified of dying.

Well, he went over to America, as we know, and in America whom should he meet but A. G. Spankingberg, one of the students from Jenner. And Spankingberg had been sent on in advance of the party to settle the affairs and to negotiate the place where the Moravians would live. And he spoke to Wesley, My brother, I must first ask you one or two questions.

Have you the witness within yourself? Does the Spirit of God bear witness with your spirit that you are a child of God? Wesley records, I was surprised, and I knew not what to answer. He observed it and asked, Do you know Jesus Christ? I paused and said, I know he is the Savior of the world. True, replied he, but do you know he has saved you? I answered, I hope he has died to save me.

He only added, But do you know yourself? I said, I do, but I fear they were vain words. Well, Wesley's returned to England in 1738 and straight away were brought into the company of the Moravians, some of the same people. And this time Peter Birla was to have a quite conclusive and decisive influence over Wesley.

He pointed out to Wesley that faith meant more than intellectual conviction. Faith also meant spiritual assurance. And the story of what happened to Wesley on the 24th of May in that year has often been told.

All I need to just mention to you is the part the Moravians played in it. Birla said, for example, that both Wesley's had confessed their doubts respecting the truth of free grace through the merits of Jesus, whereby poor sinners receive forgiveness and are set free from the dominion of sin. He said that he had been able to convince them of that from the scriptures.

So, Birla had pointed out to the Wesley's that salvation was by grace, through faith alone. And then, as we know, in 1738 on the 24th of May, Wesley received assurance of what he had intellectually already come to accept. He says that.

He says that Peter Birla and three others visited him and said that this faith was the gift, the free gift of God, and that he would surely bestow it upon every soul who earnestly and perseveringly sought it. I was now thoroughly convinced, and by the grace of God I resolved to seek it unto the end. One, by absolutely renouncing all dependence in whole or in part upon my own works or righteousness on which I had really grounded my hope of salvation, though I knew it not from my youth up.

Two, by adding to the constant use of all the other means of grace, continual prayer for this very thing, justifying saving faith, a full reliance on the blood of Christ shed for me, a trust in him as my Christ, as my sole justification, sanctification and redemption. So it would seem that what happened at Aldersgate Street was that John Wesley received a direct personal warming of his heart, confirming experimentally what he had already come to believe intellectually, and that the Moravians, knowing that themselves, had pointed him towards it. So the Lord Jesus Christ had come and had revealed himself in this living way to John Wesley.

And of course it happened subsequently, didn't it? When the Fetter Lane Society met in the new year of 1739, the Holy Spirit came down and Christ was clearly felt and known in the midst of that assembly. If you remember the record of it, this love feast at Fetter Lane, it was a quite amazing account, and Wesley tells us, about three o'clock in the morning as we were continuing instant in prayer, the power of God came mightily upon us, so that many cried for exceeding joy, and many fell to the ground. As soon as we were recovered a little from that awe and amazement at the presence of his majesty, we broke out with one voice, we praised thee, O God, we acknowledge thee to be the Lord.

So the coming of the Spirit always glorifies and reveals the Lord Jesus Christ. That is the Spirit's great work, to exalt Christ and his atoning work. So it doesn't surprise us, does it, to discover that this joy known in the presence of Christ was experienced among these Moravians, and that that joy not only influenced people like Wesley and others, but it overflowed in an outburst of hymns and songs in praise to the Lord Jesus Christ.

And some of our hymns, some of our great hymns were written by Moravians. John Senech was a Moravian. Listen to one of his hymns, Christ is our master, Lord and God, the fullness of the three in one.

His life, death, righteousness and blood are, faith's foundation are alone. He is Godhead and his death shall be our theme to all eternity. Or again, listen to another hymn written by John Senech.

We're all familiar with it, I take it. Children of the heavenly King, as you journey, sweetly sing. Sing your Saviour's worthy praise, glorious in his works and ways.

And another, lo, glad I come, and thou blessed Lamb shall take me to thee as I am. My sinful self to thee I give, nothing but love shall I receive. Then will I tell the sinners round what a dear Saviour I have found.

