

# THE PENTECOST

ISSUE #29 December 2008



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*Welcome to December's issue of The Pentecost. A couple of times a year we dedicate an entire issue to a specific Christian leader or a specific revival. We always choose someone whom God has used in a great way and who has lived an inspiring life. One such life which God used in revival was that of Maria Woodworth-Etter. It is a privilege to tell her story. Open your hearts to being encouraged and challenged by this remarkable life!*

*Shawn Stevens*

*Hello everyone this is an exciting issue that will take us back in history to the 1800s. I pray that as you read you are encouraged to believe God to do great things through you, as He did with Maria Woodworth-Etter, remembering that Jesus never changes so He is still moving and working in mighty ways today as He did back then.*

*Ramona Stevens*

**Cover Art by Stephen Chen**

## IN THIS ISSUE

THE MINISTRY OF  
MARIA WOODWORTH-ETTER



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## THE MINISTRY OF MARIA WOODWORTH-ETTER

“Earth is receding – heaven is opening – God is calling” thundered the revivalist as the attention of her audience was arrested by her apocalyptic warnings. They called her the “Trance Evangelist.” This was a fitting title for a woman who frequently received soul-shaking revelations while suspended in a trance-like state. The title of “evangelist” was equally fitting for she won thousands from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of Christ. She was authentic, candid and courageous; there was nothing ordinary about Maria Woodworth-Etter.

Maria was born in New Lisbon, Ohio, on July 22, 1844. She was the fourth daughter of Samuel and Matilda Underwood, one of eight children. She was not born into a Christian home, however, the family did join a church in 1854. A year later, Mr. Underwood died and the family experienced deep sorrow. Maria and her sisters worked during the week to provide for the large impoverished family. When she heard the gospel preached at church, she was very moved by it and decided that she wanted to be a Christian. Arrangements were made for her to be baptized in a creek, before a large crowd. As Maria was being baptized, she had a wonderful conversion experience.<sup>1</sup> She says, “I asked the Lord to save me fully, trusting myself in His hands; and while going into the water, a light came over me, and I was converted. The people saw the change and said I had fainted.”<sup>2</sup> Soon after her conversion, Maria heard the voice of Jesus calling her to go into evangelistic work. She did not respond to this call for many years. She married a Mr. Woodworth and they had six children.<sup>3</sup> They were a family and the future looked bright for the Woodworth home.

The future, however, had some unexpected turns. Maria’s (now Mrs. Woodworth) health had failed and although she longed to attend church, she was not able to. From her bed she would hear the church bells ringing and would cry herself to sleep. Not only did her health fail, but the health of one of her sons failed also. As he lay dying, he said to Woodworth; “Mamma, do not weep for me; I am going to a better world.”<sup>4</sup> Woodworth comments in these words; “It almost broke my heart to lay him away in the cold grave; but I could see the loving hands of God and hear Him calling me to build up higher, to set my affections on heavenly things and not on things of the earth.”<sup>5</sup> The tragedy was repeated a year later as Woodworth’s baby, Freddy,

was taken by death as well. Around this time, Woodworth’s seven-year old daughter, Georgie, was converted. Sadly, she developed the disease, scrofula, and suffered painfully from its effects. She sent messages to her Sunday school teacher, fellow students and friends telling them to meet her in heaven. One day, after eight months of struggling with the disease, she said to Woodworth; “Mamma, I’m going to leave you this week.”<sup>6</sup> On the last day of that week, Georgie died. As she was passing, she said to Woodworth; “O Mamma, I see Jesus and the angels; I see my little brothers; they have come for me.”<sup>7</sup> Woodworth again comments; “It was like death to part with my darling. But Jesus was very precious to my soul. Heaven was nearer, Christ was dearer than ever before. I had one more treasure in glory.”<sup>8</sup> Three weeks before Georgie died, Woodworth had given birth to a girl, Gertie. Gertie lived for only four months and died also.

Heaven and Christ were nearer than ever to Woodworth as she herself hung between life and death. During this time, she had a number of visions. She would see heaven. She would also see herself pleading with sinners to come to Jesus.<sup>9</sup> God was again calling her to the work of the ministry. Woodworth wrestled with not wanting to fulfill her calling. Part of her wanted to die and go to be with the Lord and with her children who had passed on. However, she promised the Lord that if He would restore her health and prepare her for the work that she must do, she would endeavor to accomplish it. Immediately, her health began to recover.<sup>10</sup>

Even after making this commitment to the Lord, she feared stepping out into the work. The Lord gave her a very sobering vision. She says:

