

# THE PENTECOST

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*Cover photo: Calgary, AB*

*Above photo: Golden, BC*

Hello and welcome to a special issue of *The Pentecost*. If you have been reading for some time you will have heard me talk of *The Azusa St Revival*. This month, we are devoting an entire issue to this subject. I do hope that you will read all of it and open your heart to what God may be speaking.

God bless you.

**Shawn Stevens**

This is an amazing revival that began in North America but spread around the world. We pray that as you read you'll be encouraged to believe with us for another such revival.

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## The Azusa Revival

In the early nineteenth-hundreds, Los Angeles was the fastest growing city in America. In 1906 it was a metropolis of about 238,000, but population growth was not the most significant development of this time. The Los Angeles of 1900 was on the verge of a spiritual awakening that would be unprecedented in its history and, in my opinion, unequaled by any other move of God that the world had seen. There had just been a revival in Wales, a renewal of Christian faith where the truths of the Holy Bible were freshly made alive in the experience of people once again. Many in America were praying, with hope and expectation, that revival would come to their land as well. This revival came, in April of 1906, to a poor run-down mission on Azusa Street in Los Angeles. The revival brought with it a very distinguishing peculiarity. Countless visitors left this revival testifying that they had entered into an experience that they called the baptism of the Holy Spirit. This baptism is a spiritual encounter with God that resulted in people spontaneously speaking in an unlearned language. Although criticized by some, the Azusa Street Revival saw the transformation of many lives as a result of people coming to Christ and experiencing the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

To understand why the revival proved to be such a transforming spiritual experience, we must begin by examining the history of this revival itself. Azusa's history includes people who either assisted or opposed its work. One person who could be listed in both categories is Mr. Charles Fox Parham. Parham was born in Muscatine, Iowa, on June 4, 1873 and lived until 1929. When Parham was thirteen his mother died and he went into a period of despair. During this time of turmoil, he had a Christian conversion. He briefly attended a post-secondary Methodist school but discontinued his studies, believing that formal education was a hindrance to his ministry. Instead, he launched out on an itinerant teaching ministry throughout Kansas. Parham had a peculiar teaching (that is, peculiar to many who heard him) that he adamantly proclaimed. Parham taught that a Christian needs to be baptized with the Holy Spirit. Furthermore,

he taught that the initial evidence for the baptism of the Holy Spirit was that of speaking in tongues. Visitors from his meetings testified to having experienced this baptism, resulting in their speaking in other tongues. In the fall of 1900, Parham opened a Bible school in Houston, Texas. One of his students was a black Holiness preacher named William J. Seymour, who would later come to Los Angeles with the message of revival. 4

William J. Seymour is regarded by historians as the founder of the Azusa Street Mission. He was born in 1870, the son of a former slave who lived in Centerville, Louisiana. Seymour taught himself to read and write.5 He was blind in one eye and is described as having a "meek and humble spirit."6 He had done some ministry work among Holiness churches. Azusa and Pentecostalism are closely associated with American Holiness churches which were throughout the United States by this time. Many Holiness churches were an outgrowth of Methodism and traced their history and their theology back to John Wesley. It was common among Holiness churches to believe in a second blessing subsequent to salvation. This second blessing was commonly equated with a work of sanctification and a baptism in the Holy Spirit. These are important foundations for Seymour's later teaching.

Arthur Osterberg, a leader at Azusa, described Seymour this way; "He was meek and plain spoken and no orator. He spoke the common language of the uneducated class. He might preach for three-quarters of an hour with no more emotionalism than that there post. He was no arm-waving thunderer, by any stretch of the imagination." 7 It was precisely this quality of meekness that made Seymour fit for the task ahead of him, offering spiritual leadership to revival-hungry souls. Seymour was only at Parham's Bible school for about six weeks. In 1906 he received an invitation to speak at a church in Los Angeles.

