Astonished At What Happens When Jesus Shows Up

By Byron Paulus

Luke 5:1-10 is a passage of Scripture that talks about what happens when God shows up, or in this case, what happens when Jesus shows up.

"And it came to pass, that, as the people pressed upon Him [Jesus] to hear the word of God, He stood by the lake of Gennesaret, and saw two ships standing by the lake: but the fishermen were gone out of them, and were washing their nets. And He entered into one of the ships, which was Simon's, and prayed him that he would thrust out a little from the land. And He sat down, and taught the people out of the ship.

"Now when He had left speaking, He said unto Simon, Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught. And Simon answering said unto Him, Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing: nevertheless at Thy word I will let down the net.

"And when they had this done, they enclosed a great multitude of fishes: and their net brake. And they beckoned unto their partners, which were in the other ship, that they should come and help them. And they came, and filled both the ships, so that they began to sink. When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord. For he was astonished, and all that were with him, at the draught of the fishes which they had taken: And so was also James, and John, the sons of Zebedee, which were partners with Simon.

"And Jesus said unto Simon, Fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men. And when they had brought their ships to land, they forsook all, and followed Him."

The word in this passage that gripped my heart most was the one word, "astonished." I asked God to reveal to my heart what the Bible tells us that Peter and James and John were astonished at in that moment. I believe there were several things they were astonished at that are crucial for those of us who are in revival ministry. We need to understand these issues if God is going to sweep across our nation and the world with a mighty outpouring of His Spirit.

Astonished at the Extent to Which God Can Work

How large a catch did Peter, James, and John make when Jesus showed up and told them to launch out and let down their nets? I calculated the average size of a boat in the Sea of Galilee in the day of Jesus, and the average size of fish, in order to determine how many fish it would take to sink those boats – about three thousand fish would sink the boat. I think Peter, James, and John had to be astonished at the extent to which God could work when Jesus showed up!

In our nation today, if God's presence came in revival, we would be astonished at the extent

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to which He could transform our nation – suddenly, supernaturally, sovereignly, spontaneously.

Two general elections ago I cast an absentee ballot, and the day before the election, I went to Northampton, Massachusetts. I spent the day there praying for revival, realizing the answer for our nation's needs wasn't who was put into office the next day in the White House; the answer is in the Church House. Northampton is where Jonathan Edwards preached that famous sermon, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God," which became the spark and fuel for the First Great Awakening in America.

That day I sat in Northampton and prayed, "Oh, God, would you do it again in our day?" As I was praying, I was reminded of something that I had read in preparation for my day of prayer. One reporter said that in Edwards' day, in Northampton, Massachusetts, the population was 1,200. Following that great work of God which took place through Edwards, they didn't know if they could find one person among those 1,200 who was an unbeliever. I don't know what size city you are from, but can you imagine God moving so powerfully in your city that when all is said and done, you don't know if you could find one unbeliever? God could do it again, couldn't He?

The next day I went to Newburyport, Massachusetts. There underneath the pulpit in the old South Presbyterian Church is where George Whitefield is buried. I sat outside the church on election day, and I prayed, "O Lord, will You do again what You did in George Whitefield's day? Would you quicken our nation like You did in his day?" I drove to Boston that night to catch a flight home. I remember thinking, en route to the airport, of a report I had read estimating the population of Boston was 12,000. Yet on one occasion – with no hype, no promotion, no advertising, only that people had heard that George Whitefield was coming to preach – 18,000 people showed up!

I believe the population of Chicago is about seven million. Can you imagine what it would be like if God came to a city such as Chicago, like He did in George Whitefield's day? What if nine or ten million people would show up to hear the Gospel of Jesus Christ even though meetings were unannounced? God can do it again in our nation! We will be astonished at the extent to which He can work across our nation and in our cities.

I love to read the reports of what God has done in cities. What happened in Denver, Colorado, in 1904 and 1905, and elsewhere is amazing. The headline of *The Denver Post*, January 20, 1905, reads, "Entire City Pauses for Prayer...." You say, it could happen then, but it couldn't happen today in our lifetime.

On one occasion (I wish I could say it was multiple times) I was blessed to be in a city of about 45,000 when, for three days, you knew the presence of God was there. There was a salesman traveling to that city. He got to the city limits and was so overwhelmed with the conviction of God that he pulled his car to the side of the road, got out of the car, and fell on his face for twenty or thirty minutes as God convicted him of sin. He confessed and repented, broken before the Lord. He got back into his car, drove into that city and stopped at a gas station. He asked an unsaved gas station attendant, "Is there something going on in this city?" The attendant said, "Don't you know? God is here!"

