

What Is the Spirit Doing

by Dennis Kinlaw

Dennis Kinlaw explores the historical and contemporary work of the Holy Spirit in the church, emphasizing the need for renewal and evangelism.

Duration: 51:38

Scripture: Jeremiah 1:5-10, Jeremiah 7:4-7, Jeremiah 7:12-14, Jeremiah 7:34, Jeremiah 18:1-10

Topics: "Spirit Of God"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker reflects on their life experiences and the perspective they have gained over the years. They emphasize the importance of memory as a valuable treasure and a source of wisdom. The speaker recalls a time when they were part of a Christian group that had open and honest discussions, with a strong sense of God's presence. They also mention meeting Bob Pierce, the founder of World Vision, during this time. The sermon concludes with a reminder that every day is a transition and that we should be open to what the Holy Spirit is doing globally, as demonstrated by Billy Graham's impactful ministry in Korea. The speaker references the book of Jeremiah to support the idea that God appoints individuals for specific missions, which may involve tearing down and building up.

Transcript

I want to express my appreciation for the privilege of having you all on Asbury's campus. You're not here because of Asbury putting the conference together, but since Asbury is here and the people who put it together are in this area, we get the privilege of having you here on our campus, so we want to welcome you for that. I've looked forward to this, and I must say that I look forward to it from a selfish point of view, because I notice that in the kind of pressures that I live with, I suspect your world's very different, and everything's tranquil and peaceful, and you're able to keep on top of everything in your world.

My world's not exactly that way, and so, like you, I need, let me put my joking aside, I need a touch from God and a renewal in my own heart and life, and so I come with that as part of my approach to this. I want to apologize for not being able to be at supper with you. It's interesting, I've always been able to work my schedule with some projection as to what I could do, but I've never learned to put into the schedule the unexpected and the emergencies, and this weekend we've had three of them, and so it's sort of thrown the schedule out of kilter.

I'm sorry about my throat. I've been fighting an infection there for a while, but maybe you'll forget about it as we move along. I'm sure you are sympathetic on that score.

I asked myself why it was that I was the one that got this opening assignment, this particular one, and I really decided I didn't have to think long before knowing what the answer was. I think the answer is because of my age. I suspect I'm about the oldest one here, and one of the things that you wanted was some perspective that could come from what we talk about as the wisdom of the ages or the wisdom of the years.

There's no question but that I am in a position where I can look back. It came to me one day that I have lived in every quarter of the 20th century. I was born in the first quarter, lived through the second one, lived through the third one, and I'm pretty well through the fourth one now like you are.

And it is amazing the perspective that you get when you have those years behind you. Memory is a priceless treasure. It is a wealth, and it's data in the bank from which you draw your material to draw your conclusions as to life.

And so it's in the light of that that I suspect they turn to me for this. When we speak about or when we think about the question of what is the spirit doing in our day, I suspect that I am a bit like you, that my tendency is to think in terms of spiritual renewal, revival within the church, or to think of evangelism, think of soul winning, bringing people to Christ who have never known Him before, or else we think of church planting or church growth, the extension of the body of Christ as it expresses itself in the worshiping unit. But if you will stop to look around at your day and mine, 1988, as we come toward the close of the 20th century in the United States, it seems to me that renewal, revival, evangelism, soul winning, church planting, church growth are not really the top items in the evening news or the top items in the daily newspaper.

That there has been, from that point of view, an interesting change that has taken place over the course of my own lifetime. I think back to when I began my ministry and before I began my ministry. I was born in 1922, so when the depression hit, you know about what age I was, but I was thoroughly conscious of a lot of what was taking place in the 30s and then in the 40s.

And I remember that when I was growing up, to be a Methodist was a mark of distinction in your society. It put you right in the middle of society as a person who had a good association with a highly respected organization, and the Methodist Church in that day, whichever branch it was, was an organization that had position and influence and respect. The most influential religious organization in the country was the old Federal Council of Churches of Christ, and then later became the National Council of Churches of Christ.

And when, if one wanted air time in those days, it was normally through that that one was able to breach the walls of CBS, ABC, NBC, and so forth. Evangelism was not the most favored subject in the church in those days, but it was very much alive. All I have to do is think back to my childhood and remember the stories of Billy Sunday.

