

## Catch the revival 3: Pangs of Child birth

(aka God we need help, deliver us from....)

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Thus far in this revival season we have discussed:

1. Frustration – that revival comes after much frustration. We also discussed the Azusa Street revival of 1906.
2. Prepare the way – that revival comes after much prayer. We discussed how the Moravians of Bohemia sparked the Great Awakening of 1727.

Today I am speaking about the Pangs of Child birth and will share about the Korean Pentecost of 1907.

What is “funny” in this season is that the Lord has specialised in taking me into the unknown. For example, I have never been part of a revival yet, here I am, he wants me to speak about it. Then for today’s topic, I am a parent but I have never been in a labour ward seeing a woman bring forth a child to the world, but here I am, the Commander of Heaven’s armies gives me his oracles to speak.

When a woman is bringing forth a child into the world, I can only imagine how scary and yet exciting it is.

After 9 months of carrying and who knows how many years or seasons of waiting suddenly her moment comes.

It comes with pain and anguish but the bible says this about the period after:

*A woman giving birth to a child has pain because her time has come; but when her baby is born she forgets the anguish because of her joy that a child is born into the world. John 16: 21 (NIV).*

But what if her time to give birth comes and she doesn’t have strength as the bible says:

*It is like when a child is ready to be born, but the mother has no strength to deliver the baby (Isaiah 37: 3, NLT).*

But even worse, what if the child is born dead – a still birth? What pain, what anguish, what sorrow!

For many who live in the West, the chances of a child coming out and being well and growing up well are good. Child mortality in Canada for example is only 0.4%, which means out of 1,000 births, 4 die. By comparison, in Sierra Leone in West Africa, which has the worst mortality, the rate is 8%, which means out of 1,000 births, 80 women lose their children. <sup>i</sup>

This mortality meanwhile was even worse in ancient times.

Research to study child mortality since ancient times found that on average:

- 26.9% of new-borns died in their first year of life
- 46.2% died before they reached adulthood.

Two estimates that are easy to remember: Around a quarter died in the first year of life. Around half died as children.

What is striking about the historical estimates is how similar the mortality rates for children were across this very wide range of 43 historical cultures.<sup>ii</sup>

Therefore child birth historically has been both exciting and scary – think of it from the perspective of a woman in ancient days. There was an up to 50% possibility that the child she has carried for 9 months wouldn't live. Such a woman therefore places her hope in God that the labour will not be in vain. This is the attitude we need to have when reading into any story of child birth we see in the bible, this was the context of that story or example.

It is from such a place of anxiety, fear mixed with excitement that such a woman (and her husband) placed a dependency on God to bring about birth and for that child to survive child hood – in other words to make their efforts fruitful.

Why is the Lord thus likening child birth and its pains to revival?

Well:

1. There is a period of waiting – during which there is preparation (tarrying prayer, frustration), but this we have covered in the previous messages.
2. Then there is the actual moment of revival, child birth – it can bring with it sorrow, pain and anguish but eventually brings joy when the revival bursts forth like a new born child.
3. But then there is also the possibility that the revival might not come – that instead after all the pain and sorrow, a still birth comes, the revival dies or never survives into adult hood, maturity.

What does the Lord want us to do, knowing this?

I am going to share a bible passage to illustrate this and then will share a story of the Korean revival of 1907.

## **A bible example – to show God's care for abandoned new borns.**

*On the day you were born your cord was not cut, nor were you washed with water to make you clean, nor were you rubbed with salt or wrapped in cloths. No one looked on you with pity or had compassion enough to do any of these things for you. Rather, you were thrown out into the open field, for on the day you were born you were despised.*

*"Then I passed by and saw you kicking about in your blood, and as you lay there in your blood I said to you, "Live!" I made you grow like a plant of the field. You grew and developed and entered puberty. Your breasts had formed and your hair had grown, yet you were stark naked.*

*"Later I passed by, and when I looked at you and saw that you were old enough for love, I spread the corner of my garment over you and covered your naked body. I gave you my solemn oath and entered into a covenant with you, declares the Sovereign Lord, and you became mine.*

*'I bathed you with water and washed the blood from you and put ointments on you. I clothed you with an embroidered dress and put sandals of fine leather on you. I dressed you in fine linen and covered you with costly garments. I adorned you with jewelry: I put bracelets on your arms and a necklace around your neck Ezekiel 16: 4- 11 (NIV).*

What we see in this story is that:

Often nations, families, individuals are actually in DESPERATE NEED of revival like this child who was born but no one cares for them as other new borns are cared for. For the loved new born, the umbilical cord is cut, they are washed with water to remove amniotic fluids and they are showed love and concern. Instead, the abandoned one is left out in the open, left to the elements until God comes. The one who shows care and compassion when no one else looked.