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There was a president of a bank sitting at his desk. He was unchurched. He fell under the conviction of God. He walked out into the street and said, “Can someone please point me to God?” Someone led him to Christ, and he is in full-time ministry today. Another businessman, one who didn’t attend a Bible-believing church nor did he attend any of the crusade services, while at work during those days, fell under the conviction of God. He found somebody who helped him come to Jesus Christ. He, too, ended up in full-time ministry. Won’t we be astonished at what God can do when Jesus shows up?

You say, that’s a nation, that’s a city. What about a church? We were in a church one time for six weeks, seven Sundays. You may know of T. W. Hunt. He heard what God was doing, and he decided to fly to that city just to be in God’s presence. He entered the back door of the church, and he said the presence of God was so real he literally fell on his face before God, and God met with him there. Wouldn’t it be amazing if God would come in such a way that the moment people set foot in this auditorium they would be compelled by the Spirit of God to fall on their face before Him?

We would be astonished at the extent to which God would work – in our nation, in our church, in our family, in our homes and marriages – if Jesus would come. We would also be astonished at the extent to which He can tear down the walls of hurt and bitterness and wounds.

Astonished at the Place Where God Can Work

I think Peter and John and James were also astonished at the place where God chose to work. He chose to work at the Sea of Galilee, where Peter and James and John were professional, vocational fishermen. There were a multitude of spectators on shore. What if it had been you whom Jesus came up to and said, “I want you to cast your net back out there where you were all night. I know you worked hard and didn’t catch anything, and you know the fish aren’t biting.” What would you do? I would probably have pulled Jesus to the side and said, “Jesus, wait. See all those people? I don’t want You to look bad, and I don’t want to look bad. Isn’t there a stream or another lake elsewhere? They might be biting there. But I can attest to the fact that it’s not happening here.”

For varied reasons all across this nation there are pastors and people like you who have a passion for revival. But they think, “This just isn’t the right place. It may begin in a mega church somewhere, or some mega conference, or some mega prayer movement, but certainly not here in my church, not with my friends.”

With all my heart, I believe the next great move of God’s Spirit will not begin in a mega church, not in our culture the way it is. Granted, God is sovereign. He can do it however He wants. But I think God likes to do astonishing things in unlikely places. Think with me for a moment. Who would have guessed the great Welsh Revival would begin with Evan Roberts in a back room with a few people? Who would have guessed that in the Upper Room where the disciples were gathered would start the greatest revival of all history? Who would have guessed how God would work in the desert when they came out to where John the Baptist was? Doesn’t it seem like God chooses to do His greatest work in the least likely places, especially in a culture which is so personality driven and so popularity centered? I think God is probably going to begin His work like He did with Jeremiah Lanphier in 1857, in the heart of about six people.

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Why? In a huge church, even if their motives are pure, the average person is going to say, "Why, that's because of them and what they're able to do." Oh, how God longs to demonstrate what HE is able to do! He is likely to begin revival in an unlikely place.

Astonished at the Timing of God

I think the disciples were not only astonished at the extent to which God worked, and at the place in which God worked, but also I think they were astonished at the timing of God. It was an inconvenient time. Peter had been up all night. He had to be exhausted. It was inconvenient because he had already washed his nets and cleaned them. It was also an illogical time. It wasn't logical to go fishing in the middle of the day when the sun is hot and the water is warm, because fish go to the cool, deep waters in the middle of the day. So it was an unlikely time.

In our revival ministry, the places we go where the people are willing to believe God to do something at the most inconvenient and illogical time are the places where we see God do His greatest work.

A number of years ago, a church of over a thousand invited us for a crusade. They decided the two-week period that they wanted their crusade was the first two weeks of December. I thought, "This is unusual." Anyone who knows about itinerant ministries knows it is not easy to be anywhere the first two weeks of December. They said, "We believe God wants us to sacrifice. He honors sacrifice. So we chose the most difficult time of the year to schedule our crusade."

I went to the church several weeks before the crusade, asking the people to pray and seek God. About a week before the meeting, I received a phone call and somebody told me there were prayer meetings taking place in the middle of the night. So I called the church and asked, "Is it true that there are prayer meetings taking place in the middle of the night?" The gentleman on the other end of the phone said, "Yes, it is." I said, "Is it true they are taking place between two and three o'clock in the morning?" He said, "Yes." My next question was, "Is anybody coming?" He said, "Well, we aren't counting, but in my home last night we had 10 or 15 individuals, and there are at least 15 or so other homes in the community that had that many." I calculated that there were at least 150 or 200 people who were praying from two to three o'clock every morning for two weeks leading up to the crusade. Illogical? Nobody is going to come? Inconvenient? They were tired. That year God moved in that church in ways we rarely see. He did some of the most astonishing things in people's lives.