I point to thy redeeming blood and say, behold the way to God. We sang Zinzindor's hymn just now, the hymn in praise of the Lord Jesus Christ. You can't read any of the hymns that these Moravians wrote without seeing how Christ-centered they were, and how clearly these people coming from revival were just made happy in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Let me just mention to you one or two examples of their happiness that was commented upon earlier on. There was a man called Johannes, who was an Indian chief. The Moravians went over to America, not only to settle there, but to preach the gospel to the Indians.

And this Indian chief, who had been a very evil man, was thoroughly converted. And later on in life he gave his testimony at a gathering, and this was his testimony. Brethren, I have been a heathen, and am grown old among them.

I know therefore very well how it is with a heathen. A preacher came once to us, desiring to instruct us, and began by proving to us that there was a God, on which we said to him, Well, and dost thou think we are ignorant of that? Now, go again whence thou camest. Another preacher came another time, and would instruct us, saying, You must not steal, nor drink too much, nor lie, etc., etc.

We answered him, Fool that thou art, dost thou think we do not know that? Go and learn it first thyself, and teach the people thou belongest to not to do these things. For who are greater drunkards, or thieves, or liars, than thine own people? Thus we sent him away also. Sometime after this, Christian Henry Rowe, one of the Moravian brethren, came to me into my hut, and sat down by me.

The contents of his discourse were merely these. I come to thee in the name of the Lord of heaven and earth. He equates thee that he would gladly save thee, and rescue thee from the miserable state in which thou liest.

To this end he became a man, hath given his life for mankind, and shed his blood for them. Upon this he lay down upon a board in my hut, and fell asleep, being fatigued with his journey. I thought within myself, What manner of man is this? There he lies and sleeps so sweetly, I might kill him, and throw him out into the forest.

Who would care? But he is unconcerned. However, I could not get rid of his words. They continually recurred to me, and though I went to sleep, yet I dreamt of the blood which Christ had shed for me.

I thought this is very strange, and went to interpret to the other Indians the words of Christian Henry. Thus, through the grace of God, the awakening among us took place. I tell you therefore, brethren, preach to the heathen Christ, and his blood and death, if you would wish to produce a blessing among them.

And then not only an Indian chief, but a Russian countess. Listen to this story. There was a countess several generations ago who had led what the world calls a very merry life.

She was highly situated in society, connected in close friendship with kings and emperors and princes. She was a welcome centre on brilliant occasions of dance and festivity, in view of her brilliant gifts and witty conversation, and yet she became afflicted with an incurable melancholy. None of her amusements and recreations satisfied her any longer, and everything before her and around her seemed dark indeed.

Under the old custom of measuring shoes for the feet of their wearers, a humble Moravian shoemaker was one day invited into her presence. As he opened the door, she was struck by the remarkable cheerfulness

which shone forth from his face. She watched him closely whilst he knelt at his humble task of measuring for the shoes, and was deeply impressed by the unaffected happiness written upon his looks.

She was led to say to him, You seem to be a very happy man. Yes, he said, I am very happy, all the time. You are very different from me, the high-born lady said.

I am just as miserable as anybody could be. Would you mind telling me what makes you so happy? No, said the Moravian. I'll be glad to tell you.

Jesus has forgiven my sins. He forgives me every day, and he loves me, and that makes me happy through all the hours. The job was finished, and the man went away.

But she thought over what he had said. Thought led to prayer, prayer to conviction, conviction introduced her to a living faith in this shoemaker's saviour. And this Russian princess became a great witness for Christ among titled people, especially we are told of the court of the Emperor of Russia, Alexander I. Simple, overflowing, joy in the Saviour, which they knew, and which they were able in that most disarming and honest way to share with others.

For listen to this story about Roland Hill, the great English preacher, the friend and successor of Whitefield. In old age he'd finished the last service of a very busy Sabbath day, and he was seen to be walking up and down the church on his own. An old man repeating some verses.

He was actually repeating some verses from Bishop Gambold's hymn. Bishop Gambold was a Moravian. And the hymn ended with these two stanzas.

And when I'm to die, receive me, I'll cry. For Jesus hath loved me, I cannot tell why. But this I do find, we two are so joined, he'll not live in glory and leave me behind.

Now that's the joy, that's the happiness, which they obviously knew. The Spirit had come upon them, and the Lord Jesus had revealed himself to them, and they just filled with joy and delight in his presence, and wanted to share him with other people. That's the first consequence of the coming of the Holy Spirit.

Our Lord said so. There are some of you standing here who will not taste of death till they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom. But we also remember that in Mark and in Luke, our Lord said something else.

