

The Azusa St Revival (Acts 2:1-4)



A. Charles Parham (Methodist)

Parham who was very sick, was healed in John Alexander Dowie's ministry in Zion City, Illinois. Then Parham came to Topeka Kansas and started a healing ministry. He then opened a Bible College at 'Stone's Folly'. It was an unfinished property owned by Mr Stone because he ran out of money. They lived communally like the book of Acts. Anyone who came, pooled their money together and they shared everything.

- i) Parham posed an important question to the students. The question was, 'what is the evidence of being filled with the Holy Spirit?' When Parham returned on the New Year's Eve of 1900, the students were fervently praying for the baptism of the Holy Spirit with the 'evidence of speaking in tongues.'
- ii) Agnes Ozman asked Parham to lay hands on her so that she would become filled with the Holy Spirit and speak with other tongues. Parham reluctantly did so. After a little while, Agnes had a grin and a soft glow came upon her. Then she fluently spoke in tongues – a distinctive language. She was the first woman in modern documented history to speak in tongues. She spoke in perfect Chinese and she wrote Chinese. Her writings are still preserved to this day. (They believed if you spoke in a particular language then it was the target nation for their mission work. So the gospel spread rapidly during those revival days!)
- iii) It became so controversial that the government agencies sent linguists and they have documented more than 30 languages spoken in one night – some were earthly languages, and some were of heavenly origin. Mr Stone didn't like what was happening, and kicked out the Bible College against Parham's advice. Soon afterward the whole building burned down to the ground. It is still an empty ground to this day.
- iv) Parham later moved to Houston Texas and started a new Bible College. From there Parham's nanny went to Minneapolis Indiana to meet her friends, one of whom was William J Seymour. Seymour was so excited to hear what God was doing, he left his job, packed his bag, and came to Houston to join the Bible College.

B. An Unlikely Vessel: William Joseph Seymour (1870-1922)

- i) His father, Simon Seymour, was a former slave who fought in the civil war and died early, and left his family desperately poor. William lost his left eye to 'smallpox' (c.1901). He left his home in Louisiana early and went north to Indianapolis, then to Cincinnati, and he worked as a waiter to support himself.
- ii) Seymour was impacted by the holiness and sanctification message and sought God deeply as a young man. In 1905 Seymour moved to Houston Texas at the age of 34 to study under Charles Parham (introduced by Lucy Farrell). Parham was by then a renowned Pentecostal preacher who taught salvation, sanctification, and baptism of the Spirit as separate work of God. Seymour had to get his lessons outside the classroom through the slightly open door because of segregation custom in those days (Jim Crow law). Instead of becoming bitter Seymour turned to God even more in earnest prayer. Years later Parham said of Seymour, '*Most humble man I have ever met.*' His strength was in his weakness and utter dependence on God.

C. How the Revival Started: (9th April 1906)

- i) Early 1906, Seymour was invited by Julia Hutchin to pastor a small congregation of 8 families in Santa Fe Ave in LA (Nazarene church). They sent a one-way train fare to Seymour. Seymour took it as a sign from God and went on a long train ride from Houston Texas to LA. LA then had around 250,000 people and 256 churches, and no skyscrapers. The people of LA were hungry and ready for revival. Many prayer gatherings and revival meetings were taking place.
- ii) Seymour arrived on 22 Feb 1906, and started to preach in Julia's church. However within the first week of ministry Seymour was thrown out of the church. They padlocked the church door because of his teaching on tongues (Acts 2:1-4) and pre-millennium view. Seymour wasn't even baptised in the Spirit himself then. Edward Lee heard of Seymour's plight and invited him to break the bread in his home. But Lee didn't know what to do with Seymour and Seymour didn't know where to go next. They both sought God in prayer,

sometimes all night into the early morning. In the morning Lee would go to work in the local bank and Seymour would pray and read Bible all day.

- iii) Seymour got so hungry for God that his prayer time increased to 5 hours to 7 hours a day. Soon the word began to spread about his devotion to God and people began to gather for the Bible Study. Soon the crowd got too large, so they had to move to Richard and Ruth Asberry's house on 214 North Bonnie Brae St. Seymour sent for 2 helpers from Houston - Joseph A Warren and Lucy F Farrell - and they entered into a season of intense prayer.
- iv) On 6th April Seymour proclaimed a 10 day fast. On the 9th of April, 3 days into prayer Seymour preached on Act 2:4. At 6pm Seymour prayed for his friend Edward Lee and he was baptised in the Holy Spirit and spoke in tongues. Then Jennie Moore fell on the floor under the power of God, and was filled with the Spirit and 6 others.

Jennie Moore, 'It seemed as if a vessel broke within me and water surged out of my mouth in a torrent of speech in languages God had given me. The message came with power. Interpretation followed each message.' After that, she played piano and sang to God beautifully, although she never learned to play piano before.

- v) The news spread so quickly to the neighbourhood that by the next morning there were hundreds of curious people gathered around the house. The front porch of the house was used as a pulpit. It was difficult to come near the house because of the crowd, and people were falling under the power of God outside of this house. Hundreds were getting saved. People shouted and worshipped prayed for 3 days and nights. One day the porch collapsed but no one was hurt. And they found a new place for their meeting - 312 Azusa St. in downtown LA. On 12th April at 4am, 3 days after the revival broke out of Bonnie Brae St, Seymour got gloriously filled with the Holy Spirit after seeking God all night. Julia Hutchin was also filled with the Spirit as her congregation went to Seymour's meeting.
- vi) San Francisco was hit by a powerful earthquake around this time. It destroyed the city. Thousands died. And fires destroyed most of the buildings. Two powerful aftershocks severely shook LA. 40,000 earthquake tracts were distributed in a week. Men began to fear God! They were wondering if they were to be hit next. 312 Azusa St. was filled with people to the point of suffocation!