*“Then the Lord, in a vision, caused me to see the bottomless pit, open in all its horror and woe. There was weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth. It was surrounded by a great multitude of people who seemed unconscious of their danger; and without a moments warning, they would tumble into this awful place. I was above the people on a narrow plank-walk, which wound up toward heaven; and I was exhorting and pleading with the people to come up onto the plank and escape that awful place. Several started. There was a beautiful bright light above me, and I was encouraging them to follow that light and they would go straight to heaven.”<sup>11</sup>*

This vision deeply impressed upon her the responsibility of her calling. More sorrows were ahead for Woodworth. This time her six-year old son, Willie, became ill. He knew that he was not

going to recover and told Woodworth and the others that he was going to be with Jesus. He soon died. Woodworth comments: He was the joy of my life, nearly seven years old. He was very bright for one of his age – in fact, far beyond his years. He was the pet of the whole neighborhood ... This sad bereavement nearly took my life. The dear Savior was never so near and real to me before. He was by my side and seemed to bear me up in His loving arms. I could say, "The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord."<sup>12</sup>

By His grace, the Lord carried Woodworth through experiences such as this. Woodworth now had one remaining daughter, sixteen-year old Lizzie. The Lord's grace was about to show itself in another way. Woodworth says that she felt unqualified for the work that she was called to do. In simple faith, she asked the Lord to anoint her for service. In answer to this prayer, she had a wonderful experience. She says: The power of The Holy Ghost came down as a cloud. It was brighter than the sun. I was covered and wrapped up in it. My body was as light as the air. It seemed that heaven came down. I was baptized with the Holy Ghost and fire and power, which have never left me. Oh praise The Lord! There was liquid fire, and the angels were all around and the fire and the glory. It is through the Lord Jesus Christ and by this power, that I have stood before hundreds of thousands of men and women, proclaiming the unsearchable riches of Christ.<sup>13</sup>

The time had come; Woodworth stepped out in faith. She held a small meeting in her home town and began preaching on the text " ... Set thine house in order; for thou shalt die, and not live." (2 Kings 20.1; Isaiah 38.1). As she was preaching, all fear of man left her and her words rang with greater and greater conviction. She continued holding meetings for a few days and twenty souls were converted. Encouraged by this, she held more meetings and, when preaching, she experienced the same power that she had received when she was baptized in the Holy Ghost. The glory of God seemed to descend and fill the meeting houses.<sup>14</sup>

Woodworth shares further that: I started out after God baptized me in the Holy Ghost. I knew God was calling me for public service. I knew I would die unless God came to me like He did to the fishermen. I told the Lord if He would baptize me with power and knowledge that I would undertake the work. I would go to the ends of the earth and live a thousand years if I might take one soul to heaven. So the Lord wonderfully baptized me and sent me out.<sup>15</sup>

This was Woodworth's experience and determination as she set out to begin her ministry and preaching work. One thing that characterized her ministry work was her fiery preaching. On one occasion, she says: I believe in preaching in such a way that the power of God will make people tremble and come up to the front to do His will. 'The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom...' [Psalm 111:10]. The first we know of God, there is a holy awe that comes over us. When we want God to work, to cause His presence to be felt in our midst, we must feel He has the power to work among His people; and it is a terrible thing to resist. We must get on the full armor and rush into the battle. Press the battle to the gates. Vain is the help of man. There is no shelter except in the wounded side of Jesus. It is the only place on earth to which we can flee. We learn there the way of righteousness, and we know what awaits the sinner if he does not accept this shelter.<sup>16</sup>

As well as Woodworth's ministry being characterized by fiery preaching, it was also characterized by a very peculiar feature. Many times while she was ministering, Woodworth would freeze in a trance. She sometimes would stay in this trance-like state for long periods of time, even hours. Upon awakening from the trance, she would share with her audience visions that she had just seen. Often these visions were of heaven and hell. Many in her audiences were shaken up by these sobering visions. If it wasn't peculiar enough for her to go into a trance, it was equally peculiar for the very same thing to happen to attendees of the meetings. The newspapers began calling her the "Trance Evangelist." Many accused her of using hypnotism. She vehemently denied this, declaring that she did not use hypnotism and that the trances in her meetings were by the power of God. She said; "I know nothing about hypnotic power. I never saw a person hypnotized; but I do know something of the power of God, of the power of the Holy Ghost."<sup>17</sup>