Now, you may not have any of that in your feeling and in your emotional patterns, but my father was in 1933 willing to drive 500 miles to hear Billy Sunday preach. But he was not alone. There were thousands of people like him.

And Billy Sunday sort of symbolized the aspiration of many people in that day. In my day, we had in our little county seat town in North Carolina, population of 5,000, we would have citywide revival meetings in which the Methodists and the Baptists and the Presbyterians and the Episcopalians and all the churches in town would come together, unite, and bring in someone to speak. I remember when I was seven years of age, we had a Presbyterian evangelist, and the services were held in a tobacco warehouse.

You can get a lot of people in a tobacco warehouse, and we had a lot of people in those services. And the man who was the Presbyterian evangelist visited in our home. I was, I don't know, seven years of age perhaps, maybe less than that, because I remember as he walked out of our home, he picked me up and prayed for me.

I think that is the first memory that I have of the Spirit of God moving deeply on my own spirit. I had the feeling that I had confronted a man of God, and that in confronting him, I had confronted the Spirit of God. Now in these days, you wouldn't get in my hometown the Presbyterians, the Episcopalians, the Baptists, and the Methodists and the rest of the group in that kind of crusade, but you had that in those days.

Every church practically had its own revival meetings, and I remember in those days they ran for two weeks. That was not unusual, and sometimes would run longer than that. And so a whole body of believers would devote themselves for an extended period of time to seeking God and opening themselves to the ministry of the Spirit to their own heart.

The end result was that there was a great need for evangelists, and so there were many conference evangelists in the United Methodist Church, or in the Methodist Church South or Church North, whichever you might belong to, or Methodist Protestant Church, or if you were a Baptist, whichever branch of the Baptist, or if you were a Presbyterian, as I mentioned, the evangelist in the citywide campaign in my hometown was a Presbyterian. Every church had something like that, and so there was a market. There was a market for these people, and so the Methodist Church was typical in that we had many conference evangelists.

When I came to Asbury College as a freshman in 1939, I think there were plus or minus one or two, 20 evangelists in the city of Wilmore, or the village of Wilmore, excuse me, that lived here and moved out across the United States on an average, I suspect, of 42 to 44 weeks a year, traveling the country preaching the gospel. Now that had great benefits for Asbury College, because if one of those evangelists could get a kid converted, he got one star on his crown. But if he could get him converted and get him to come to Asbury College, or get her converted and get her to come to Asbury College, he knew he got three stars in his crown.

And so we had these unpaid recruiters that covered the countryside, and we are still feeling the impact of that by the national student body that we get. This year our students come from 44 states. That does not come from public advertising, but it is a carryover from those days when out of Wilmore these evangelical spokesmen covered the United States.

I remember the days of tent meetings in every small southern town and some northern towns, because I remember being in a tent meeting in a northern town, and I remember they kept me in a hotel, and we had a lot of company in the room, not the two-legged kind, but the other kind in that hotel. But there were tent meetings in those days, and there were evangelists who just traveled the United States, people like a guy by the name of Mordecai F. Hamm, who happened to be preaching one night, and in his crowd was a young fellow named Cliff and another young fellow named Billy, and out of that came the Billy Graham Association, from an itinerant evangelist preaching in a tent meeting in a southern town. The countryside was dotted fairly well with independent camp meetings, too, that reached a remarkable spread of people, and along with it were Bible conferences.

And in those days, the preachers in those camp meetings and Bible conferences were old-line denominational preachers. They were members of Methodist conferences, or they were ordained

Presbyterian clergymen, or they were ordained Baptist clergymen or clergymen from the old-line mainline denominations. That is a radically different picture that we get today when we look at the typical independent camp meeting in this country.

You will find, or even the Bible conferences, the representation is very different. Those were the days of figures like E. Stanley Jones. And I can remember the first time I heard E. Stanley Jones, and I can remember traveling a great distance to hear him because he was not only a missionary, but he was an evangelist, and I remember he identified himself as an evangelist.

One of the things he said, it isn't easy to be a Christian. It's even more difficult to be a missionary than to be a Christian, but to be an evangelist than a Christian is just about impossible. And he always got a good rise out of his crowd with that.

But those were the days of Walter Judd. And I remember Walter Judd traveling this country preaching. He had spent his life as a medical missionary in China, but as a student, he reached thousands of students in the United States, speaking on secular university campuses as well as Christian institutions.