And it's very interesting to compare the Matthew passage 16 with the Mark and the Luke passage. We're told in Mark 9 verse 1 that Jesus was saying to them, truly I say to you, there are some of those who are standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God, after it has come with power. The kingdom of God.

Believers would see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom. Unbelievers who are also present, if you read the story carefully, you will see that there were unbelievers present. Our Lord was speaking to both groups of people, just as you and I do sometimes if we are preaching.

We speak to believers, we speak to unbelievers. There were believers and unbelievers in that congregation to which our Lord was preaching. To believers he said, when the Spirit comes, you will see the Son of Man.

To unbelievers, there are some of you standing here who will not taste death until they have seen the kingdom of God coming, with power. As a man is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Our Lord was talking about the coming of the Holy Spirit upon unbelievers, enabling them to see the kingdom.

So, what happens to unbelievers when the Spirit comes? Believers see the Lord Jesus Christ in a new way and are filled with joy. What happens to unbelievers? They see the kingdom of God. They are convinced of sin, righteousness and judgment.

Now that is the second great consequence that we can discern in this Moravian revival. When the Spirit came to them, the world of unbelievers was influenced, because this awakening that I am talking about gave birth to one of the most remarkable and influential missionary movements in modern history. And I am not exaggerating when I say that.

It is to the shame of a great many Christians today that they do not even know about the Moravian missionary movement. But as in New Testament times, the effect of the Spirit's coming upon the Church was that its members were inspired and empowered to proclaim the Gospel to others, and they became living witnesses to the Lord Jesus Christ. Within thirty years, they had carried the Gospel not only to almost every country in Europe, but also to many pagan races in America, North and South, Asia and Africa, within thirty years of this revival.

Their first mission was to the Negroes in the West Indies, five years after the outpouring of the Spirit. And they laboured among the Negroes, often in extreme conditions. Many of them became slaves, because that was the only way that they could communicate with these Negro slaves.

They would not have been allowed contact with them otherwise. So they became slaves, worked as slaves alongside the Negroes in order to preach the Gospel to them, and to witness to them. And it has been estimated that by fifty years or so, after the revival of 1727, there were 13,000 converts in the West Indies before a missionary from any other church had even arrived.

In 1733, they sent out missionaries to Greenland, which William Cooper has immortalized in his well-known hymn or poem about the missionary movement in Greenland. "'See,' he wrote, "'Germany send forth her sons to pour it,' that's the Gospel, "'on the farthest north. Fired with a zeal peculiar, they defy the rage and rigor of a polar sky, and plant successfully sweet Sharon's rose on icy plains and in eternal snows.'" It was the Moravians who inspired William Carey.

It was their missionary periodical, their magazine, the periodical accounts that he threw on the table, remember, at that famous meeting with the memorable and historic words, "'See what these Moravians have done. Cannot we follow their example, and in obedience to our heavenly Master go out into the world and preach the Gospel to the heathen?' In fact, from that one small village community of just 200 people, over 100 missionaries went out in 25 years. James Montgomery wrote about them in one of his hymns, and it's a beautiful hymn.

"They walked with God in peace and love, but failed with one another. While sternly for the faith they strove, brother fell out with brother. But he in whom they put their trust, who knew their frames that they were dust, pitied and healed their weakness.

He found them in his house of prayer, with one accord assembled, and so revealed his presence there, they wept with joy and trembled. One cup they drank, one bread they break, one baptism shared, one

language spake, forgiving and forgiven. Then forth they went with tongues of flame, in one blessed theme delighting, the love of Jesus and his name, God's children all uniting.

That love our theme and So, the Moravian missionary movement, it began as the overflow of spiritual life. There were no large-scale plans, no ambitious blueprints. The whole was carried on quietly and unobtrusively.

Their aim was simply to share with everybody who would listen to them the joy which they had found in Christ. It was so simple, so simple, and yet so wonderful. John Newton was greatly impressed by the Moravian missionary movement.

In fact, when the London Missionary Society was formed in 1795, John Newton wrote to a friend these words, For myself, I am already engaged to support and recommend the Moravian missions. There I seem to know what I am about. There I see the hand of the Lord already stretched out.