Commenting on these trances, in 1885, a newspaper reporter for the Cincinnati Enquirer wrote: I have endeavored to give a true and impartial account of the very remarkable revival of religion at the Methodist Episcopal Church in this city, and I am impressed with the magnitude of the undertaking, at present more than ever before, and am convinced that it is beyond the "ken of tongue or pen," to give an accurate description of the scenes enacted at each meeting. Scores have been stricken down at these meetings, and whatever form the limbs or body chanced to

assume, in that position, immovable as a statue, they remained – sometimes the hand uplifted far above the head, the eyes open wide, and not a muscle of the entire body moved; they were as immovable as in death.<sup>18</sup> Many, like this reporter, were shocked, having never seen scenes like this before. The Cincinnati Enquirer was not the only newspaper running articles on Woodworth. In that same year of 1885, the Indianapolis Journal printed these observations, along with some of Woodworth's preaching: On yesterday Mrs. Woodworth opened services by singing, Let Me in the Kingdom. Her gestures, voice and countenance seem not of earth, and she sees her crown almost within her grasp. Her text was Acts 2:17: '...your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams.' She said the last prophecy is being fulfilled. 'Signs and wonders follow God's Word in His way. Don't expect blessing in your way, but cry, 'What shall I do?' And be ye also as clay in the potter's hands. Remember you are doing business for eternity. Oh, do it well. May God make sinners sin-sick and place great thorns in their pillows. Sinners, don't resist the Spirit, You can resist until the key is turned on your heart. Don't stray away from God. Don't cross the deadline. Change your course; There are breakers ahead. Leave the poor old stranded wreck and get into our boat. It's a lifeboat. Christ is our pilot; He never leaves the helm. He will guide us safely into port. Passage is free for all. We will soon sail for the kingdom. Your country is in the sky. Oh, come, come now.' Many lay entranced for hours. Those who resisted most were first stricken.

Many related visions they had seen...<sup>19</sup> Newspaper reports, such as these, stirred the curiosity of the public and they continued to come to the meetings. Coming to the meetings, attendees often stayed for hours. A service could run from 9 A.M. in the morning until 3 P.M. in the afternoon or, on another occasion, from 4 P.M. until 9 P.M.<sup>20</sup> Woodworth continued to be as controversial as ever and The Weekly Review Democrat of Indiana called her "a bull in a china shop."<sup>21</sup> Although seen as controversial, Woodworth was simply expressing the spirit of revival which so filled her life. She said: In these last days when God is pouring out His Spirit in great cloud bursts and tidal waves from the floodgates of heaven and the great river of life is flooding our spirit and body and baptizing us with fire and resurrection life and divine energy, the Lord is doing his acts. His strange acts, which include dancing in the Spirit and speaking in other tongues and many other operations and

gifts. The Holy Ghost is confirming the last message of the coming King, with great signs and wonders and miracles.<sup>22</sup>

In light of such an outpouring of God's Spirit, Woodworth pleaded with people to put themselves in a position where they could receive from the Lord. She said further: Sometimes the Holy Ghost comes like a mighty rushing wind from heaven and makes a great commotion among the people, sometimes silently. He comes to us here. You want to take down your umbrellas and get your buckets right side up. God will fill the vessels and make you a powerhouse for Him; Then God will show Himself mighty to pull down the strongholds of the devil and build up the kingdom of Christ. You will have power to preach, and signs and wonders will be wrought as in the days of the apostles. The Lord was with them. He was invisible but He was with them, confirming the Word with signs and wonders; and He will never forsake us if we obey Him.<sup>23</sup> One sign and wonder that continued to confirm Woodworth's preaching was the trances. Skeptics abounded and voiced their cynicism. One reporter said that revival participants "were temporarily out of their heads" and "indulged in the most extravagant demonstrations."<sup>24</sup> One pastor, Silas Comfort, offered this explanation for the trances; "Religious catalepsy – a suspension more or less of the functions of the cerebrum, attended by an abnormal activity of the cerebrum: the rational powers – the will, judgment, or reason – are temporarily put in abeyance and the involuntary susceptibilities left subject to the prevailing impression or influence."<sup>25</sup>

Woodworth insisted that it was the power of God. In one Indianapolis meeting, in 1885, she went into a trance at 2.30 in the afternoon and did not come out of it until 8.30 that night. People left the meeting to tell others what was going on and hundreds more came to see what would happen next. Woodworth wasn't the only one in a trance. The daughter of a Mr. John Malone was affected in a similar way. Mr. Malone was not present at the meeting but word was brought to him. He was known to have a violent temper and when he heard the news, he vowed to take vengeance upon Mrs. Woodworth and her team. Marching into the church, however, he had a change of heart and The Indianapolis Times reports, "in ten minutes he was the noisiest convert in town, praising the Lord and shouting that he was glad he had found Christ."<sup>26</sup>

There would be many more converts. On at least one occasion, a large courthouse was used to try to accommodate the

crowd. Packed to suffocation, crowds pressed in to hear the revivalist. The Kokomo Gazette Tribune, in 1885, reported on one Woodworth meeting which started at 10 o'clock in the morning and closed at 11 o'clock that night. They estimated that the night crowd was between 2,500 and 3,000.<sup>27</sup>

