

Lord to pour out His blessings on us when we are most faithful to the message that glorifies His Son?

The Bible assures us that someday, in some way, “the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea” (Isaiah 11:9; Habakkuk 2:14). Perhaps the waters of this knowledge will begin with a heavenly rain that falls from a storm which develops from a small cloud. Perhaps that cloud is on the horizon of evangelicalism today.



A CLOUD ON THE HORIZON HOPE FOR BIBLICAL REVIVAL IN OUR TIME?

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In 1 Kings 18:44 the servant of Elijah reported to the prophet that “a cloud as small as a man’s hand” was rising in the western sky. Elijah sent a message to nearby King Ahab to hurry away in his chariot lest the storm overtake him. “In a little while the sky grew black with clouds and wind, and there was a heavy shower” ending a long drought.

I see a small cloud on the horizon of evangelicalism. If it continues to grow, the Holy Spirit could turn it into a cloudburst of reformation and revival. That cloud is the widespread interest in recovering the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

I am seeing this movement in print, hearing it in sermons and conferences, and observing it in churches throughout the land.

Off the top of my head I can quickly list several examples (in no particular order):

- Mark Dever’s highly commended new book, *The Gospel and Personal Evangelism*, with its emphasis on “What is the Gospel?” in chapter two, the longest chapter.
- The interdenominational unity seen in the “Together for the Gospel” conference, with thousands of registrations nationally and internationally pushing it to relocate to one of the largest venues in Louisville.
- A manuscript I reviewed on a forthcoming book by Elyse Fitzpatrick on believers staying in love with the Gospel and learning to apply it to all of life.
- A recent sermon by John MacArthur on www.SermonAudio.com that focused on the importance of clarity on the Gospel as crucial for evangelism, and which became one of the most popular sermons on the website.
- Another widely-publicized new book, *In Christ Alone: Living the Gospel Centered Life*, by Sinclair Ferguson.

Very little time and research could turn up many other examples of Christian leaders who are calling upon believers to confirm and clarify their understanding of the Gospel.

Note that this emphasis is not just a fresh call to evangelism, but rather a recovery of the evangel itself. How great is this need? Let me suggest an experiment to determine the need in your own ministry setting. Pass around a sheet of paper in your church/class/small group, and then ask, “How many times do you think you’ve heard the Gospel in your life?” Some, especially those who are lifelong churchgoers, may roll their eyes and say, “Oh, probably *thousands* of times.” Heads will nod in agreement.

Then say, “Good! Since you know it so well, please write the Gospel on this sheet of paper.” Then watch people stare at you in stunned silence.

“You’ve heard it thousands of times, right?” And to become Christians you had to understand the Gospel before you could believe it, right? So just take a paragraph or so and write that Gospel you believed.”

Now they avert their eyes and shift in their seats.

“And remember,” you continue, “the Gospel is not, ‘Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved.’ No, that is not the Gospel; that is the appropriate *response* to the Gospel. Write the Gospel that people must hear, understand, and believe in order to be right with God. Surely you’d agree that we need to be more clear on the one and only message by which we get to Heaven than on our Social Security number, phone number, or computer password.”

What does it reveal about the condition of even the liveliest churches if the members who have heard the Gospel countless times and who also claim to have believed it cannot write out the Gospel? Beyond that, if people are tentative about the Gospel in the supportive surroundings of their own church, can we expect them to confidently share the Gospel with an unbeliever in the hostile environment of the world?

How could the recovery of the Gospel possibly lead to a rain of revival upon our churches? For starters, many church members might understand the Gospel for the first time and be converted. Next, it would be preached and taught more clearly in our churches thus children, regular attenders, and guests might be saved. Third,

our church members would become better witnesses in the world because they would gain confidence in sharing the Gospel. The role of the Holy Spirit, said Jesus in John 16:14, is “He will glorify Me.” When can we ever expect the Holy Spirit to come upon us with more power (as in revival) than when we are clearly declaring the Gospel of Jesus?

The Gospel in one word *is* Jesus. In a phrase, the Gospel is the life and work of Jesus. But without a biblical understanding of who Jesus is and what He has done, it does little good to say, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved.” People must be told of the just and holy God whose law they have willingly broken countless times. This guilt places them under the wrath of God and will condemn them when they give account for their lives at the Judgment. But in His love, God sent His Son Jesus to rescue sinners. Jesus lived a sinless life, a life that earned Heaven. But He was willing to take the wrath of God in the place of those who had broken God’s law and disqualified themselves from Heaven. So He allowed Himself to be executed on a Roman cross outside Jerusalem in the place of the guilty, that He might bear both their sins and their punishment, and transfer to them the credit for His righteous life. As the Bible puts it in 2 Corinthians 5:21, God “made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”

The evidence that God accepted Jesus’ sacrifice is found in the historical fact of Jesus’ bodily resurrection three days after His crucifixion. Five weeks later He ascended to Heaven where He sits as King over all, and from where He has promised to return bodily and then welcome people to eternal joy with Him in Heaven or consign them to eternal torment in Hell. According to Jesus, the only appropriate response to this offer of forgiveness and eternal life is to “repent and believe in the gospel” (Mark 1:15).

Don’t take for granted that the unbelievers you know have ever heard this message. Don’t take for granted that those in the circle of your ministry influence could demonstrate an unambiguous grasp of this message of salvation. Don’t take for granted that your own family members clearly understand the Gospel. Are you clear on the Gospel yourself?

Can we expect our churches to thrive if we are unclear on the church’s most basic message? Conversely, can’t we expect the