Knowing this, we can see that it is only God who can show genuine concern and pity on us in reviving us, commanding us to “Live!”. He goes further for he is the only one who can clothe us in fine clothes, put shoes on our feet and give us fine jewellery, like an adored wife and mother – he is therefore the one who gives us life and not just life but ABUNDANT LIFE.

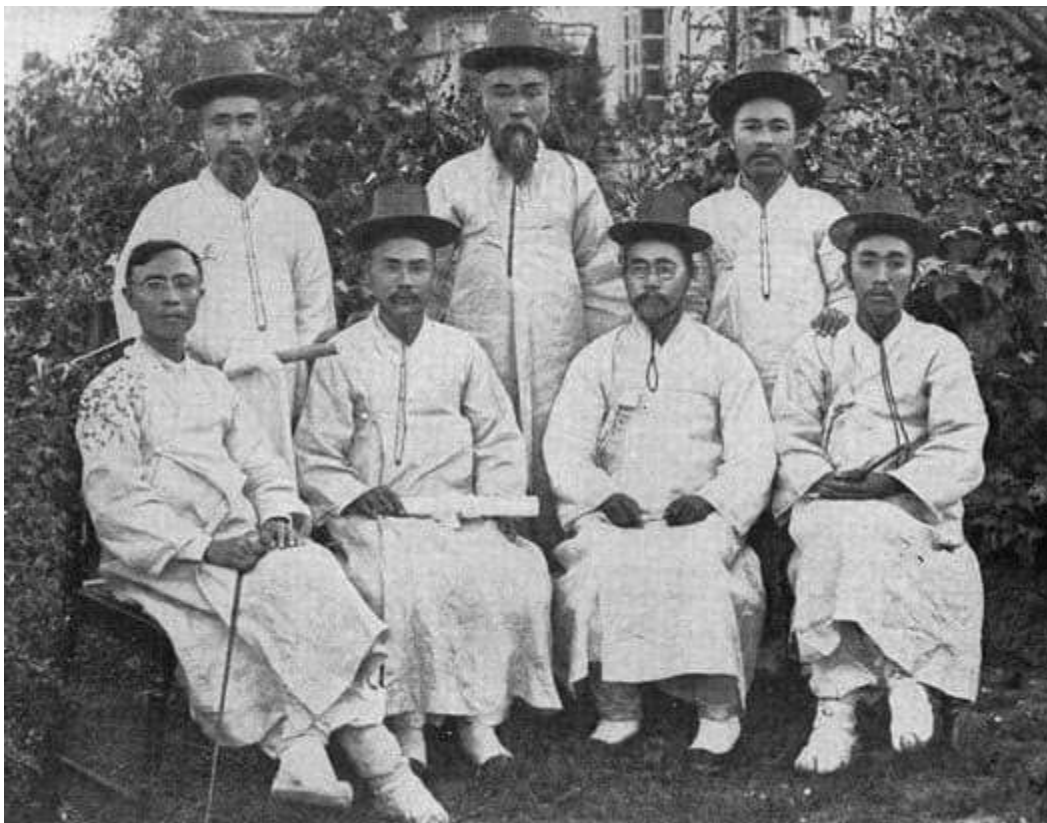
Knowing this, we can during the pangs of child birth – cry out to him not to abandon us to the elements but to remain with us to give us life, clothing, shoes, jewelry.

### **1907 Korean revival example – to show how a still birth can almost come.**

And now the scary bit of still birth. What can cause revival to be dead on arrival? What can prevent this child from being born? An example from the Korean Pentecost of 1907 can help us.

What is strange is that many today, when you hear Korea or Pyongyang, think of ballistic missiles and a “rebel nation” closed off from the world, but this is not how it always was. There was a time Korea was called “Jerusalem of the far east”.

Korea was one of the last nations to hear the gospel but God ended up giving them 3 revivals in one decade but the most well known is the one of 1907.



Over one hundred ten years ago, Pyongyang saw the outbreak of a massive revival, the high point of the season of evangelical strength in northern Korea. Presbyterian missionary William Blair preached to thousands of Korean men, focusing on their need to turn away from their traditional hatred of the Japanese people, with whom Korea had a long history of conflict.