Whether ministering to attentive or hostile crowds, Woodworth's determination was the same. A very rough crowd came to Woodworth's tent meeting in Kerry Patch. They were smoking cigars, lighting firecrackers and carrying pistols and clubs. Some of them were half drunk. Woodworth's assistants tried talking to them, only to have stones thrown at them. At this, Woodworth remarked; "God has placed us here and by His grace we'll stay ... we will never give up and if they take us out of the tent before we are ready, they will take us out dead."<sup>28</sup>

Woodworth told her assistants to lead in prayer and assured them that God would answer. After a while, God's presence seemed to descend into the tent and was fearfully felt by everyone present. Next, Woodworth said; " I arose and stood before them. I raised my hand in the name of the Lord and commanded them to listen. I said that the Lord had sent me there to do them good and I would not leave until the Lord told me to, when our work was done."<sup>29</sup> The fear of God came upon men in an even greater way and some stood there with their mouths open, afraid to move.<sup>30</sup>

Brave declarations such as this were common for Woodworth. She once said;

*"The righteous are as bold as a lion,' not the boldness of sin, but a holy, gentle boldness. We are not afraid what the people will say or do unto us. We love their souls; we have found the Lord, have tasted of 'the powers of the world to come.'"*<sup>31</sup>

The revival meetings did not consist solely of trances and powerful preaching, but also of miracles of healing. Woodworth would pray for the sick in her meetings. Report after report would come back testifying of divine healing. In 1914, a Dr. John Bowen came to one of Woodworth's meetings. Two years previously, he had been thrown from a horse buggy and sustained serious injuries. These injuries included a fractured skull, a fracture of his right fibula and internal injuries. Over time, his condition worsened as his heart enlarged and his skin turned blue from circulation problems. Being a doctor himself, he knew that he could not live long. Other doctors confirmed this

prognosis. At the revival meeting, Woodworth prayed for him and he was instantly healed. Two years later, he wrote that he was still healed and that he has seen other people healed of things such as consumption, pellagra, Brite's disease, cancer, paralysis, blindness and valvular heart trouble. He had continued to monitor the conditions of these ones and reported that after two years they were still healed.<sup>32</sup>

Other testimonies began to spread. In one of Woodworth's meetings in Atlanta a woman who had been born deaf and dumb was healed. Overwhelmed with joy, she began to dance and went over to a piano which was being played. She was hearing music for the first time in her life and was very much affected by the sound of it.<sup>33</sup>

Another one to be deeply affected was an alcoholic man who came to one of Woodworth's tent meetings in Massachusetts. He had an encounter with God, was saved, healed from several chronic ailments and permanently delivered from alcoholism. He returned home to Connecticut a completely changed man. The next morning, he was baptized in the Holy Spirit and was speaking in tongues. In a few months, all the members of his family who were old enough to understand were baptized in the Holy Spirit. Eventually seven of his ten living children attended Bible College, five married ministers and two became missionaries. Six of the grandchildren also went on to full-time ministry.<sup>34</sup>

Sadly, there were still many skeptics who disbelieved in the spiritual experiences occurring in the revival meetings. Woodworth pleaded with them: So the working of the Holy Ghost is foolishness to the natural mind. He is not discerned by the natural man; but you go to God and get the oil of heaven, and you will have light on the blessed Word of God. God will talk to your heart, and Christ will be real and salvation will be real and heaven will be real because the Spirit of God will let you down into the deep things of God. Glory to God!<sup>35</sup>

She further maintained that:

Jesus did many mighty works, and He told the apostles they should do greater things than these if they believed on Him. Men and women, God wants you to get into that place. Don't you see God works through human instrumentality? God will use us if we are swallowed up in Him.<sup>36</sup> In 1887, Woodworth began meetings in Urbana, Illinois. In the audience was a certain lawyer named Mr.

Wright. Woodworth had been told of his coming ahead of time and in the meetings she pleaded strongly with him to confess his sins. Wright became convicted as Woodworth continued to press. Other attendees fell on their knees and began praying for Wright's soul. Soon, tears streaming down his face, he leaped to his feet, waving his arms and shouting loudly. He proceeded onto the platform, stood beside Woodworth, and began calling to others in the crowd, imploring them to lay down the things of the world and to seek a place in God's kingdom.<sup>37</sup>

Woodworth continued on to the town of Boiling Springs, seven miles northwest of St. Louis. Again, a wonderful revival broke out. The St. Louis Daily Globe-Democrat reported that "... Mrs. Maria B. Woodworth, a woman whose intense enthusiasm, eloquent power of speech and miraculous cures of the physically afflicted have occasioned more excitement among the people of Ohio, Indiana and Illinois than has ever been known."<sup>38</sup>