I can remember the 40s and the 50s and the explosion of evangelical life in this country as I look back now. At the time, I don't know that I realized how great an impact was being made by the Spirit of God. But I found myself in a pastorate and looking for some inspiration, and a friend of mine said to me, a student with whom I had gone to school here at Asbury, he said, Dennis, you ought to go to a Youth for Christ convention in Winona Lake, Indiana.

And so I got a carload of my teenagers and finished my church, my preaching on Sunday. And after church on Sunday night, we headed for a thousand miles to Winona Lake, Indiana. And I listened to people like Jack Shuler, Robert Cook, Bob Pierce, Jack Wurtzen, and Billy Graham, and you can keep on going, Torrey Johnson.

It was an amazing bunch of young men. And I heard them in the early days of their ministry. They came from all over the country and they came from all over the world.

I remember the thing that impressed me most. My friend who said to me that I should go, who sat next to me for years in chapel here at Asbury, he said to me, Dennis, what you want to go to above all, miss anything else but don't miss the 6 o'clock morning prayer meetings, because there's where the action is. And so I went at 6 o'clock and the place was jammed.

And the key leaders in it were the key leaders in the evening sessions, were the key leaders in the morning prayer meetings. You know, I've noticed oftentimes that those of us that are the leaders let other people do the praying. But in that organization, the leaders were the ones who were at 7:30 at night were the ones who were the leaders at 6 o'clock in the morning.

Very moving times. It was not unusual for those 6 o'clock morning meetings to be confessional times. And I remember Bob Cook, who later became president of King's College, saying to this group of Youth for Christ leaders across the United States, he said, if your rally is failing, the failure isn't in the rally, it's in your heart.

Now let's deal with it. I've never been among Christian workers who dealt with each other that straightforwardly and that openly. It was amazing the sense of the presence of God in those early meetings.

But after one of those morning prayer meetings, Ernie turned to me and said, I want you to meet a friend of mine. So he introduced me to Bob Pierce, who, and that was before he had founded World Vision. And you know World Vision came out of that.

I think back now to the incredible number of organizations, movements, institutions that came out of that movement of the Spirit of God with relatively limited number of young men who had committed themselves to God and to evangelism. But he said, I want you to meet Bob Pierce. He's a friend of mine.

So he introduced me to Bob Pierce, and Bob Pierce looked over to me and said, Kinloch, where are you? I said, well, I'm pastor of four country churches in North Carolina. Great, so glad to meet you. Let's pray.

I didn't know many people who thought like that, but he threw one arm around Ernie's shoulder and another arm around mine and sort of cracked our heads together. And this was his prayer. Dear Lord, thank you for the chance to meet Dennis.

Don't let him bury himself in a hole somewhere where he won't count. Get him out on the firing line for you. Thank you.

Amen. Good to meet you, Dennis. He was gone.

Next time I met him was on an airplane traveling across Korea where he was responsible for feeding about 18,000 orphans a day, and he was dedicating that day a new wing of a Presbyterian mission hospital for infants. He produced Leper Colonies. It was an incredible story, but it came out of the passion of his heart that I sensed a little bit that morning in that 6 o'clock prayer meeting.

But those were the days also of some other things, like the NAE was founded and Christians in this country that weren't part of the old line denominations began to find each other and get a common voice. Those were the days when Fuller Seminary was founded, which started a new day in theological education in the United States. In those days, Asbury Theological Seminary had 70 students and was about 17 years old.

Christianity Today came out of that. In those days, there were the radio evangelists like Charles E. Fuller, who became the father of Fuller Theological Seminary. Walter Meyer, the Lutheran Hour.

I think it may be that the greatest evangelist I ever heard was Walter Meyer, and he was carried all across the United States in the Lutheran Hour. And I think of some of the kind of representative voices for Christendom on the air in our day in contrast to him. I'm not interested in lauding scholarship, but he was a scholar in Semitics from Harvard University, and he could read Akkadian, he could read Babylonian, he could read Ugaritic, you name it.

He knew that stuff. But when he preached, you never heard any of that. I will never forget the movement of the Spirit on my heart when I would hear him talk about our blessed Redeemer.

He was a magnificent evangelist, and those were days when the word was going out, and he was heard around the world through, if you remember, our military system with our servicemen overseas. Out of that came the great missionary conferences, because, you see, when I was growing up, I never heard of a missionary conference. And then in the 40s, we began to hear about Park Street Church, and I heard about a Presbyterian church that's connected to New York, and then there was People's Church in Toronto, Canada.

