

The 1953 Congo Revival

Truly revival is God's way of revealing Himself among His people and into a lost world. One revivalist said that God is one massive, continuous, pent up revival waiting to happen. In the Belgian Congo of C.T. Studd there had been revival in the past, but before the 1953 Congo revival, religious coldness stalked the land. Many people attended church because it was expected, but secret sins were practiced habitually with none the wiser, or so it was thought.

“That last Friday evening in July 1953 – I remember it as though it were yesterday! It was 7:00 pm: one hundred of us gathered for the weekly fellowship meeting in the Bible School hall in Ibambi, in the north-eastern province of what was then the Belgian Congo, later Zaire, now again the Democratic Republic of Congo. Jack Scholes, leader of the team of 50 missionaries working across the province, had stood to lead in prayer. We had sung a hymn, and Jack began to share what he had witnessed of revival in the southern part of the mission area, where he had been visiting during the previous two weeks.

Suddenly, all heard the fearful roar of an approaching hurricane. Stewards moved around the hall, taking down the wooden shutters to prevent accidents that could occur, should they be blown in.

I glanced out into the night, expecting to see dark scudding clouds, palm trees bending low to the ground, dust spirals rushing towards us – it simply wasn't there! The clear sky, upright palm trees silhouetted in the moonlight, all was still, utterly still. Yet the storm lanterns, suspended from the central beam the length of the hall, were shaking wildly! The very building seemed to rock, as though a rumbling earthquake was beginning to erupt. A noise as of a mighty rushing wind filled the place.

All over the hall, people were down on the ground, crying to God for mercy. Others were shaking violently, apparently uncontrollably. Here and there, a few were on their feet, their hands upraised, their faces radiant, praising God!

What on earth was happening? Was this the work of the Holy Spirit, visiting us in revival blessing, or was it a demonic spirit seeking to disrupt the fellowship? Was it for real, or was it a great deception?

Jack Scholes stood still, watching, praying, and then moving forward amongst us, speaking quietly to one and another of the leading elders, pastors and missionaries: ‘Just pray! Ask God to keep in control: allow the Holy Spirit freedom to act as He sees fit.’

All over the hall, a shattering conviction of sin was gripping hearts. Sin was suddenly seen as desperately sinful. There were no gradations, big or small – sin was sin, and separated one from God. People were moved to tears, and almost forced by the Spirit of God to confess – confess to petty thieving, jealousies, anger, coldness of heart, spiritual pretence. . . And then, as sin was brought out and laid at the foot of the cross, cleansed by the precious blood of the Saviour, an amazing joy flooded in! Singing started – in great waves – words being made up as they sang, each song praising God for the Blood.

‘Fura’a, Fura’a, Fura’a, Kwa damu ya Yesu!’

‘Joy, Joy, Joy, For the Blood of Jesus!’

The 7:00 pm evening meeting would always be finished by 9:00 pm – many of us were still there at 2:00 am! Some stayed all night. And all through Saturday night. By Sunday, the news had spread of the Spirit’s gracious visitation to the ‘big church’ at Ibambi, and Christians began arriving from the surrounding villages. Throughout the day, the Holy Spirit continued His wonderful work. Many were broken down under conviction of sin, then led into a new realization of cleansing and forgiveness. By afternoon, joy – joy and an extraordinary power and wonder – filled the vast crowd. The singing, the radiant faces, arms up at every mention of Jesus – what a day!”

The revival swept on through the countryside, through villages and cities, churches were filled and souls were brought into the kingdom as the mighty flow surged on and on.

The Epicenter

Lubutu, in the southern extremity of the mission field, was the place the Holy Spirit first broke out in February 1953. There had been some meetings, a workers conference going on at that time for the African evangelists when an awful solemnity started descending on the meeting. The people expressed a deep desire to 'meet with God'. That night as the Africans met alone, the Spirit suddenly descended and loud cries and wailings could be heard out of their meeting place – God it seems had desired to meet with them!

The scene in the meeting halls was of apparent chaos. Many people were overcome with violent shaking, many stood with loud cries and weeping, confessing to one unseen all their sins, others stood in rapture, their hands raised worshipping Jesus! As the meeting lasted several days, the evangelists were filled with a powerful joy to go spread the gospel and the wonders of God come down!

