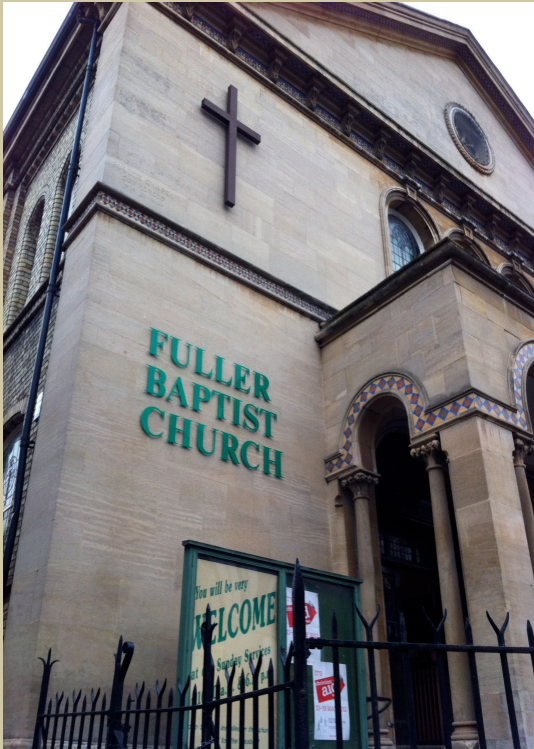


Can it happen again?



What was the accelerant that launched the Baptist Missionary Society in 1792?

In May of this year, my wife Pauline and I were able to attend a worship service at the Fuller Baptist Church in Kettering Northamptonshire, during a visit to the UK. After the service, we were shown around the church that seats 1500 people.

Not only was this small market town, mightily impacted by the Gospel in the late 18th century, this very building was also ground zero for the formation of the BMS.

So what was it propelled these people? What ignited them? What caused them to be so effective?

The answer is quite simple.

Inspired by a book on prayer by Jonathan Edwards in New England, God moved in the hearts of three local pastors, John Ryland, Andrew Fuller and John Sutcliff, to pray and seek God for revival; and the rest, as they say, is history.

These pastors were members of the local Baptist Association. In 1784, Andrew Fuller preached a sermon, and in true Baptist fashion, John Sutcliff moved a motion to challenge members to set time aside once a month for prayer.

This "Prayer Call of 1784", as it was later called, began with these words:

"Upon a motion being made to the ministers and messengers of the associate Baptist churches assembled at Nottingham, respecting meetings for prayer, to bewail the low estate of religion, and earnestly implore a revival of our churches, and of the general cause of our Redeemer, and for that end to wrestle with God for the effusion of his Holy Spirit, which alone can produce the blessed effect.." (Emphasis added)

Sutcliff went on to make his purpose abundantly clear:

"The grand object of prayer is to be that the Holy Spirit may be poured down on our ministers and churches, that sinners may be converted, the saints edified, the interest of religion revived, and the name of God glorified."

Over the next few years, as the churches met for prayer, God began to move in a new way, turning the tide of decline in the Baptist cause. *"There was an increase in numbers of churches. By 1798 there were 361 Baptist churches, more than double what there had been 40 years before. By 1812, the number had risen to 532."* (1)

William Carey who was a member for a time in Sutcliff's church, caught the vision for world evangelism; and as these brethren '*expected great things from God and attempted great things for God*', missionaries were sent out, not only to Serampore in India, but also Rev John Saunders was sent to Sydney in 1832: "*Encouraged and commissioned, though not supported, by the Baptist Missionary Society*" (2)

So, can it happen again?

If NSW Baptists collectively set time aside, to seek God, claiming His promises and asking Him to move in a new way, would He answer our prayer? Both biblical revelation and church history would answer in the affirmative!

The main obstacle that Fuller and his friends had to overcome in their day was that of the passivity, produced by hyper-Calvinism. Who could forget the rebuke of John Ryland Sr. to the young William Carey:

Can it happen again? I believe it can, and I say this on the authority of the Word of God.

If My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land. – 2 Chronicles 7:14

Footnotes:

(1) "The Prayer Call of 1784" Michael G Haykin historian with the Andrew Fuller Center, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. <http://web.ncf.ca/tonyc/prayercallof1784.html>

(2) "Shaping the Australian Baptist Movement". Dr Ken Manley.

(3) "Exposition of the Old and New Testaments" In loc Zechariah 12:10: Matthew Henry

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