And the model that has swept across the United States in evangelical circles and in many old-line denominational churches too, congregations of the missionary conference, came out of that group of people and that movement of the Spirit in those days. And the ends of the earth have been touched by the resources, both dollar-wise and people-wise, that came out of those. Those were the days of when, for the first time in my experience, evangelicals were able to get into major graduate schools as evangelicals and hold their own.

And the end result was, I remember when I got applied to Brandeis University and looked Cyrus Gordon in the face and said to him, pray tell me, do you understand what an evangelical is? You need to know who I am. And he looked back at me with some irritation and said, of course. He was an agnostic, conservative Jew.

He said, of course I know what an evangelical Protestant is. It's only you, the Jesuits, and the Orthodox Jews that have the kind of motivation that I want to produce the kind of scholarship I want. Welcome.

It was an interesting day. I had never found that in the circles in which I moved. But you can see things like the scholarship that has come out of the New International Commentary on the New Testament, New International Commentary on the Old Testament, that came from what was happening in those days.

Along with it came the charismatic movement. And you'll have to go a long ways to tell the impact of that that began in those days. Touched the old line denominations and for the first time broke out of the traditional Pentecostal circles into the old line denominations.

Broke even into the Roman Catholic Church. And you know, when I was in my twenties, it was not unusual for evangelical Protestants in this country to identify the Vatican with the Antichrist. Now you think how far we've gone from that.

And the kind of thing that I have known of fellowship across Protestant Roman Catholic lines was inconceivable in those days. And I wonder if the major reason is not the ecumenical movement that worked toward that end, but it was the movement of the spirit, when a born-again evangelical and a born-again Roman Catholic sat down and talked to each other in the same spirit and each of them bore witness to their brotherhood in Christ. That laid the groundwork for something that we are seeing in our own day and that some of us have had the privilege of experiencing in personal friendships.

I look back though to that group of young men that I saw in Youth for Christ and I've thought many times about the impact that came out of that. Some of it seemed sort of stupid. I remember Billy Graham was very upset when he had to ride behind a talking horse to draw a crowd in a parade in the town he was speaking in.

And he did not like second billing to a talking horse. But that's what he got and that's the way he got his crowd. So there were some things that may have been sort of stupid in it.

But there were some other things that were very daring. I remember seeing Billy Graham and, who was it with him, Torrey Johnson. They went to see the President of the United States at that time, Harry Truman, who was not particularly known for his piety.

And when they came out, I remember the interview that the press had with these two young evangelical Christian upstarts that simply wanted the witness of Christ at the center of the American stage. And there was something refreshing about it and something challenging about the naivete of those guys and the

naivete with which they operate, but the sincerity and the genuineness. And I think the ministry of Billy Graham out in the years since has borne witness to that.

But they were young. They, interestingly enough, didn't live close together. I want to hold you with that for a minute.

They were not a group of people who saw each other every day. But in spite of the fact they were a group of people who didn't see each other every day, they fed each other's fires. And there was no way to explain the one in New York except by his association with the one in Los Angeles.

There was no way to explain one except by his association with the others. And in that, I think I've seen in our century something of what those early Methodists had, that they may not have seen each other every day, but they were feeding each other's fires day by day by day by day by day. And it was that mutual inspiration, mutual challenge, mutual encouragement, knowing the other one was there and knowing sooner or later he had to face the other one.

You see, it's easy for me to break my connections with my brothers and then I can get lax in my spiritual life. But if I know I've got to meet somebody to whom I've got to be accountable in the near future, I find that there's a check within that tendency for me to stray. And these fellows had that.

They held each other accountable. So they fed each other's fires. And they built their ministry on prayer and on a spiritual, on a passion for souls.

There's no question, that was a prime moving thing, their passion for God and their passion for souls. And they dared to challenge the culture of their own day. And they had vision, like Bob Pierce who said, Don't let Dennis bury himself in a hole somewhere.

And they had the daring to get themselves out and face the world and challenge it. Now, if you know anything of that story and have followed the careers of those fellows in the years since, it's an amazing witness to the power of God, an amazing witness in the 20th century. But now when you come to our day, I look around for things like that and it may be that I look in the wrong places, but I find that our day is remarkably different.

