

POWER EVANGELISM

Interview with Matthew Needham (5th June 2014, but slightly updated in February 2017)

1) What do you understand by power evangelism?

When it comes to power evangelism first of all I think of Jesus Christ and His ministry as recorded for us in the gospels. He attracted huge crowds of people through miracles and this gave Him many opportunities to present His message. Without the use of miracles these large crowds would not have so easily gathered because their hearts were far from God. Through miracles the people knew that God was arising to help them and there was a great prophet among them. Of course, we know that Jesus is greater than a prophet, yet when He came the people of Israel did not know who He was.

Jesus demonstrated His divine authority and gave signs of who He is so that people would believe in Him. They should have accepted Him as their Messiah. The places that did not accept Him were denounced for not believing in His miracles when they had seen them so clearly. Miracles were the evidence that proved that He is the Son of God. There was healing, deliverance and all kinds of wonderful signs, and that was power evangelism.

We then move into the book of Acts and this is where my second idea of power evangelism comes from. In the book of Acts we see Jesus as the Baptizer in the Holy Spirit. The people of God experienced revival and then they spread the gospel far and wide. The outpouring of the Holy Spirit was so that Christ's followers would receive power to witness for Him. Miracles were used to break areas open for the gospel, such as Philip the evangelist in Samaria; Peter, John and Stephen in their continued work among the Jewish community, and the apostle Paul to the Gentiles.

The apostles sought to establish churches where the presence of God would be manifested, so that those who came to Christian meetings would have to acknowledge the presence and the power of God among them. Power evangelism is like advertising. It is advertising the gospel and who Jesus is. Jesus Christ is the Saviour of the world and the miracle worker. Power evangelism is the power of God touching people's lives as we proclaim the gospel.

2) How is power evangelism practiced by yourself and your church?

I've had miracles happen in my own life which changed me and through that I testify to the reality of God's power and the reality of the Holy Spirit. When you preach that kind of message you have opportunities to pray for people. You practice power evangelism by preaching and praying. We have to be open for God to minister through us to whoever we meet. Whenever an occasion arises for us to speak, preach, witness, share, or pray for people, those are opportunities to practice power evangelism.

Churches that I have been involved with over the years have liked to invite evangelists who walk in this kind of ministry. I myself have been invited to different places to hold similar kinds of meetings. I have benefited greatly from men of God like Bill Subritzky, Weston Carryer and Tony Walker, etc, who have ministries of healing and deliverance; power evangelism ministries.

Most Pentecostal churches give opportunity for people to be prayed for on a frequent basis and allow the Word of God to be preached in this kind of way. But then there are specific times when people with a recognized gift as an evangelist are invited and a more special meeting, gospel outreach type of meeting, is planned.

I have been involved with conducting seminars on power evangelism, so we preach the message, we pray for people, while our faith and confidence is in the presence of the Holy Spirit to confirm the Word of God. We believe for God to change and transform people's lives and for Christians to be anointed and empowered to go out more equipped for evangelism. When we do evangelism we are in partnership with the Holy Spirit, so we look

to Him to speak through us, to minister through us and touch people's lives in various ways to bring people to salvation and to strengthen believers in their faith.

I frequently used to join with an evangelism team that goes to Queen Street and would invite people to come with us back to church to watch a gospel film that evening. I remember an occasion back in 2014 when a young man came with us. As we got nearer to the church he began to tell me that something was telling him not to go into the church. I said to him that it is just a lie of the devil. By the time we arrived at the church he was quite agitated. When we got out of the van I asked him if he would mind if we prayed for him because he really needed it.

Along with another evangelist we prayed for him. He was weeping and he hugged us at the end. He was able to go into the church and listen to the clear message of the gospel. Yet, because he was unwilling to fully surrender his heart to God, it was as if the demons were compelling him to run away and he was being driven to run away. We had to follow after him to bring him back. If you don't know anything about power evangelism you won't know what to make of that kind of situation because in power evangelism you are often confronting the kingdom of darkness. The devil's influence was exposed by the presence of the Holy Spirit.