Although Parham counselled Seymour not to go, Seymour accepted this invitation. The pastor was a Mrs. Julia Hutchins. She was wanting to leave Los Angeles and become a missionary to Africa. Before she could go she needed someone to replace her. She had

heard from others that Seymour was a great man of God and she was considering him for the position. Seymour began preaching there and, between February 22 and March 4, he shared with the Los Angeles congregation the teachings that he had learned about the baptism of the Holy Spirit, and its subsequent evidence of speaking in tongues. By March 4th, Hutchins decided that Seymour would not be her replacement. Seymour had come to the mission, planning to continue a teaching session, only to find the door locked. His teaching had caused quite a stir and he was not welcomed back. Hutchins would later become a participant in Azusa and a supporter of Seymour, but at this time she opposed him. However, some from the church were very interested in what Seymour had to say and one couple invited him to carry on meetings in their home. Seymour did so and in no time the meetings were packed. They moved their meetings to yet another home, on Bonnie Brae Street, and God greatly moved among them. In that time, numerous individuals testified to being struck by the power of God, resulting in them spontaneously speaking in another tongue. Before long, these house meetings were packed with revival seekers and a larger facility was needed. <sup>8</sup>

The new facility, a frame building at 312 Azusa Street, would be the location for the Azusa Street Revival. A wooden packing crate was draped with a cloth and this became Seymour's pulpit. Pastor Seymour began holding services that would begin at 10:00 A.M. and usually things ran until midnight, but sometimes beyond that, to as late as 3:00 A.M. Within days of this new beginning, crowds began swarming the Mission, filling its interior and then spilling over to the outside grounds. People would stand for hours by an open window just to hear what was going on inside. It is estimated that in 1906 as many as fifteen hundred people would visit Azusa on a Sunday. <sup>9</sup> Seymour preached that men and women needed to be, first converted, then sanctified, and then filled with God's Spirit (another term for the baptism of the Holy Spirit). Seymour frequently preached on the cleansing of sin through the blood of Jesus, the return of Christ, and unity. <sup>10</sup> All-day baptismal meetings were arranged at the beach to accommodate all the converts. As many as

250 converts were baptized at these events. There was no pre-planning or format for the services at Azusa. There was little or no structure. In fact, the leadership of the revival was very anti-structure. It was of supreme importance to Seymour, and the others present, that God Himself would direct the meetings, and that the meetings would in no way be a product of human ingenuity. People came to pray, to receive prayer, and to experience God. Sometimes Seymour would preach and, at other times, guests would stand up and preach. The meetings would alternate from preaching to prayer, to singing, all spontaneously, in no fixed order, and with no prearrangement. There would often be extended periods of time where people simply sought God.

Seeking God at Azusa meant breaking with traditional formats of church. Frank Bartleman, a participant of the revival, describes the meetings this way:

*Brother Seymour generally sat behind two empty boxes, one on top of the other. He usually kept his head inside the top one during the meeting, in prayer. There was no pride there. The services ran almost continuously. Seeking souls could be found under the power almost any hour of the day or night. The place was never closed or empty. The people came to meet God – He was always there. Hence a continuous meeting. The meeting did not depend on the human leader. God's presence became more and more wonderful. In that old building, with its low rafters and bare floors, God broke strong men and women to pieces, and put them together again for His glory. It was a tremendous overhauling process. Pride and self-assertion, self-importance, and self-esteem could not survive there. The religious ego preached its own funeral sermon quickly. No subjects or sermons were announced ahead of time, and no special speakers for such an hour. No one knew what might be coming, what God would do. ... All were equal. No flesh might glory in His presence [see 1 Corinthians 1:29] He could not use the self-appointed. Those were Holy Spirit meetings,*

*led by the Lord. ... The rafters were low; the tall must come down. By the time they got to Azusa, they were humbled, ready for the blessing.*<sup>11</sup>

Bartleman also said:

*The Mission had no pope or hierarchy. We were 'brethren.' We had no human programme. The Lord Himself was leading. We had no priest class, nor priest craft. ... We did not even have a platform or pulpit in the beginning. All were on a level. The ministers were servants, according to the true meaning of the word.*<sup>12</sup>

From this account we can see the positive effects that this revival had upon people; they became humble and spiritual hunger was cultivated within them. Azusa was a great spiritual watering hole which thousands flocked to. Those participating were oblivious to the passing of time. There was no prearranged program to be jammed through, and no one was taking a cue from anyone else. Bartleman exclaims; "I often said that I would rather live six months at that time than fifty years of ordinary life."<sup>13</sup> He could say this because the quality of a life that is filled with God is more fulfilling than a life without God, regardless of its length. In the midst of all this seeking for God, countless individuals claimed to have been baptized with the Holy Spirit, evidenced by speaking in tongues.