We see the major old line denominations instead of being at the center of the stage and held in high respect and regard, we find that they're generally in decline across the board. In fact, I sat the other day with Leonard Griffith. You know Leonard Griffith? Pastored two of the larger churches of the United Church of Christ in the United Church of Canada in Toronto and was a successor to Leslie Weatherhead in London.

And he's spoken all across the United States as well as Canada and Britain. He said, Dennis, you know, when I meet a top church executive today, my tendency is to think of a brewery executive. I said, Come on, Leonard.

Bottom line, Dennis, that's all that counts. I thought, you know, it's a pity to find a person who has been one of the better spokesmen for the gospel of Christ in our generation with that kind of cynicism about the leadership in the church. But he simply reflects the mood of a world of others in our day and particularly those that are not within the church.

I noticed an article in Christian Century, oh, maybe five weeks ago on church-related colleges. It was written by, I gathered, a member of the Board of Trustees of a Presbyterian-related college. And his question was, Can a church-related college be Christian? And it was interesting that it was a wistfully written article.

It was a nostalgically written article. And the conclusion was basically sort of, I wish it could be true. Some way or other, it ought to be able to be true.

Most places it isn't, but maybe if some of us had turned our attention to it, it would be possible. Now, you look at the great mass of church-related colleges that have dotted the landscape of the United States and you realize what has taken place in terms of these across our country. And there's just a general decline of respect for the church in our day.

I would like to ask anybody who's anywhere near my age if he's experienced what I've experienced. When I was 25, I didn't hesitate to look at someone when he said, What is your profession? With joy, I looked at him and said, I'm a minister of the gospel of Christ. You sit on a lot of planes today, and the person next to you says, And what's your business? It really isn't too hard to say, I'm a clergyman, but I dare you to say, I'm an evangelist.

It's amazing how wide one of those airplane seats can get. And it simply reflects a change in the atmosphere and in the mood and in the value system of our culture. When you turn away from the old line denominations in our day to the more evangelical movements within the denominations and the more evangelical churches, I don't think you find an extremely optimistic scene either.

Most of the so-called evangelical churches, their growth rate is not keeping up with the population growth rate. When we find groups like the lay witness mission, layman's retreats and so forth that are vitally evangelistic across the churches today, they're generally pretty spotty and pretty far apart. Clyde, how many evangelists does Free Methodist Church have now? Twenty? How many would the Wesleyan Church have? About the same.

I can remember when Wilmore had twenty. And I sat down and ran through the National Association of United Methodist Evangelists and was amazed at how few there were who were conference appointed. And I also was dismayed at how few of them I would want to preach in my own church.

Now, you'll forgive me. I'm not trying to be critical. But the most sacred thing any pastor has is his own pulpit.

And any man who's responsible for a pulpit, who will let just anybody stand in that pulpit, has something lacking in his sense of accountability. But these are not great days from some point of view. Thank God for Billy Graham.

He still stands clean and tall, but he's 70 years of age. And I don't see a successor on the scene. I don't see anybody coming.

We thought maybe Leighton Ford would make it, but he's disappeared into the woodwork, it seems to me. Lausanne, as I understand it, is getting ready to phase itself out, basically out of business as far as the United States is concerned. And as I look around, I have a bit of a feeling that even the charismatic movement, with all of its strengths, a bit of the glamour is gone from it these days.

So, we have a different picture today. I was thinking when I was thinking about this, there is a sense in which you could almost call the life of the church in my lifetime one of decline, steady and inexorable. Our culture is different from what it was when I came along.

The other day I ran across a book. You may have seen it. I don't even know how old it is.

I don't think it's too old. But by a visiting professor of philosophy at Yale University, his name is Thomas Molnar, Hungarian. The name of the book is The Pagan Temptation.

His thesis is that there are three periods in human history when the Church of Christ has confronted paganism clearly and inexorably, so inescapably. The first period was in the first two centuries of the church. And when the church in its youth, in its beginning, confronted paganism, it did it so effectively that by the third and fourth century, the pagan world was using Christian terminology and thinking Christian concepts.

He said the second period of great confrontation was in the 14th century and the 15th century. But then it was not the church against the pagan world. It was some within the church against paganism within the church.

And the world, the church was the world of that day. And he said since the 14th and 15th centuries, we have had a church divided in which some of the church was pagan and some of the church was Christian. No indication that Thomas Molnar would represent the position of anybody in this group.