Astonished at the Methods God Chooses to Use

I think Peter, James, and John were astonished at the methods God chose to use. What methods did He choose to use? He used the same boat, and the same net. He didn't say, "Peter, I know you didn't catch anything last night. I know you are tired, but please, take time to camouflage the bottom of the boat. Get some fish-friendly nets, if you will, please, and maybe some contemporary lures to fit in with it."

I'm not down on methods, but I will tell you this much: When Jesus comes, methods do not

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matter. He loves to take the methods we are already using and empower them and use them to show us what He can do. Otherwise, we would be putting our trust in methods.

Astonished at the People God Chooses to Use

I think Peter was especially astonished at the people God chose to use when Jesus showed up. Who did Jesus choose to use? Remember, Peter was tired. Are you ever tired? Do you ever get weary? Peter had to feel like a failure at that moment. He hadn't caught any fish. He was supposed to be the professional, the vocational fisherman. He likely felt rejected. But I think Jesus saw something and knew something, and that is why He chose to do an astonishing work through Peter.

There are three things I want to call to your attention concerning why Jesus chose Peter, and I believe Jesus is looking for the very same three things today to determine whether He is going to do an astonishing work.

Number one: Peter was honest. What fisherman do you know who would volunteer the information, "I worked hard at fishing last night, but I caught nothing." Peter was being honest. For a fisherman, that is the ultimate, the epitome of honesty. Some of us do all right when someone comes to us to hold us accountable and says, "How are you doing? How are you doing with your thought life? How are you doing in your marriage, Byron? Are you praying with your wife? Are you really being a spiritual leader to your wife?" They come and ask those questions and we will respond, won't we?

I think Jesus saw something in Peter. He did not ask him how it went. Peter volunteered the information because he had a heart of vulnerability to be exposed, to be willing to be honest. The real test is when nobody comes to me and I go to them, and I say, "You know what? Sue and I, we are blessed in our marriage, but we aren't praying as intimately as we need to be." I shared that with a man this morning. "We aren't crying out to the Lord together. I pray with her and over her every day. But God wants to do a work in my heart in that area."

When we get honest, and when we admit our need, isn't that the first step that leads to God doing a great work in any of our hearts and in our lives? Yes, it is – honesty.

The second reason I think that Jesus chose Peter was that Peter was surrendered. He was surrendered to obedience. I love that phrase, *"Master…nevertheless...."* That is speaking of Jesus as Lord, Teacher, Master. I can imagine Peter thinking, "Even though it is illogical; even though it does not make sense; even though I was out there all night long...." For me, even though I have been proclaiming the message of revival for years, even though I have been waiting for God to come down in revival somewhere, and we have worked hard at it and we have not seen it yet – "God, nevertheless, at Thy word, I will...." Peter was surrendered to the Lordship of Christ – *"Master"*– and to the authority of His Word – *"at Thy word."*

A third reason I believe God chose Peter was that he was personal. He did not say, "Lord, depart from John and James. Lord, *they are* sinful men" or, as we might say, "Lord, depart from my wife. *She* has issues…and my kids – *they* really have issues. Lord, depart from my pastor and staff. They are just not doing it right. Our church, Lord, depart from it, will You?"

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We will never see an astonishing work of God that way. Do you want to see an astonishing work? Get honest, be surrendered, and say, "Lord, *I* am a sinful man."

I have a tendency to be an expert "guilt shifter." When we humans have an issue in our life, we have a tendency to find an issue in somebody else's life that is a little bigger, and then we don't feel so guilty. God does not send revival that way. God sends revival when we as leaders do exactly what Gypsy Smith did. When he would get to a community and he wanted to see God do a great and mighty work, he would take a piece of chalk, draw a circle, and he would step inside that circle, and he would lift his heart and his hands to heaven, and he would cry out, "O God, send revival to this circle! Send revival to my heart, to my life!" It was then he would see God do astonishing things.

I believe God longs to do astonishing things, and He will if we get honest and if we will surrender our plans. Peter had to surrender his plans; he had to surrender his prestige; he had to surrender his pride. Friends, when we get honest, when we become obedient and surrendered, and when we get personal, taking our eyes off everybody else and cry out, "God, send revival to my circle!"– it is then God will do an astonishing work!

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