

James Caughey

by David Smithers

David Smithers' sermon on James Caughey highlights the transformative power of the Holy Spirit in revival ministry and the essential role of prayer in achieving spiritual growth.

Scripture: Zechariah 4:6, John 16:13, Acts 1:8, Romans 8:26, 1 Corinthians 2:4, Galatians 5:25, Ephesians 5:18, 1 Thessalonians 5:19, 2 Timothy 1:7, Jude 1:20

Topics: "Holy Spirit", "Revival Ministry"

Description

David Smithers preaches on the transformative power of the Holy Spirit in the ministry of James Caughey, emphasizing the absolute necessity of the Spirit's influence for effective Gospel preaching and soul-winning. Caughey's commitment to fervent prayer and reliance on the Holy Spirit led to remarkable revival across Britain, with thousands converted and communities transformed. Despite facing opposition and criticism for the manifestations accompanying his ministry, Caughey's unwavering dedication to prayer and dependence on the Spirit's guidance brought about lasting spiritual growth and empowerment among the Wesleyan Methodists.

Transcript

J. A. Stewart has rightly said, "Apart from the mighty endowment of the Spirit of Pentecost, all our Gospel services will be in vain. The natural, unregenerate man cannot comprehend the things of the Spirit. His darkened mind can only be enlightened by the divine intervention of God, the Holy Ghost. He cannot be argued, fascinated, bullied or enthused into accepting Christ as Savior. It is not enough that we clearly expound the Gospel. It must be given in the demonstration and power of the Spirit and then applied by Him." It was this burning revelation that radically transformed the ministry of a young Methodist preacher by the name of James Caughey.

James Caughey was born in Northern Ireland on April 9, 1810. The Caughey family later immigrated to America while James was still very young. By 1830 Mr. Caughey was working in a large flour mill in Troy, New York. Between the years of 1830-31, he was soundly converted, along with thousands of others during the Second Great Awakening in the "Burned-over District." Two years after his conversion, he was admitted as a Methodist preacher into the Troy Conference. He was later ordained in 1834 as deacon and after two more years was finally ordained as an elder of the Methodist Episcopal Church. Initially he seemed to be merely another sincere but quite ordinary Methodist preacher. His first ministry labors were not distinguished by any uncommon results; therefore his friends and family did not entertain any lofty

hopes for his future ministry. However, Mr. Caughey had already begun to embrace his own desperate need for a genuine upper room experience. He resolved to fully yield and entrust his ministry to the power and influence of the Holy Spirit. Burdened and burning with conviction, James Caughey vowed to God to always submit to the following points;

"(1) The absolute necessity of the immediate influence of the Holy Ghost to impart power, efficacy, and success to a preached Gospel.

(2) The absolute necessity of praying more frequently, more fervently, more perseveringly, and more believingly for the aid of the Holy Spirit in my ministry.

(3) That my labors will be powerless, and comfortless, and valueless, without this aid; a cloud without water, a tree without fruit, dead and rootless; a sound uncertain, ununctionless and meaningless; such will be the character of my ministry. It is the Spirit of God alone which imparts significance and power to the Word preached, without which, as one has expressed it, all the threatenings of the Bible will be no more than thunder to the deaf or lightning to the blind. A seal requires weight, a hand upon it in order to make an impression. The soul of the penitent sinner is the wax; Gospel truth is the seal, but without the Almighty hand of the Holy Ghost, that seal is powerless . . .

(4) No man has ever been significantly useful in winning souls to Christ without the help of the Spirit. With it the humblest talent may astonish earth and hell, by gathering into the path of life thousands for the skies, while without the Spirit, the finest and most splendid talents remain comparatively useless . . ."

From this time Mr. Caughey's labors were more fruitful, but not so as to distinguish him above many other Methodist preachers of the day. He pastored and occasionally evangelized in the Northeastern United States until 1840. Caughey was then impressed of the Lord to leave his church and go preach in Britain. Almost immediately he began to minister with a new anointing and power. He obtained permission from the Methodist Conference to visit Europe, and quickly set out to bring reformation and revival to the heartland of Wesleyan Methodism. In July 1841, James Caughey arrived in Liverpool England and began an extensive tour of Britain that lasted until 1847. For nearly seven years Caughey was the ordained means of sparking revival in one industrial city after another all across Britain. Throughout this continuous season of revival, Caughey preached on an average of six to ten times a week, resulting in 22,000 souls converted and thousands more refreshed and empowered by the Holy Spirit. Mr. Caughey's revival ministry repeatedly emptied the public drinking houses and miraculously transformed entire communities. Most of his converts were young people, between the ages of sixteen and thirty years old. One of those especially impacted by Caughey's preaching was a tall and gangly youth named William Booth. Mr. Caughey's ministry gave the young Booth hope and courage to step out in faith and start a street preaching ministry in the forgotten city slums of England. This ministry quickly grew and was later officially established in 1878 under the name, "The Salvation Army".