There would be more meetings in 1888 and the Springfield Journal (IL) reported a wonderful healing at Oak Ridge Park. A ten-year old girl with a spinal disease was brought to the meetings. Her condition was so severe that she had not been able to walk, or even sit alone, for the past four months. After receiving prayer, she was able to walk around the tent and left the meeting walking side-by-side with her parents.<sup>39</sup> While meetings were still being held at Oak Ridge Park, newspaper reporters began questioning attendees. One man said; "Yes, I believe it. I went out without any confidence at all in the reports. I saw a man over ninety years old, who had not walked for eight years on account of rheumatism, and was brought to the tent on a litter, got up and walked about. I had to believe."<sup>40</sup>

While attendees such as this man were convinced by what they saw, many others were not. In fact, some of Woodworth's detractors were intent on having her shut down. Doctors Wellington Adams and Theodore Diller made application to the probate court to inquire into the mental condition of Woodworth. Diller said; "We thought that the performances in that tent ought to be stopped, either by abatement as a nuisance or by an inquiry into the mental condition of Mrs. Woodworth, whom we regard as undoubtedly insane."<sup>41</sup> Diller was asked why he believed Woodworth was insane. He responded that it was because she had visions, she believed the visions as being reality, she believed that she had received direct commands from God, and that she was intensely

egotistical.<sup>42</sup>

Curious about what Woodworth's response to these allegations would be, the St. Louis Post-Dispatch interviewed her. They specifically asked her to comment on her visions as being grounds for insanity. She answered by pointing out that other historic Christian leaders, such as the apostles John, Peter and Paul, also saw visions. The interviewer then suggested that Woodworth's prosecutors would probably respond by saying that the apostles lived in ancient times and that conditions today are not the same as they were then. Woodworth replied that John Wesley hadn't lived in remote ages and that he had seen visions. She protested that you can't lock up everyone who has seen a vision and, also, that the doctors had not been accurate in recounting what she saw.<sup>43</sup>

When news of Woodworth's dispute made the papers, everywhere people began taking sides. Those critical of Woodworth claimed that she was mentally unsound and incapable of managing her affairs. However, many others rose to her defense during this time. The St. Louis Republic printed an article blasting two other doctors, Clyster and Jalap, who were attempting to find Woodworth insane. Their medical analysis was denounced as quackery. The paper declared that: One of the most meddlesome and mischievous pieces of quackery which St. Louis has seen in many a day is the attempt of Doctors Clyster and Jalap to have Mrs. Woodworth, 'the Pentecostal evangelist,' committed as insane. The proceedings which these busybodies have begun are at the expense of the public. A great many witnesses are likely to be summoned and a heavy bill of costs made for the taxpayers for no other purpose than filling the newspapers with the names of Doctors Clyster and Jalap. The country is full of 'medical colleges' which from year to year are turning out hundreds and thousands of doctors – good, bad, and indifferent – on the community. As long as the bad and indifferent have their diplomas and are 'regular,' the public is defenseless against them. They are free to pursue their course of quackery virtually unchecked ... Ordinarily this may be treated as a jest, but when the effort to obtain free advertising takes the form of cowardly annoyance to a defenseless woman, who, however ignorant and unconventional she may be, is certainly trying to do what good she can, it deserves the unqualified condemnation of all who love fair play.<sup>44</sup>

Throughout this difficult time, Mrs. Woodworth continued

to hold meetings. The publicity about the dispute had drawn even more crowds. One St. Louis reporter described a meeting in these words: "A crowd which assembled at Mrs. Woodworth's evangelical tent last evening was even larger than the night before. The place was packed with a hot, restless, and perspiring mass of humanity, many being attracted thither by the account of the proceedings against her published in the papers. The service was one of prayer and song. The meeting was one of the most disorderly that has ever been witnessed under the tent, for no sooner would someone throw up his or her hands in a religious 'trance,' than the crowd would stand up on the seats, push forward, and do everything but literally climb over each other to see the person. Mrs. Woodworth's face had a harassed or troubled look, but she still possessed the same pleasant welcoming smile which she always wears; and she walked up and down the platform making the same graceful curving gestures which many claim to be her method of hypnotizing her followers."<sup>45</sup>