I think he is a Hungarian Roman Catholic. But he said the third period is the current one. And the scene today is not the paganism within the church against the Christian remnant within the church, but he said it's the remnant within the church against the paganism within the church and against the pagan world.

So now you have a pagan world about us in our Western culture and you have a substantial chunk of that world within the church and then you have a defensive group within the church representing the historic tradition of the Christian faith. And we see the effects in our own culture and our own society. Now times have changed.

And it seems to me that we may be at, I started to use the word transition. I remember the first year that I was president of Asbury College, David Seamans and I found ourselves as the speakers at student leaders retreat. I was brand spanking new, knew nothing about undergraduate liberal arts education and found myself, we had had a period of rocky transition here, facing a group of students and I had to answer their questions and they went to work on them.

So I pled, wait a minute, this is a transition time, be a little patient. I'll never forget David looking up and saying, that's what Eve said in the garden too. So I backed away from saying that, but I think there is a sense in which every day is a transition, is a transition, every period is.

But this one certainly is. But one of the beautiful things is that the United States isn't all the world. And if we're going to look at what the spirit is doing, there's some other things we need to look at.

I remember that Billy Graham was in Korea and spoke to two and a half million people in the square in the center of Seoul, Korea. And in the course of that trip he said, you know it's been an interesting journey of Christendom from Jerusalem to Rome to Germany to Britain to the United States and it keeps moving west. And maybe the future of Christendom is in the Orient and Korea is certainly a part of it.

You read the story of Korea and it still is an amazing story, the growth of the church. It is significant enough that the Koreans who come to this country do something to us. So my understanding is that the fastest growing group within United Methodism is the American Koreans, the Koreans who came to this country.

But it is, there is a vital force within the Korean church. I had the privilege of being in Korea in 1959 and I've been in Korea a couple of times since and spent two months out there in ministry. What fascinated me was I was awakened every morning at 4.30 by the carillon of the largest Presbyterian church in the world playing Hail to the Brightness of Zion's glad morning.

And it was an invitation to the Korean Presbyterians to come to prayer meeting at 5 o'clock in the morning and they went. It was, but that movement is still going. I have had a profound interest in China through my lifetime.

Elsie and I wanted to go to China as missionaries back in the 40s. We took a year of Mandarin Chinese and we found the door closed to us and then now finished off missionaries. And so all through the years I carried a concern in my heart for China and a profound interest in it.

And we were convinced that Christianity was pretty well wiped out in the brutality of the Mao revolution and the Mao culture. But I was in Canton five years ago. They just opened four churches in Canton.

I sat in a Wednesday night prayer meeting and there must have been 300 people there. And 60 percent of them must have been under 30 years of age. Born under Mao's communist, brutal communist government, I said to the pastor who had been converted through a Methodist, British Methodist missionary in his youth in China, I said, how did these young people become Christians under Mao? And he looked back at me sort of smiling to himself and quietly said they're children of believers or else they're friends of children of believers or else they're friends of friends of children of believers.

He could shut the churches down but he couldn't stop the homes. And so we may have seen the greatest explosion of the Christian church in human history in the 20th century, in our own century, in China. Now, we need to learn some things from that.

I think there are some things to be learned from that. But God is at work. We have, there are two couples of us Methodist preachers that have the same grandchildren.

And Jack Key is about the same age as I am. He retired last June and he and his wife are in China today teaching English. And that's what he wanted to do is his final venture for Christ.

And China is wide open to evangelicals. They're wide open to born again believing Christians because they say their lifestyle is better than their non-converted counterparts that come from the West. They create fewer problems and they have a greater interest in the people they're teaching.

It's wonderful when the world gives your testimony for you, isn't it? But the Chinese government now is beginning to do some of that. That's an act of God and something we ought to find our fires fed by. You take Africa.

Is it true? Somebody told me somewhere I read there are about 20,000 conversions a week. By the year 2000, they expect sub-Saharan to be 50% Christian with 350 million Christians in it. It's amazing, isn't it? God has not gone out of business.

And you may not be seeing everything you want to see next door or right under your nose, but God is at work in our world. I talked with J.T. Siemens and he tells me there are 4,200 Indian missionaries that are being sent out by local Indian congregations that are Indians funded by Indians. I have an association with the OMS, formerly Oriental Missionary Society.