For that young man to be fully delivered he needed to submit to God and resist the lies of the devil that were going on in his mind. We can do our part, but a person still has to respond to the gospel by their own will. Sometimes it seems as if the devil has got people so bound up that they can't respond, but they have to be willing to be delivered and let go of their sins. That particular young man was holding onto false excuses for smoking marijuana. He knew that God was calling him, but the devil had a foothold in his life and it was as if he didn't want to let the demons go.

Evangelism is a spiritual battle, so we need to believe in God's power and authority all the time. When God is moving in power to reach the lost a lot of deliverance often needs to take place as we rebuke the demonic powers and command them to go in Jesus' name.

3) What weakness have you experienced with the power evangelism approach?

One problem I have seen is that some preachers try to force things to happen and it becomes like putting on a show. It is as if they are trying to make miracles happen in the flesh instead of seeking God and allowing Him to do it. They are trying to make something look as if it is happening when it isn't and they are exaggerating the work.

At one meeting there was an overseas guest speaker and he literally thumped me and hit me on the chest when he prayed for me. He was praying for people down the line and people were falling backwards, but when he prayed for me I didn't fall back so he thumped me in the hope that I would fall, but even then I didn't. It was a hard whack that he gave me. When I didn't fall he then fell on the ground. Then he eventually climbed up on me.

The whole congregation was watching this and there I was at the front with this staggering preacher supporting himself on me. To me it was all fake. Afterwards I spoke to the preacher's wife, who was selling his books at the back of the meeting. I asked her, "Why did he do that?" She said, "Oh, because the power was too great; the power was too great." I was thinking that he wasn't doing that because of God's power; he was putting on a show. The preacher was acting and pretending to fall and then climb up off the floor onto me; clinging to me in a funny way as everyone was watching.

At times meetings can get out of hand and bring confusion to people. That is why the apostle Paul gave specific instructions in regard to the use of the spiritual gifts in a church service. Sometimes it can be hard to know what spirit is operating. Is it the person's own spirit, a demonic spirit, or is it the Holy Spirit? There has to be a certain amount of maturity and wisdom in church leadership not to quench the Holy Spirit on one hand but on the other not to give in to fanaticism and emotional hype.

When God moves in His true power that can produce strong emotions, but you still have to be careful and maintain a right balance of discernment. We don't want to hold God's

power back nor give in to fake or false performances either. I have seen many things that I would question if it is truly of the Spirit of God or if the person needs deliverance from demons even though they think they are giving themselves to the Holy Spirit. Sometimes we have to wait and see what is really going on, but not everything that happens is of God or being handled in the right way.

One situation I faced when working in Africa was that the people I was with there were extremely hungry to see and produce miracles. That really helped me and motivated me a lot to continue focusing on doing healing meetings and to really believe and expect miracles. Good things were happening and prayers were being answered in marvellous ways. But later on I found out that a number of the main leaders I was working with were actually thieves. They used all kinds of lies and deception to cover their greed.

This was very off-putting to discover and it brought the ministry at that time and place to an end. I could no longer work with them and I left that area. It defeated something good that was happening. I then focused on preaching repentance messages more clearly because what is the point of wanting miracles if people aren't actually being transformed and repenting of their sin?

One thing I liked about the ministry of Bill Subritzky (1925-2015) is that he was very good at moving in healing and deliverance for the purpose of opening up people's hearts to listen to the Word of God, to have a clear understanding of what sin is, and why they have to repent. His ministry stands as an example of how power evangelism can be done well to lead people into the kingdom of God.

4) What fruit have you seen with your power evangelism approach?

I've had many occasions where people have been powerfully touched by the presence of the Lord. There have been times when I have met people who did not believe in God, but after praying for them they have believed. That is because God Himself touched them and that is the kind of fruit we are looking for; people acknowledging that God is real, God is true. You can't deny the reality of God when He does a miracle in your life.

Miracles are for the purpose of opening people's heart to hear the gospel, so that unbelievers repent and are saved. The apostle Paul said that the kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power, so that our faith will rest on God's power and not on human wisdom. The Christian faith is based upon the miracle power of God. Jesus Christ has risen from the dead and we are going into all the world to proclaim that miracle! The fruit of salvation comes through believing in Him and proclaiming this message with power so that others will believe.