D. 312 Azusa St. – a Humble Lumber House (~220m2)

- i) It was originally a horse stable. The stable downstairs originally accommodating animals was converted to a meeting hall with chairs without the back support. Upstairs was a counselling room and Seymour lived there. Later upstairs was filled with crutches from those who had been healed in the meetings. The place was open at all times for anyone to come and seek God. The upper room was filled with people praying at all times. There was zero advertisement, no big preachers to draw the crowd, just Holy Spirit-led meetings - 3 meetings a day, 7 days a week, for 3 ½ years without stopping. No two meetings were the same. Seymour was often found praying in two shoeboxes. *'No flesh will glory in the presence of God.'*
- ii) *'No instruments of music are used. None are needed. No choir, but bands of angels have been heard by some in the spirit and there is a heavenly singing that is inspired by the Holy Ghost.'* (Nov 1906) It inspired the 'awe' and the 'sense of God's holiness'
- iii) Eye-Witness Accounts

John Sheryl - Katherine Scott (a teenage girl) was led by the Spirit and pointed at a stranger coming into the meeting and spoke in tongues that left a great effect on him. He said, 'I am a Jew who came to the meeting to investigate this speaking in tongues, so that I could write against the Christian religion. This girl just spoke to me in Hebrew and told me my first and last name, my occupation, and my business in the city and she told me to repent.' He dropped to his knees and cried out to God.

Fire at Azusa - 'I was a boy and had accompanied my mother, a devout Catholic woman before she came to Azusa. As we moved to an open spot near a bench, I suddenly felt a chill. And the hair on my arms, legs, and head stood on end. It felt as if I was surrounded by God. I was trembling and so was my mother and everybody else. In most churches, children would be twisting on their seats or running up and down the

aisles, but not at Azusa. Everyone was quiet. Even babies in their mother's arms. It was not that their mothers kept them quiet, because nobody said a word, not even a whisper. As my hands shook and the hair on my arms stood up, people suddenly rose to their feet and their hands shot towards heaven. My hands went up with theirs, though I hadn't tried to raise them. Even the hands of babes and arms shot towards heaven.

Strongmen began to cry out loud and then women followed. As I looked over the congregation, another chill ran down my spine. It was as if ocean waves moved from one end of the congregation to the other. Wave after waves of the Spirit rippled through the hall like a breeze passing over a cornfield. When the hair on my arm settled down, so did the people. They settled back into their seats and prayers burst through the hall. Then tongues of fire suddenly appeared over the heads of some of them. Then a black man with a shiny face began to speak in tongues. And as he spoke a blind white woman came off the bench...and cried out, 'Oh my blessed Jesus, I can see. I can see.' Praise to the precious blood of Jesus sprang to our mouths. The crowd seems to have forgotten how to sing in English. And out of their mouths came the new languages and heavenly harmony that no human being could have learned. I cannot describe it. No human being could ever duplicate it. We sang heavenly choruses and in between each chorus our eyes filled with tears.'

- iv) Glory clouds rolled in and children would play peek-a-boo in that cloud. Creative miracles: an arm growing out in a few seconds and four fingers growing out! One time a fire department was called in because people saw the flames on top of the building. When they came there was no literal fire, but 600 people seeking God at the altar to receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Sometimes people three to four blocks away would feel a divine pull to come into the building and they didn't know why they were inside the building. They would get saved and healed and filled with the Spirit. There was that supernatural pull around the building from a few blocks away.

E. Legacy - What William J Seymour said

'Don't go out of this place talking about speaking in tongues. Instead, try to get people saved. Remember, apostolic power brings apostolic persecution. If God for Christ's sake forgiven your sins, you know it. And if you don't know it better than anything in this world you are still in your sins – the work is not done.'

'When you are sanctified. People can see it in your life. When you are filled with the Holy Spirit, you have the holy boldness to stand up before the world without fear. Man may say it is of the devil and you are drunk, but glory to God that there is power behind you that man & woman cannot deny.'

- i) Decline: Seymour fell in love with a lovely lady, Jennie Moore and married her. Then Seymour's secretary took the mailing list of the 'Apostolic Faith' and ran to Portland Oregon to start her own ministry. It was the ministry's monthly magazine with 50,000 global subscriptions which documented the miracles and the teachings of Seymour. So the connection to the rest of the world was cut prematurely. (Seymour's secretary believed Seymour shouldn't marry and get distracted as the Lord would return any moment!)

Also, Seymour and Parham had a split, and Parham started his own meeting in LA. And Azusa St. revival began to wane.

- ii) Legacy: Azusa St. revival ministry was a prayer house and a mission base. By Oct 1906, some 38 missionaries went out to the mission field, and within 2 years they were in 50 nations. 110 years later some 600 million Christians around the world would trace their spiritual roots to this little place. It was the most powerful move of the Spirit of the past few centuries.

The core of the church at Azusa St. Revival consisted of about 50-60 local people with hundreds of visitors coming from outside to meet with God.

- iii) Challenge: It's been over 100 years since God visited Azusa St. in a unique way. Seymour said c.1909, 'about 100 years from now, a much greater revival than this will break out on a worldwide scale!'

Do we believe God will do it again? 2020 has been a year of profound changes. What does 2021+ hold? Rumours abound of impending economic upheaval and war in the Middle East at any moment. Will the Church be the conduit between heaven and earth again and be the witness to the ends of the earth?