**Here is one missionary’s description of a prominent Saturday night in which the Holy Spirit came.<sup>iii</sup>**

*God is not always in the whirlwind, neither does He always speak in a still small voice. He came to us in Pyongyang that night with the sound of weeping. As the prayer continued, a spirit of heaviness and sorrow for sin came down upon the audience. Over on one side, someone began to weep, and in a moment the whole audience was weeping.*

*Man after man would rise, confess his sins, break down and weep, and then throw himself to the floor and beat the floor with his fists in perfect agony of conviction. My own cook tried to make a confession, broke down in the midst of it, and cried to me across the room: "Pastor, tell me, is there any hope for me, can I be forgiven?" and then threw himself to the floor and wept and wept, and almost screamed in agony.*

*Sometimes after a confession, the whole audience would break out in audible prayer, and the effect of that audience of hundreds of men praying together in audible prayer was something indescribable. Again, after another confession, they would break out in uncontrollable weeping, and we would all weep, we could not help it. And so the meeting went on until two o'clock a.m., with confession and weeping and praying.*

Contrition over sin and praying out loud were among the distinguishing signs of this revival, which resulted in many new conversions and additions to church memberships.

**Here is another story, explaining how confession of sins was a spark to opening the door for the Spirit to fall on a Sunday evening<sup>iv</sup>:**

*Following three more months of prayer, the Pyongyang churches began 1907, as they did each new year, with a week of daily prayer services. But when they came to the final Sunday evening service, after eight consecutive days of special prayer services, there had been no exceptional blessing received from the Lord. They wondered if God was going to withhold the reviving influence of His Spirit that they had so diligently sought.*

*About 1,500 people gathered in the Central Presbyterian Church for that final prayer service. As the meeting progressed, all were astonished when the leading Elder of the church suddenly stood up and publicly confessed: "I am an Achan. God can't bless because of me. About a year ago a friend of mine, when dying, called me to his house and said, 'Elder, I am about to pass away. I want you to manage my affairs; my wife is unable.' I said, 'Rest your heart; I will do it.' "I did manage that widow's estate," the elder continued, "but I managed to put 100 dollars of her money into my own pocket. I have hindered God. I am going to give the 100 dollars back to that widow tomorrow morning."*

*Instantly the hindering barrier to the Lord's blessing was removed, and conviction of sin swept across the audience. The church service, which had begun at 7 p.m., continued till 2 a.m. Throughout that time dozens of people at once were standing, weeping, as they awaited their turn to confess their transgressions.*

**Here is a final story of how hostility among church leaders once removed brought the Spirit<sup>v</sup>:**

*It was the custom of the Korean church leaders to gather at Pyongyang each New Year's Day for a ten-day Bible conference. In January 1907, 1,500 men gathered together, representing the leadership of hundreds of churches. For almost six months, missionaries had been praying for a mighty movement of God among the Korean church, and anticipation grew as the meetings began.*

*On Monday afternoon, several missionaries gathered together for prayer. They pleaded with God to move among them. One of their number later testified, "We were bound in spirit and refused to let God go till He blessed us." That night as they entered the church, it seemed the entire building was filled with the presence of God.*

*It was common knowledge that two church leaders had a hostile relationship.*

*On Monday evening, a Mr. Kang had confessed his hatred for a Mr. Kim, but Kim had remained silent. Several missionaries were concerned about Kim's unwillingness to reconcile. That evening, God answered the prayers of the missionaries in a most unusual way.*

*As the meeting progressed, Kim sat with the elders behind the pulpit with his head bowed. Suddenly he came to the pulpit. Holding it firmly, he confessed, "I have been guilty of fighting against God. I have been guilty of hating not only Kang You-moon, but Pang Mok-sa." Kim's animosity toward Kang was well known, but Pang Mok-sa was the Korean name of the missionary who had urged others to pray for him.*

*The revelation of hatred toward the missionary came as a complete surprise to all gathered. Turning to the missionary, Kim continued. "Can you forgive me?" he asked.*

*"Can you pray for me?" The missionary stood to pray in Korean. He began, "Apage, Apage" ("Father, Father"). That was as far as he got. "It seemed as if the roof was lifted from the building and the Spirit of God came down from heaven in a mighty avalanche of power among us," the missionary later reported. "I fell at Kim's side and wept and prayed as I had never prayed before." Across the auditorium, hundreds stood with arms stretched out toward heaven calling on God. Others lay prostrate on the floor. Hundreds cried out to God for mercy.*