They've had a work in India since the Second World War. I think they have two missionaries there now. But it's interesting, the greatest explosion of the OMS's work in India and its history is now.

Missionaries are not there, but God is at work. J.T. tells me that there are 20,000 Asian and African missionaries right now in the world funded by Asians and Africans. So it may be that the greatest story in our part of the 20th century is the picking up of the missionary mission and passion by Third World churches.

And that speaks of what is tomorrow. It may well be that some of these may turn their attention in our direction. In fact, some of them are, but it's largely with ethnic groups in this country now.

But it could be that the day will come when it will go beyond that. Latin America, all you have to do is think of the influence of the Pentecostal movement, the charismatic movement. It's amazing what God has done there.

Now, as I said, we tend to think, when we think of the work of the Spirit in terms of revival, renewal, in terms of evangelism, soul winning, in terms of church planting, church growth, we tend to think of positive things. But before I close, I want to suggest that it may well be that we need to look at something else. Because I've become convinced that the Spirit does negative work as well as positive work.

And if it's the Spirit that does it, then we ought to accept it as such and give thanks for it and adjust to it. My scripture passage to support that would be the first chapter of Jeremiah, where Jeremiah was given his call. God said he had called him from his youth, from the womb.

He belonged to him. He had a mission for him. And he said, I appoint you in verse 10 of chapter 1, I appoint you over nations and kingdoms to uproot and to tear down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant.

And you've got to go through four negatives before you get to one positive. Do you notice them? He said, I have appointed you to uproot and to tear down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant. If you remember the passage in Jeremiah 18, the great potter story, where Jeremiah goes down to the potter's house and the potter is working with his vessel and he finds it marred.

But instead of throwing it away, as Jeremiah expected him to do, he took it and he made it again another vessel. And then Jeremiah said, doesn't the potter have a right to do with the clay what he wants to do? And then he said, if Yahweh decides to uproot and tear down, then that's all right. And if Yahweh decides to destroy and overthrow, that's all right.

And if Yahweh decides to build and plant, that's all right. Then in the passage it says, if the people he wants to build and plant do not do his will and live unrighteously, then he, Yahweh, will uproot and tear down, will destroy and overthrow. But if those that are scheduled for uprooting and tearing down and destroying and overthrowing repent and do and turn to God in faith and in obedience, then the same God that scheduled them for negatives will then build and plant them.

Now, if God is the one who builds and plants, we say, Jeremiah would say, yes, and he has a hand in the uprooting, the tearing down, the destroying, and the overthrowing. So it may be that as we lament some things in Western culture, we may need to see that what we're seeing is a work of God in which he is shaking the foundations, in which he is exposing what is false, and in which he is shattering false hopes and laying them bare for what they are in order that people might escape, as Jeremiah would say, the lie, and in order that they might find the Lord God and find truth. I challenge you to read again the chapter 7, the great temple sermon, where he says, this people has put their faith in the house of God instead of the God of the house.

And since they've put their faith in the house of God instead of the God of the house, then the house of God has become a hindrance to the God of the house. And so what happened at Shiloh will happen to Jerusalem. And so he says, the temple, the temple of the Lord, the temple of Yahweh, don't let me hear it again.

It's interesting that Jesus picks up one of his lines for the cleansing of the temple from that temple sermon of Jeremiah, which means, I think, that when Jesus cleansed the temple, he had Jeremiah's scene and Jeremiah's message in mind. And so he said, strip this building down, and the loss will not be so great because I will raise it up. But when I raise it up, it won't be a building of stone and mortar.

It will be a building of people whose lives have been touched by the Spirit, the body of Christ, the living body of Christ. And so out of tragedy, what appeared to be tragedy and disaster, came something fresh. I said to a friend of mine who is a better scholar than I, I said, did the destruction of the temple make it possible? Was it a help in 70 A.D.? Was it a help to the spread of the gospel of Christ? I'm not a scholar in this.

But he said, well, that's what Augustine thought. And I remembered Augustine's treatment of the city of God. As he looked back to what had happened, as I remember, in Jerusalem and then in connection with the fall of Rome, he said, this should lift your eyes to something more permanent.

I noticed that when the Vatican began to act as if it had a corner on the gospel and a corner on God, that the church was shattered. The unity of the church was shattered. And out of the shattering of the unity of the church, tragic as that was, the personal faith of probably every person in this group here tonight came.