One of my aims is to do large scale gospel crusades, something like what evangelist Reinhard Bonnke has done. It takes a lot of work to build a ministry with that kind of nation shaking influence. I'm still in the early stages of developing the ministry, but the aim is there to reach the multitudes and to shake nations.

In Africa and Asia you are going to have people wanting prayer all the time because in those places people are spiritually inclined and in need, whether saved or not. The best fruit comes through opportunities to demonstrate the presence of God and lead people to salvation. It is always a blessing when someone is healed or delivered or baptised in the Holy Spirit. It is always wonderful when someone comes into a deeper relationship with the Lord, but what I am looking for most is eventually seeing people in Heaven. Therefore we have to use power evangelism to make disciples.

You don't reap the harvest without sowing the seed. It is on the Day of Judgment that we will see the real fruit of our labours. As we are faithful in doing what Jesus has called us to do and as we remain in Him we are producing fruit all the time. Some of the gospel crusades I've been involved in were used to plant churches. The hope is that these churches will continue being built up and remain strong until the coming of the Lord.

5) What makes it effective in different regions?

The more hunger there is for God and a willingness to be prayed for among the people, there you find more opportunities to minister and it is more effective. Africa, Asia and the Pacific, where I have worked, these places are ripe harvest fields. There can be different times and seasons in different countries, but there are so many countries where the time of harvest is now.

I was a crusade organizer for Bill Subritzky's ministry (2008-2009) and having done evangelism in a lot of countries myself I found that in many places there is a real hunger for gospel crusades and an expectation of miracles. Then in other countries evangelism is hard going and unfortunately the church can become quite unevangelistic in those places. The church becomes satisfied doing meetings within its four walls and not much emphasis is placed on reaching out.

The apostle Paul worked harder than the other apostles and that is why God used him in a greater way. If you want to be effective in evangelism you have to do the hard work. Some countries, such as Nepal, where their history of Christianity is relatively short, there was a hunger and a desire among the Christians to do gospel crusades because it was a novelty and something new. In places like India you can do gospel crusades all over the place because of the mass population; Africa also.

Gospel crusades have always been more effective in the poorer countries. Jesus said that He was anointed to preach the gospel to the poor. In poor areas with high populations you will get a large crowd more easily. Crusade evangelism is really power evangelism. The potential in doing this kind of work is still huge.

6) What are the difficulties with power evangelism?

One difficulty is ministering to people who are not healed or even die after you have prayed for them. This is where perseverance and seeking God for His direction is definitely needed. If you give up when someone is not healed you are not going to get the breakthrough. It is a spiritual battle to breakthrough in certain places. When you are doing evangelism on a larger scale you need good prayer support and intercession going on. You need prayer teams.

A difficulty also is the financial side of raising funds for doing large scale crusades. When you move beyond one to one evangelism or small church meetings, you have got the issue of finance, so you need people's hearts awakened to the importance and effectiveness of doing gospel crusades and giving towards it. In some places church leaders can be quite negative about the results of doing crusades. Having been a crusade organizer and worked with many churches I know something of the difficulties of getting churches on board.

Then there is also the issue of the follow up programme afterwards. Many churches think that they can do follow up effectively but in fact they can't. They think they know how to disciple people but many of them don't. A lot of fruit has been lost because churches don't know how to follow up new believers.

It is hard to find churches that are really serious about evangelism in the Western world. We mainly preach to ourselves because preaching to unbelievers is difficult. There are so many areas where our evangelism efforts need to be improved. For a start, most churches are not interested in employing evangelists or making evangelism to unbelievers a top priority. Churches should employ evangelists just as much as they employ pastors. Most churches never employ evangelists, so the vision and potential of what the ministry of the evangelist can really do is sadly lacking and is missed out.

A lot of improvements need to be made in the evangelists themselves and in how we work with churches. We have to enlarge our vision of what can be accomplished in seeking and saving the lost. A country like New Zealand needs a major increase in power evangelism and in supporting the ministries that do it.