

Wouldn't it be wonderful if people around us here in Peebles were so eager to hear God's word, so curious as to what was happening here, so excited about God speaking to our hearts and so moved by the power of it that they were queuing outside the church begging to hear more. "In your dreams", I hear you say! Are these days gone for ever? Is it possible? Scotland has known Revival like this in the past so why not again? What is needed to make it happen? Is it a big evangelistic event or celebrity speaker who could draw a crowd? If only we knew what the answer was, we could bring such a day here in Peebles.

But we do know and the first thing we know is that such a reaction as Paul encountered in the city of Perga in Pamphylia, what is now Southern Turkey is the work of the Holy Spirit. It wasn't the charisma or the celebrity of the speaker although few could match Paul for power in preaching. But no one can prepare a person's heart to receive God's word, nor bring that word powerfully home to transform a life other than the Holy Spirit. We are in God's hands and it is a miracle of His Grace that he uses the most faltering of preachers to reach out and save people.

Secondly we know that many people were praying that God would use these preachers in the way that He did. When we looked at the church in Antioch we compared the words of Jesus; **"Ask and it will be given you, seek and you will find, knock and the door will be opened."** Well they did ask and here is God's answer. It didn't come quickly they had to wait but here it is.

Thirdly we know that when Paul preached in the power of the Holy Spirit he expected a response and so did those who came to hear him. When we come to church what do we think is going to happen?

Do we believe that God is going to speak to us and turn our thoughts and hearts to Him? Do we come hungry and expectant, with hearts open to the living God and ready to meet with Him because only then will we be receptive?

So we do know what we need for revival to take place; a trust in God and recognition that He is Lord, a pleading with the Holy Spirit to work in the hearts of people and in us through powerful and persistent praying and a new expectation and value placed on worship week by week. ***44On the next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord.***

This is crucial. If we come expecting little then little is what we will get. These folk left on the first Sabbath buzzing. They spent the whole week talking about it and many more came looking for the same powerful word for themselves. Do we talk about our experience on a Sunday? If we go to a film, a concert or a show, if we see a programme on TV we will certainly talk about it over coffee with friends or on the bus so why not Church?

Studies have shown that the majority of people who become Christians came to faith through a friend inviting them to come or sharing with them. Here in Perga many who heard the Apostle preach in the power of the Holy Spirit received the Lord Jesus Christ for themselves as their Saviour and Lord. As always there would be those for whom it was a thunderbolt from the blue, others would have thought long and hard over many days and some were still unsure wrestling with God. They might not be able to say accurately when

they gave their lives to Jesus it would be different for each person but when these new Christians looked back they would know whatever their story that they were truly his, converted from the paganism and the dark night of the soul in which they lived, saved from the sin and the judgement of God upon their lives, set free from its bondage and made new by the Holy Spirit of God.

God was working in their hearts to bring them to Himself. Salvation had come to them by Grace alone. All the more remarkable because all this came about after just one sermon in the synagogue and the whole city is aflame. People were talking about it in the streets. "You should have heard it, like God speaking right to my heart! You should come. This Jesus is amazing." This is how the news was spread with people "gossiping in the gospel".

It is really only in Britain or the Western World that people are embarrassed to speak about faith. You wouldn't find that in Africa or the East where it is a lively topic of conversation in every bar and coffee house. It has been much neglected here and the day is now coming, indeed in some measure it has already come when the law will forbid it and the opportunity is gone from us.

Of course whenever you get a spiritual awakening resentment and opposition will trail in its wake and here was no exception. ⁴⁵***When the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and talked abusively against what Paul was saying.*** Their jealousy may have arisen for a number of reasons. It may have been simply the numbers. They had never seen so many folk coming along to the service and they would feel it was all out of control, or at least out of their control. I wonder how we would react. Would we feel very uncomfortable if all sorts of people starting turning up to worship claiming to be born again, would we feel threatened as to our own faith?

Perhaps the problem was that what the church leaders were hearing was a much fuller and richer exposition of the Scriptures than anything they had ever preached and they felt the emptiness of their own service and it didn't fit with what they thought the message should be. For many years now we've been so careful not to offend anyone that the message has become bland and empty of real challenge; what people want to hear rather than the unpalatable truth.

No one should come from the presence of the Lord Jesus feeling unchallenged as to the way we live or the person we are. You cannot come into the presence of Holiness and not recognise your own shortcomings and sin. You cannot meet with the living God and go away unchanged. You cannot encounter the Holy Spirit and remain unmoved. If the service does none of these it is no wonder if people are just bored! The answer is not to get angry when you see God changing lives but to be part of it.

It may be that they were dismayed by all these Gentiles arriving, taking over and perhaps squeezing them out of what they saw as their own Church? It is God's church not ours and He will call who He will. We should rejoice to see anyone coming to faith, being converted, becoming a Christian so many ways of expressing the reality of giving your heart and soul into the hands of God. It is astonishing when folk are resentful or angry when people say that they've been born again as if they have no right in "our" church. We ought simply to rejoice even if their experience is not exactly the same as ours.

Indeed we need to look to ourselves and wonder whether it is not our experience that needs to be questioned; whether we really do belong to Christ in God and are not just along for the

ride! Nothing could be more important than to say, Lord Jesus unworthy as I am, I come to you and lay my life at your feet to turn my back on everything that is false in repentance and give you supreme place as my Lord and Saviour.

Their fierce reaction convinced Paul to break with synagogues altogether. It was a momentous decision. ⁴⁶***Then Paul and Barnabas answered them boldly: “We had to speak the word of God to you first. Since you reject it and do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life, we now turn to the Gentiles.***

It is the very mark of an authentic, powerful work of God in the world that it will be accompanied by hostility and opposition. You can trace that right through the prophets, right through the New Testament. Make no mistake it was a rejection. This was no polite disagreement but a deliberate anger against the Good News of Jesus. “We will not have this” That is a solemn position to take up and Paul and Barnabus would never again be invited to preach in that synagogue no matter how great the public demand. It is very sad and yet by the grace of God people were hearing and responding in the midst of it. ⁴⁸***When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honoured the word of the Lord; and all who were appointed for eternal life believed.***

Not only that but it spread until the synagogue authorities tried to stop it using what influence and power they could. ⁵⁰***But the Jews incited the God-fearing women of high standing and the leading men of the city. They stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them from their region.***

They had the backing of the law makers and rulers but sadly it was the religious folk who were so dead set against God and as Paul and Barnabus walked away from that city they were thinking of Jesus words in Luke 10:8-12: ⁰***But when you enter a town and are not welcomed, go into its streets and say, ¹¹“Even the dust of your town that sticks to our feet we wipe off against you.***

In v 51 that is just what they did as they moved on to another place. The rejection had been bitter but it was the beginning of a new church there. It would not stop just because Paul and Barnabus had been chased out. It would go on by the Grace of God as the new Christians witnessed to their faith in hostile territory. It would be that assurance and power which would cause them to on to preach the good news.

⁵²***The disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.***