So out of the negatives that God permits, if you'd rather use that language than Jeremiah's language, out of the negatives that God permits may come what our hearts are yearning for. And it may be the negatives that are necessary to make them possible. A friend of mine was telling me the other day about a conversation between Sandra Van Ocker and Cal Thomas.

Cal Thomas, you may know, is an evangelical Christian, probably a little bit to the right of some of us. But he is known in the press as from that perspective, as coming from that perspective, which certainly is not the perspective of Sandra Van Ocker, if you know Sandra Van Ocker. Sandra Van Ocker said, Cal, it was when the stories were out all the time about Jim Baker and Jimmy Swaggart and all of that.

And he said, Cal, how do you feel about these stories? Cal said, I was humiliated. I was embarrassed. I was very self-conscious and very defensive.

He said, when I finished my defensive speech, he said, Sandra Van Ocker said, you know, it's almost enough to make me believe in God. And Cal said, what do you mean? Well, he said, I wondered if there

was a God, how long he'd put up with it. And apparently he's had enough, if he is.

Now, there are some things that can be said in this way that can't be said otherwise. And it may be that we need to look at these things. It may be that we as evangelicals need to look at our own, the failures within our own movement, where God has shattered some of our idols, where God has shown the futility of some of our methods, where God has shown the sterility of some of our ways.

It may be that we need to look at these, some of our failures, to see what the Spirit of God is doing in our failures, in our inabilities, our failures, to see what God wants to say to us. Should we be discouraged? I'm not at all sure that we should. I think there are a lot of positives that are taking place, some amazing things.

Will you let me use just one personal one that speaks to me that I missed for a long time? As I said, I have had an opportunity to have an association with OMS International. It's a small organization with between 300 and 400 missionaries and staff. They work in 14 countries.

One day it dawned on me they had 12 Bible institutes and graduate schools of religion in the Third World. In the last three years they have started a theological seminary in Spain and in the last year have taken the initial steps toward one in France. Wouldn't it be interesting if that flame could be turned around and carried backwards? It's been 300 years.

We have two kids in Paris, France. It's been 300 years since there was an evangelical witness of any strength in that society. It would be interesting if that could be turned around in our day.

It may well be, but God has his ways, doesn't he? I was sitting in a classroom at Princeton and the professor was Dr. Emile Cahier, a Frenchman. He never saw a Bible until he was in his twenties. Then his wife had smuggled it into the house.

When he married her, a Scottish girl, he married her on condition religion would never be discussed in the home. So when their first child came, all of her religious past began to haunt her. So she talked to a Huguenot pastor out of a Bible one day that she met and she smuggled it in the baby clothes into her home.

One day when he was in deep despair, despondency, he found it and began to read. His life was transformed. I'll never forget a series of lectures he did on the Christian pattern of life.

Three of them were on holiness, the reformed tradition of holiness. I was not sure that the reformed people knew a great deal about, at least from a Wesleyan point of view. And so he said, now gentlemen, we didn't have any ladies in the class at Princeton in those days.

He said, if you want to see the classical statement of the reformed tradition of holiness, the reformed doctrine of holiness, don't go to the reformers. You don't win but one battle at a time. And their battle was justification by faith.

So he said, they won it for us and we loved them. But then he said it took the pious and the Puritans to push that thing farther. And then it was a Wesleyan that gave us the classical statement on holiness of heart.

But he said the day came when British Methodism congealed and so God raised up another group called the Salvation Army. And he said, if you'll go get the Salvation Army doctrinal handbook, you'll get the classical statement of the reformed tradition on personal holiness. Then he said, to let you know what that means, I want to read for you the testimony.

And he read the testimony of Samuel Logan Bringle, Salvation Army commissioner. Never forgotten that. I remember his use of the word congealed.

Because you see, I was one of the congealed ones. When we congeal, God doesn't quit. And he can either uncongeal us or go on and use others.

He's not going out of business. And I'm at the stage of my life, what little time I've got left, I'd like to know where he's at work and what he's doing and what he wants to do and what he wants to do where I am. And I'd like to be in tune with it.



Audio: <https://sermonindex1.b-cdn.net/20/SID20907.mp3>

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/dennis-kinlaw/what-is-the-spirit-doing/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net