*While they had been praying for revival for months, when it came the missionaries were terrified. Many in the church were in deep mental anguish. Others struggling to resist God were seen clenching their fists and banging their heads against the ground.*

*Some feared that allowing the meeting to continue would result in some people going crazy, yet they knew they dared not interfere with the work of the Holy Spirit. Finally, they agreed to end the meeting at two o'clock in the morning, six hours after it had begun.*

*Throughout the rest of the conference, similar events were repeated daily.*

## **A summary of the child birth parallels with the 1907 Korean Revival**

These 3 examples can give us a glimpse into the Lord's mind on how he used this revival for our example:

1. The revival almost failed for many months and there was frustration amongst the leaders because there was hatred – the Koreans hated the Japanese.
2. The revival almost failed because there was sin among church leaders – one leader had taken part of a widow's estate and another hated two other leaders/missionaries.
3. When the leaders confessed their sins, no doubt under the conviction of the Spirit, then there was an outpouring of the Spirit. Thank God they persevered and refused to let God go until he visited them.
4. This outpouring was terrifying. When God finally visited after the many prayers, it was terrifying, perhaps like child birth. People threw themselves on the floor, there was deep mental anguish in the presence of God, many called out to God for mercy. Others struggling to resist God were seen clenching their fists and banging their heads against the ground. It was so scary, that the leaders feared people might go crazy!

## Impact of the Korean revival (joy after the pangs of child birth).

The pangs of revival have had an impact on Korean society? Here are some examples including over 100 years after this revival:

- In just 5 years from 1905-1910 the c. 80,000 of Korean converts was more than the total number of the entire Japanese church after 50 years of missionary work and twice the number of Chinese protestants after 80 years of missionary labour. By 1912, there were 300,000 members, in a nation of 12 million.
- A requirement by the first missionaries of all converts to learn to read so they could read the bible later translated into near 100% literacy among Christians in a largely illiterate nation, resulting in Christians becoming natural leaders of Korean society.
- Fasting and prayer is widely practiced including the idea of a prayer mountain - mountain retreats where Christians go for days or weeks of prayer. The prayer life of the Korean church remains a role model for Christians around the world.
- In many churches, "concerts of prayer" are still practiced in Sunday morning services, with the whole church confessing their sins to God and then calling on God in unison for his blessing. In what have come to be called the "Dawn Meetings," many Koreans still gather every morning at their churches at five o'clock for prayer. Friday nights are devoted to all- night prayer meetings.



Revival could become a still birth – fail in its infancy, unless we rely on the Lord, who takes pity on us and visits us and clothes us. But this birth can bring with it grief and anguish, perhaps like a woman in the pangs of child birth, BUT its fruit last 100 years for generations to come.

May we not grieve his Spirit by harbouring unconfessed sins including lack of unity in the Church.

The Lord is speaking to us a final word:

*"Then my people will know that I am the Lord their God, because I sent them away to exile and brought them home again. I will leave none of my people behind. And I will never again turn my face from them, for I will pour out my Spirit upon the people of Israel. I, the Sovereign Lord, have spoken!"*  
Ezekiel 39:28-29 NLT

## **Revival prayer**

*"O Lord, God of Israel, you are just. We come before you in our guilt as nothing but an escaped remnant, though in such a condition none of us can stand in your presence."* Ezra 9:15 NLT

Show mercy on us Lord. Show mercy everlasting father and forgive our sins. Forgive Lord and come and clothe us. Remove our nakedness, our blood, our shame. Remove our hatred for our fellow men. Pour on us your Spirit oh YHWH. God, we need help! Deliver us from all the chains of sin that hold us captive.

Lord, visit Korea again – both Korea Pyonyang and Korea Seoul. Come Lord Jesus, Come! Amen.

## **Notes**

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<sup>i</sup> [https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.DYN.IMRT.IN?locations=CA&most\\_recent\\_value\\_desc=true](https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.DYN.IMRT.IN?locations=CA&most_recent_value_desc=true)

<sup>ii</sup> <https://ourworldindata.org/child-mortality-in-the-past>

<sup>iii</sup> <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/evangelical-history/the-north-korean-revival-of-1907/>

<sup>iv</sup> <http://vancechristie.com/2015/05/21/when-revival-came-to-korea/>

<sup>v</sup> Source: "The ten greatest revivals ever from Pentecost to the present", Elmer Towns and Douglas Porter, 2000.