The judge who would hear the case was Gabriel Woerner. According to the Law of Inquiry, written information was to be given to a probate court on the unsoundness of an individual's mind and, if the court found the information to be a satisfactory cause for the exercise of its jurisdiction, further enquiry was to result. The proceedings began and doctors Adams and Diller argued tenaciously that Mrs. Woodworth was insane. Judge Woerner essentially, though not formally, dismissed the case saying that he did not think that he would be justified in having her declared insane. He said that if Mrs. Woodworth was a public nuisance, she should be tried by a different tribunal than his court. His advice to the doctors was to change the nature of their actions and consult a lawyer. Dr. Adams later said to the press that he was not going to pursue further prosecution of Mrs. Woodworth as a public nuisance. However, he was going to request that the legislature of the government would pass a law banning all exhibitions of hypnotism and its public use.<sup>46</sup>

Now that Woodworth was cleared, she resumed her work. One night, very shortly after this, a remarkable healing occurred. A Mr. Thomas Farley, who was debilitated by rheumatism, was wheeled to the tent in a furniture delivery vehicle. He was lifted out and helped up to the platform. Mrs. Woodworth asked him if he had faith in Christ's power to work miracles. He responded that he did. Mrs. Woodworth cried out, "Rise up and walk" and, at once,

Mr. Farley got up, left his cane behind him, left the tent and was greatly relieved. He was seen with his arms lifted up, praising God loudly.<sup>47</sup> The news of Farley's healing spread widely. He was well-known in his community, having served on the police force for nineteen years. Many rejoiced with him. Further reports in defense of Mrs. Woodworth began showing up in the papers. The Kansas Democrat wrote that: "...a doctor, or any other man of science who does not carry the conscious love and Spirit of God in soul 'every day and every hour,' is no more competent to pass judgment on spiritual teachings and spiritual experiences than a mustang pony on the plains of Mexico. He who undertakes to analyze and define the nature and effects of the spiritual inflowing of divine life, love, and glory into a human soul or body by the use of his chemical retort, microscope, or galvanic battery will come as far short of his undertaking and will show as much ignorance of his subject as the little boy who should attempt to explain and illustrate planetary speed and planetary distances by the speed of his kite and the length of his kite string."<sup>48</sup>

Many people continued to believe in Mrs. Woodworth and her evangelistic work continued to expand. By July of 1891, it was reported that she had established thirteen churches. She had held meetings throughout the country from Pennsylvania to California, with most of her time being spent in Ohio and Illinois.<sup>49</sup>

In June of that year, she was holding meetings in Topeka, Kansas. Crowds ranging from three-to-fifteen-hundred came to the meetings and Mrs. Woodworth preached between one and two sermons a day for weeks on end. The Topeka Daily Capital said that she: "... is unquestionably a very sincere and unselfish Christian woman, devoting her life to bringing men and women to the faith of Christ. She claims no unusual power for herself. Her addresses are plain, forcible, and earnest, reaching the heart of common people. The 'power,' which has thrown a number of converts into fits or trances, she claims to be the manifestation of the divine Spirit."<sup>50</sup>

Another person from the media to commend Woodworth was C. E. Kalb. He writes: I would like to say a few words in regard to the work of Mrs. Woodworth. When she held her meetings at Springfield, Ill., I was city editor of the Daily Monitor. I visited her meetings; and though not a Christian myself but a church member, I felt that she was preaching the true Gospel .... The people there had trances and many would shout. I have seen them falling in trances faster than I could count them and in all parts of the



audience. That was three years ago and not one of them has gone crazy, but instead they have become intelligent, sober, and industrious and are still filled with the Holy Ghost.<sup>51</sup>

With many people coming to Christ and being filled with the Holy Ghost, there was a need to baptize these converts. On one occasion, in August 1891, ninety-one members of Woodworth's church, The Church of God, were baptized by immersion in the Kansas River. This spectacle was observed by a crowd of about five thousand people.<sup>52</sup>

Converts continued to be baptized and Mrs. Woodworth continued traveling from city to city with her tent. In 1894, the Columbus Gazette reported that "People who are afflicted with all manner of diseases come in hope of being relieved, and many go away professing to be healed. Cancers, tumors, bad cases of rheumatism, Bright's disease, heart trouble, everything and anything that can be mentioned in the catalogue of ills that flesh is heir to, have been brought to this wonderful woman, and she claims and the patients assert that they are entirely healed."<sup>53</sup> One desperate woman, diagnosed with cancer, who had been given up to die by fifteen doctors and could not eat or sit up, came to a meeting. She was healed and later found herself able to eat heartily and walk to the meetings.<sup>54</sup>

As more people were healed, crowds would come even in cold and stormy winter weather. Some traveled long distances to participate in the meetings. Woodworth continued to minister with zeal and preach with intensity. One writer reported that "She wields the sword of the Spirit with a strong arm, boldly and fearlessly defying the world to prove that the gifts and power of the Holy Ghost are not with the church today as in apostolic times."<sup>55</sup> In one meeting in Indiana, visitor Miss Pearl May went into a trance and remained in that state for over an hour. When she came out of it she said that she had seen a vision of heaven.<sup>56</sup> Another interesting phenomena to come out of the meetings were spiritual songs given spontaneously, some by means of tongues and interpretations. If these songs had all been written down, one commenter said that they would fill a hymn book.<sup>57</sup>