Mr. Caughey's ministry consistently left an intense impact on all those who attended his meetings. Often his services were filled with the sounds of hundreds of hungry souls simultaneously sobbing and crying out for more of Jesus. In the autumn of 1843 in Hull England, Mr. Caughey recalled the following miraculous events: "At this moment an influence, evidently from Heaven, came upon the people suddenly; it seemed like some mighty bursting of a storm of wind upon some extensive forest. The entire congregation was in motion; some preparing to flee from the place, and others in the act of prostrating themselves before the Lord God of hosts. Cries for mercy, and piercing supplications for purity of heart were heard from all parts

of the agitated mass -in the galleries, as well as throughout the body of the chapel; While purified souls were exulting in the loftiest strains of adoration. The scene was, beyond description, grand and sublimely awful. It was God's own house, and heaven's gate. Poor sinners were amazed, and fled; but some of them fell down, some distance from the chapel, in terror and agony. Many however remained, repeating the publican's plea, 'God be merciful to me a sinner!' My soul, full of holy awe, trembled before the majesty of God. Like Elijah, who covered his face in his mantle when the Lord passed by, I was glad to have a place of concealment in the bottom of the pulpit. The superintendent minister, the Rev. Thomas Martin, who was with me in the pulpit at the time, was so overpowered, that he could do nothing but weep and adore. Thus it continued for about twenty-five minutes, when the Lord stayed His hand, and there was a sudden and heavenly calm, full of sunshine and glory. The number converted and sanctified on that night was great. It appears the influence was almost as powerful outside the chapel as within. An unconverted man, who was standing outside at the time, waiting to accompany his wife home, said, when she came out, 'I don't know what has been going on in the chapel, or how you have felt, but there was a very strange feeling came over me while I was standing at the door.' A few such shocks of almighty power would turn the kingdom of the devil in any place or city upside down, and go far to convert the entire population."

On occasions the manifestations accompanying Mr. Caughey's ministry went far beyond the accepted norms usually associated with modern, English Methodism. As we have already noted, extended seasons of intense weeping and piercing cries were quite common in Caughey's meetings. However, there were also some occasional instances of a more drastic nature. In Ireland there were manifestations of exuberant jumping and rejoicing accompanied by others being violently overcome with uncontrollable shaking and trembling. As a result, it was not uncommon for Mr. Caughey to be accused of promoting emotional fanaticism by those who were resisting his reforms among the Wesleyan Methodists. The following comments from Mr. Caughey's book "Revival Miscellanies" are indicative of how he responded to his critics. He writes, "I understand the design of such names as 'fanatics, enthusiasts, madmen, etc.' These names are fastened upon some of the zealous servants of God for the same purpose that the skins of wild beasts were put upon the primitive Christians by their persecutors, that they might more readily be torn in pieces by the hungry lions in the arena of the amphitheater. Yet they were Christians still, notwithstanding these deforming skins, and so are we, though some cover us from head to foot with the hideous imputations of fanaticism."

Those who were closest to the revivalist were often asked how Mr. Caughey managed to consistently flow in the power of the Holy Spirit. The answer was almost always the same. -Knee work! Knee work! Knee work! This was his secret! James Caughey was a man committed to faith-filled, travailing prayer. "He spent many hours of each day on his knees, with his Bible spread open before him, asking wisdom from on high, and beseeching a blessing from God on the preaching of His Word. This was his almost constant employment between breakfast and dinner." Caughey's anointed ministry was merely the outward fruit of a lifestyle of constant praying in the Holy Ghost.

Mr. Caughey's lengthy revival ministry in Britain had brought about an unexpected refreshing among the common people of the Wesleyan Methodist Church. As a result, his ministry naturally empowered the growing, Methodist reform movement. These Methodist reformers sought to encourage spiritual renewal and ministry-participation among the common English people. They understood that a lasting revival would prepare and empower the common man to take his rightful place in the Church. Thus, they strongly supported James Caughey, as he challenged the Wesleyan people to return to the apostolic roots of John Wesley's Methodism. Eventually, Mr. Caughey was stubbornly opposed and censored by England's

Methodist leadership. Finally, in 1847 Caughey reluctantly consented to close his revival meetings in England and quietly return to America.

Revivals are seasons of intense and rapid spiritual growth, and such growth always involves change. Growing children demand new and larger garments, just as growing trees need room for their expanding roots. The sincere seekers of lasting revival must be willing to change and yield to the Spirit's control. The wind, water, and fire of the Holy Ghost are ever moving elements that require plenty of room to breathe. We must beware of quenching and smothering the influence of the Holy Spirit by our predetermined preferences and stiff religious traditions. True revival will not come through our fleshly might or organizational power, but ONLY by God's Spirit! Have we given the Holy Spirit permission to change US?

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