I know their missionaries are eminently endued with the spirit of disinterestedness, self-denial, humility, fortitude, and the meekness of wisdom. And the success the Lord has given them is truly wonderful. Perhaps there has been nothing equal to it, to what they have suffered and what they have done among the heathens since the apostles' days.

But it may be said of our Saviour's kingdom, so far as the Brethren or Moravians are concerned in it, that it cometh not with observation. It makes no noise, it attracts but little attention. They are a people little known, and therefore despised and undervalued by many, but not by me.

I judge that true Christian discipline is better observed by them than by any other body of people who profess the gospel. And we have an example from Zinzendorf's biography of the way in which he himself went about his own missionary endeavours. You see, the one thing about these Moravians is that they had a simplicity and a determination and a spirit of self-sacrifice that often you just don't find in modern missions.

And this is the sort of way in which Zinzendorf spoke. He was troubling. In 1742, among the American Indians, I'm quoting, having once taken a person with him to show him the way through the wood, he asked him of what religion he was.

Well, Lutheran to be sure, said his guide. But do you know what it is to be a Lutheran? asked the count. This question startled the man who honestly confessed that he did not.

On enquiring further whether he would be glad to have it explained to him, and receiving an answer in the affirmative, the count prolonged his journey so as to find time to converse with the guide during the night, and then describe to him with a warm heart what it was to be a Lutheran. This so affected the man that it proved the means of his conversion, as I have often afterwards heard him relate. Now I could multiply story after story about that simple, spontaneous, courteous, wise, but passionate concern for people to be saved that you find among these Arabians.

So, the Spirit came upon them in that gathering in 1727, meetings that preceded and other meetings that followed it, but supremely in that gathering, and that coming of the Spirit upon them had two profound effects. On them, filling them with joy and happiness, which they shared with others like the Wesleys, and whomever they came to meet, and then it also fired them with this evangelistic zeal to take the gospel all over the world, so that other people might share in the joy of salvation which they knew. Now why is this

so important for us today? Well, you see, we're living in a day, aren't we, where the atmosphere in which we are living and witnessing needs to be changed.

Part of the difficulty about our day is the atmosphere in which we are ministering and living. It's anti-God. It's secular.

It's immoral. It's cynical. It's destructive of anything Christian, and sometimes even of anything moral.

So, the atmosphere in which we are working needs to be changed. The name of God needs to become holy to people. The kingdom of God needs to be real to people.

The will of God needs to be something that matters to people. The atmosphere needs to be changed. Well, how is that going to come about? What's the encouragement of this story for us today? Well, surely twofold.

First of all, we can prepare for what God himself and God alone is able to do. We can prepare for it. They preached, and so must we.

They taught, and so must we. They appointed wise spiritual leaders, and so must we. They were concerned about fellowship between believers on the great truths of the gospel, and so must we.

They prepared, as I've said, for five years before 1727. It wasn't preparationism. It certainly wasn't conditionalism.

It arose out of a spiritual concern, a burden which Zinzendorf and others felt. Now, we surely ought to be able to do that. But the second thing that we must do, as they did, is to pray, and to pray in a way that is different from the normal perfunctory coming of the Spirit.

And they prayed that God would send the Spirit. They were convinced about that. Not only in their minds, but in their hearts.

They saw that only the coming of the Spirit upon them, and upon society, would transform their lives, and the lives of unbelievers. And so, we, I think, are called upon by the Lord today, in the same kind of way, to pray as they did. And we need to pray.

James Montgomery was a man of prayer. He wrote hymns, didn't he, in which he urged us, and has urged us to pray, and called upon the Lord that he would send his Spirit in a way that will cause the Lord Jesus Christ to be glorified, and his name hallowed, and the kingdom of God come, and the will of God be done on earth as it is in heaven. O Spirit of the living God, in all thy plenitude of grace, where the foot of man hath trod, descend on our apostate race.

That's James Montgomery in Moravian. Give hearts of fire, give tongues of fire, hearts of love, to preach the reconciling world. That sort of prayer, which the Lord is able to give to us, and which we ourselves are required, I think, by the Lord, to pray for ourselves.

If you then being evil, Jesus said, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him. And if we can just be encouraged a little to pray in the way that they did, and to look for the Lord to come in the way that he came then, then I believe we will not only be learning from the example, but we will, in the providence of God, be preparing ourselves for what God is able to do in our days, and may it please him to do it.

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