In 1889, Mrs. Woodworth and her husband set out for California to hold meetings. It was in California that Mrs. Woodworth learned the terrible news that her husband had committed adultery. He went back to the Midwest, divorced Mrs. Woodworth, and married a sixteen-year old woman. One month after the marriage,

he died of typhoid fever.<sup>58</sup> After Mr. Woodworth's death, Maria Woodworth remarried in 1902. She says very little about this, other than; "On the first day of January, 1902, I married Mr. S. P. Etter of Hot Springs, Arkansas."<sup>59</sup>

One more city where Woodworth, now Mrs. Etter, saw great success was Dallas, Texas. In 1912, she held services there. One participant commented: The meetings are marvelous, cannot describe them. They are full of power and the presence of God. Persons get messages in tongues from God and others interpret; oh, such precious loving messages! Jesus is seen walking in the midst; angels are seen; fire lights are seen by saints and sinners. Very little preaching; volumes of praise, much prayer, and some testimony. People here from twenty states, letters from over the ocean. I have never seen so much simplicity, love and unity.<sup>60</sup>

Mrs. Etter was well-loved and was enjoying great victory in her ministry. However, more trouble lay ahead of her. On August 19, 1913, one of her meetings was interrupted when a police chief arose from the audience, walked up onto the pulpit and arrested Mrs. Etter. The charges brought against her were that she was obtaining money under false pretenses. It was argued that Mrs. Etter received money as payment for cures. Not every physically afflicted meeting attendee was healed and some considered Etter to be a fraud. Etter again found herself in court. There she heard the testimony of one blind man who had not been healed. However, this was followed by numerous testimonies from those who were, indeed, healed. After hearing more than twelve testimonies of actual healings, Judge Kingsbury was left with much to think about. One witness, Jessie Van Husen, testified of how she had suffered for years as a result of a train accident which left her crippled and in constant pain. In Mrs. Etter's meeting she was healed and her nurse was present to affirm this report.<sup>61</sup> Mrs. Van Husen had walked to the witness stand without assistance and appeared to be in perfect health. Another person, Mrs. Frederick A. Peck, ascended the witness stand and testified of being healed of an illness that had afflicted her for seventeen years. She said, further, that she had never heard Mrs. Etter, or her co-workers, ask for money in exchange for healings. Witness after witness told of their experiences of being healed.<sup>62</sup> The sixty-nine year old Mrs. Etter, herself, took the stand and unashamedly declared her testimony

to the court. In the end, Judge MacFarland simply ruled that minors were not to participate in the excitement of the meetings.<sup>63</sup>

Etter's meetings resumed and men, women and children continued to press into the tent. The Topeka Daily Capital almost immediately published the story of a thirteen-year old girl who, during an evening meeting, was found lying on the straw-covered ground, before the altar with her hands shaking and extended into the air.<sup>64</sup> No prosecution was made over this. While more reports of healings were being made, the health of Etter's own husband was deteriorating. He was over seventy years old and rheumatism had left him with the need for crutches and he was confined to the house.<sup>65</sup> On August 29, 1914, The Christian Evangel published the notice of his death.<sup>66</sup>

Mrs. Etter, though grieving her husband's death, still continued on through this difficult time of loss. More difficulties were around the corner. Etter's own health began to decline and, on the 20th of November, 1914, her doctor found her with a temperature of 102 and a pulse rate of 100. This was seriously irregular and the doctor was very concerned. However, in the ensuing days both her temperature and her pulse rate dropped and she completely recovered. According to her doctor, she "... passed through what is ordinarily fatal in sixty percent of persons seventy-two years of age."<sup>67</sup> Immediately following this, Etter had a vision in which she saw the Lord seated on a great white horse and holding a sword in His hand. He had communicated to her that He had conquered death and disease and He was sending Etter forth again in great power. He told her that He would be with her.<sup>68</sup> She continued on to hold meetings in Florida and there were more reports of salvation and healing.