The Hard Rock in Opienge

The leaders in Opienge heard of the revival in Lubutu and while glad of the Spirit's move were not very happy about the strange manifestations. They feared the government would step in and shut down the mission if these were allowed to persist. But the God who is bigger than any government had different ideas.

Among the natives there grew a longing for God to intervene there as well. It all started with a native evangelist who had some words with his wife and took up a small stick and struck her on her arm. He was immediately seized with a dreadful remorse and had to be carried into another house crying out to God for mercy to wipe away his sin. The same trembling of those in Lubutu had seized him, but the leadership didn't recognize it yet.

The work in Opienge was going forward and to all intents and purposes looked good from the outside, but inwardly there was much deadness and many secret sins that God fully intended to take care of.

The next step in the revival in Opienge was when Sena, the wife of a Lubutu elder came to visit. In the Sunday service people noticed her jerking and shaking and when they

asked if she was sick, she replied that the Holy Spirit was upon her. They laughed and thought she was addled.

The next Tuesday night Pelza, the wife of the Opienge chief elder woke up other folk with her loud cries and singing. She cried out to Jesus thanks many times over and explained how a light had come to her until it burst in her heart and filled her with unutterable joy! She received a vision from the Lord where He told her, that the work in Opienge depended on the people being broken before him and letting Him do the work He wanted to do.

Thursday night the men and women worshiped apart and in the men's meeting the evangelist who had struck his wife's arm was praying a broken, earnest to the extreme prayer, with many tears and crying. He suddenly fell prostrate in a seat and wept when suddenly the power of God fell on the meeting. Men were falling, jumping, laughing, crying, confessing, singing, some shaking, some reeling around like drunk and rejoicing. The women heard the commotion and came to look in the window at the men. They immediately went back to their meeting and the Holy Spirit fell on them as well.

Bomili is Bombed

About 800 people were present in the building, having heard the God had been blessing their brothers and sisters in other areas, they wanted the full measure of what God had for them. God was ably and fully willing to share as well.

People from Opienge had come to Bomili to share their experiences in the revival and after three days of testimony the Lord graciously answered the call of hearts.

While listening to the testimonies, suddenly the Spirit of God descended on Bomili and scenes reminiscent of before broke out. Men and women crying out for mercy, deep joy breaking out, spiritual drunkenness, peace like a river that flowed.

The current of the revival continued to flow to Wamba where deep repentance fell on the people and many deep, secret sins were confessed publicly. But scenes of utter joy and abandon in the wonders of the Living God were also present and God moved like an ever flowing stream.

Other Revival Scenes

Biboko, saw the wild meeting and decided to leave. Upon walking but five steps he felt his legs suddenly stiffen and he could walk no more. A voice in his heart told him that if he left the church without getting right with God, he would be a lost soul. He stood there fighting it out, and then confessed to much painful distress from his heart and was gloriously set free. He staggered around like a drunken man, laughing and singing, full of joy.

One man, one of the workmen, had a hard time. He began to tremble and shake so bad it took four men to hold him down. He would cry out 'Woe is me, I am undone!' in sheer agony of spirit and still seemed not to get to the bottom of his sin. He tried to get one word out and seem not to be able to. At last he got it out and shouted it to the top of his lungs. . . LUST. When he cried that one word out over and over the powerful joy of the Lord seized him and he leapt up suddenly full of praise, dancing and wonderful singing.

This revival ran to and fro across the land of the Belgian Congo in 1953 to 1955. Many saints were born again in the revival and many were filled with the Spirit. Quite a few evangelists with long, powerful ministries were sent out and many pastor with strong, thriving churches were brought forth.

God bless and moved, because some people felt His call to their hearts and started seeking and praying for real revival. Not revival as they expected, but revival as God wanted to send, powerful, sin piercing, joy giving, healing, delivering and soul saving.

We pray for revival in our churches, but do we really want revival like God wants to send? Check your priorities and seek His face alone, let Him pierce you through and let revival start in your heart.

Source: The Spirit of Revival by Norman Grubb