Despite beautiful stories of salvation and healing, again some took offense. In August of 1915, Etter was back in Topeka, Kansas. Judge MacFarland sent word to her, reminding her of his previous ruling that children under sixteen years of age were not permitted to participate in the meetings. That evening a ten-year old boy was brought to the meeting by his mother. There was a great uproar as a police detective and a probation officer walked up to him and removed him from the service. Judge MacFarland then ordered that the mother be taken to a detention home. A court date was arranged and Mrs. Mary Romer appeared before the judge on charges of being a delinquent parent. Under great strain, she told MacFarland; "Judge I took my child to see Jesus. Glory to God, I

found Him two years ago and you or anyone else can't take Him away from me. And I wanted my child to find Jesus, and that is why I took him."<sup>69</sup> MacFarland told Romer that he was not trying to keep her away from the meetings. However, he believed that Etter's meetings were not a proper place for children. He would not release Romer's son to her unless she promised not to take him to the meetings. Under great pressure, Romer finally agreed not to bring him to Etter's tent.<sup>70</sup>

MacFarland was intent on doing more than breaking the will of one mother. Along with the mayor, the chief of police and several other police officers, he came to one of Etter's meetings. The mayor warned Etter that the frenzied behavior of Etter's converts had to be eliminated from their services. He said that he would not interfere as long as the crowd worshipped quietly, in an orderly way. However, if converts were found rolling on the floor or going into excited trances, he would be forced to close the meetings. This would also result in Etter being banned from conducting other meetings in any part of the city.<sup>71</sup> Etter continued holding meetings. One eventful service saw fourteen people claim that they had been healed from chronic afflictions. In that same service, several benches had been broken by the crowd. The next morning the paper headlines read; "Holy Rollers Break Benches From Fervor." No prosecution of Mrs. Etter occurred over this incident. She continued on to Colorado.<sup>72</sup>

Participants continued to be touched by God at Etter's meetings. One pastor, participating in some meetings held in Michigan, wrote:

Last night, the third night of the meeting, the power of God fell like large drops of rain all over the tent. Saints were praying, weeping, shouting all over the congregation as the power fell upon them. A woman back in the audience came hastily forward wither friend to the altar and began to weep and pray her way through to God. In just a few minutes the power fell on her. She rose and almost ran up onto the platform to Sister Etter and asked her to forgive her for speaking evil against her and of the power of God, saying that she thought it was hypnotic power and that she prayed for God to smite her if it was not His power. God's smiting power came, but it fell on her so that with heavy tears and prayer she asked God to forgive her for speaking evil of His power.<sup>73</sup>

While others would have retired a long time ago, the  
10 seventy-three year old Mrs. Etter came to Los Angeles and began

holding services. Immediately, a mighty revival broke out. This was historic revival territory and people began thinking of Etter's meetings as the second Azusa. One witness said: From the first meeting, which was on Saturday night, to the present writing, it has been one wave of glory and power after another, each succeeding wave rising higher than the former. The result has been that many who were far out on the sea of life without chart or compass have been brought ashore and anchored in the haven of eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. Many backsliders have been reclaimed, many believers baptized in the Holy Ghost, and many sick ones healed. The love, the unity, and the sweet fellowship is deep beyond description. Many of the most remarkable messages in tongues and interpretations that we have ever heard have been coming forth almost daily.<sup>74</sup>

While many were experiencing wave after wave of power and glory, others were offended. History was about to repeat itself. Etter and an assistant were arrested on charges of disturbing the peace and were taken to the police station. Some of the officers told her that they were ashamed to have had to make the arrest but that they were obligated to. The judge put off the trial for two weeks and, later, Etter was told that she need not appear; the case was dismissed.<sup>75</sup>

Etter continued to be very active. At age seventy-four, she had a permanent tabernacle set up at Indianapolis. She continued to travel as well, drawing crowds of one-to-two-thousand. In 1924, at eighty years of age, after fifty years of ministry, Etter died peacefully in her room. A Brother Feick told of a day, in her last three weeks, where she was especially touched by the Lord. She began praising and magnifying God in tongues. A number of times she felt led to deliver messages to those who came to visit her<sup>76</sup>. She died without a struggle and with the respect of thousands.

The lives of five of her children were taken. Her own health was brought low on repeated occasions. She was misunderstood by many and misjudged as insane. Newspapers maligned her. Police arrested her. Courts tried her. Yet in these situations, Mrs. Woodworth-Etter was courageous, unshakable and ultimately victorious in her high calling and mission to walk in revival and to lead multitudes to faith in Christ. She had been transformed by God's saving grace. She had been chosen for His special work. She had tasted of the powers of the world to come. There was no going back. There was only going forward with fearless determination to advance God's kingdom on earth. The Word of the Lord went before her and a

stream of healing followed behind her. She lived and walked in the realm of revival faith where heaven is real, deliverance is real, hope is real and Jesus is all in all. With the anointing of the Lord, the simple faith of a child, and with a heart as large as her tent, she carried the good news of salvation and healing to multitudes of needy, searching souls.

Shawn Stevens

## ENDNOTES :

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