What is this baptism with the Holy Spirit? To understand this experience, we must go back two thousand years to the teachings of Jesus Christ and the experiences of His disciples. The Bible records that Jesus Christ, after He resurrected from the dead, addressed His disciples with these words; "For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence."<sup>14</sup> So we see that Jesus Christ used this term, teaching His disciples that something important was in store. He further told His disciples to wait in Jerusalem for this to occur. His disciples did so, and we are told that:

*And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a*

*rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.*<sup>15</sup>

We see from this scripture that the baptism of the Holy Spirit is a spiritual experience where the Holy Spirit of God fills a Christian. In this case, this baptism was evidenced by speaking in other tongues. As a result of this baptism, a Christian enters into a deeper communion with God, and is emboldened and prepared to be a witness of his faith. Seymour taught that tongues did accompany the baptism of the Spirit. However, he also taught that divine love accompanied this baptism as well and, unless the divine love was present, he was not convinced that the true gift had been given.

Because the baptism of the Holy Spirit was foreign to the experience of most, it was also controversial. The baptism of the Holy Spirit, along with the Azusa Revival in general, was criticized and mocked by many. Detractors came from two camps, the secular community and the religious community. To the secular community, this experience was foolish and the revival was fanatical. Newspaper headlines read "Weird Babel of Tongues" and "New Sect of Fanatics Is Breaking Loose." *The Los Angeles Times* of April 18, 1906 contains this reporter's comments:

*Colored people and a sprinkling of white compose the congregation, and night is made hideous in the neighborhood by the howlings of the worshipers who spend hours swaying forth and back in a nerve-racking [sic] attitude of prayer and supplication. They claim to have 'the gift of tongues,' and to be able to comprehend the babel. Such a startling claim has never yet been made by any company of fanatics, even in Los Angeles, the home of almost numberless creeds.*<sup>16</sup>

We see from this quote that in the opinion of some, such long periods of prayer and supplication were "nerve-wracking." It was unexplainable to them, and

even more unexplainable, was this mysterious phenomenon of speaking in tongues.

The secular community was not the only one to ridicule the Azusa Revival. Much criticism came from the religious community as well. Many traditional religionists felt that these occurrences were irrational, based on pure emotionalism. Some called it a delusion of religion.<sup>17</sup> Some religious leaders were upset because their church members were leaving to be a part of the Azusa Revival.

The most serious opposition that Seymour faced from a churchman was from Parham himself. Parham was invited, by Seymour, to come to Azusa and he did in December of 1906. At this point, it must be said that Parham is a very questionable figure in Pentecostal history. He is questionable because of his racial views. From different historians we receive a different picture of him. Some draw little or no attention to his racial views concerning Black people. Other historians depict him as being an out-and-out bigot. He is not alive to comment on what everyone has said about him. However, we do know how he reacted when he came to Azusa. He was offended at the fact that Blacks and Whites were not segregated in the meetings. He tried to take over the meetings and restrict the ministry of some of the leaders. Before he had a chance to ruin everything, Seymour put him out of the Mission. Some authors have drawn too close an association between Parham and Azusa. In fact, Parham opposed Azusa. What part did Parham personally have in Azusa? Seymour had spent six weeks of his life at Parham's Bible school, but that was before he ever went to Los Angeles. Parham did not want Seymour to go to Los Angeles in the first place. Seymour's own experience with the baptism of the Holy Spirit came after he had come to Los Angeles, not while he was at Parham's school. When Parham saw what was happening there, he was opposed to it. After being put out, he set up rival meetings nearby and spoke out through the press, calling for people to pay no further attention to Seymour.

Azusa included many people and people-groups which were marginalized by the larger American culture.

Women, immigrants, the poor and Negroes all participated in Azusa and were wonderfully used of God. It seemed as if God was pleased to use these humble ones and passed over many more proudly professional ministers who sometimes visited the revival. Such ministers might even receive a warning from the Azusa people. It was reported in the Los Angeles Herald that one Negro woman at Azusa spoke out this exhortation: "An' you shepa'ds, you pasto's, you'd bettah feed youh flock on de Holy Ghost o' they won't feed you. If you all don't git right wid Gawd you won't have no mo' congregation and you'll have to go out and go to wuk."<sup>18</sup>

Many were adamant in their criticisms. However, God continued to move regardless of who opposed His actions. Seymour said:

*God raised up Ezekiel to prophesy to the dry bones and they lived. He was a blessed Holy Ghost man, though he did not have the baptism with the Holy Ghost.... He preached as he was commanded and the bones all came together, bless His holy name, and a great army was raised up. So we have this same privilege in these last days when God is pouring out His Spirit upon all flesh and our sons and daughters are prophesying in His mighty name.*<sup>19</sup>

While Seymour taught on the outpouring of God's Spirit, he also taught on the importance of the Word of God. He wanted it to be clear that he would not accept practices which were not supported by the Bible. He said:

*The Corinthian church was one of Paul's most gifted Churches, and just as it is today, where a church is very gifted, the only safeguard from deceptive spirits is by rightly dividing the Word of God to keep out fanaticism. We may let down on some lines and rise on others, but God wants everything to be balanced by the Word of God.*<sup>20</sup>

Inquirers often learned of Azusa from reading The Apostolic Faith magazine. For years, this was the official newspaper of the Azusa Revival. It grew to a

distribution of 50,000. <sup>21</sup> It recorded testimonies, visions, reports and teachings from first-generation Azusa Pentecostals, as well as testimonies from others experiencing revival around the globe.

Worship at Azusa was expressed in many forms. Surrounded by God's glory, people sometimes shouted loudly and, at other times, stood in silent awe. Some jumped off of their feet, while others fell down on their knees. Some, with out-stretched arms, sang out in English and others did so in other tongues. At times people danced. At other times, participants were still and reflective. Some would come in and find a spot where they would pour out their hearts to God in soft whispers, while others did so with heavy sobs. <sup>22</sup>

It has been said, by some writing on Azusa, that the revival ran continuously as one unbroken meeting for three years. This is not too far from the truth. Meetings were scheduled daily at 10 AM, 3 PM and 7:30 PM. However, there was no real concluding time for these meetings and they frequently ran into each other, creating a seemingly unbroken meeting. Prayer was a major feature of the revival. George B. Stud comments:

*I saw, too, that they had a wonderful spirit of prayer upon them; I never had seen such people to pray. Such liberty and unction in prayer, and such continuance in prayer; and that, not merely at public meetings and altar services; but in cottage prayer meetings, in all-nights of prayer, and in the smaller gatherings of two and three, how remarkably have I found the spirit of prayer and intercession upon them.* <sup>23</sup>

In addition to the main meetings, there was a room upstairs called the “upper room.” Here seeking souls would be “tarrying” for God to baptize them in the Holy Spirit. Sometimes they tarried for hours, sometimes for days. When their breakthrough came, they lost the thought of how long they had sought for it and wallowed in the ecstasy of the heavenly outpouring they were now experiencing. J. H. Sparks comments on the worship at Azusa by saying; “Sunday evening [April 5, 1908] found the house packed from door to door and such a volume of praise as went up to the

shining courts; it seemed the angels and archangels must have rejoiced together with us.” <sup>24</sup> Glen Cook reflected; “We were saturated with the spirit of love and prayer and the days passed all too swiftly.” <sup>25</sup>

One phenomenon at Azusa which was truly remarkable and was commented on, again and again, was singing in the Spirit. At times, God would move upon those gathered in such a way that they would start singing in tongues. This was soon called singing in the spirit, singing in tongues, heavenly anthem, heavenly choir or heavenly chorus. The beauty of this heavenly singing caused men and women to stand in awe. It has been said that “people are melted to tears in hearing this singing. It is the harmony of heaven and the Holy Ghost puts music in the voices that are untrained.” <sup>26</sup> William F. Manley described it in these words:

*There was a most remarkable incident of the sweetest singing I ever heard by about half a dozen women, all in unknown tongues, in which at intervals one voice would die away in very plaintive strains, while the others carried on the song. Then the former would break out in rapid strong language, filled with unction, and others would give tones as of singing in the distance. This was most enchanting, and filled with tender love. This singing was led by Miss (Jennie Evans) Moore, who never could sing before, until she was baptized with the Spirit.* <sup>27</sup>

Frank Bartleman says of the experience:

*The Lord had sovereignly bestowed it, with the outpouring of the 'residue of oil,' the 'Latter Rain' baptism of the Spirit. It was exercised, as the Spirit moved the possessors, either in solo fashion, or by the company. It was sometimes without words, other times in 'tongues.' The effect was wonderful on the people. It brought a heavenly atmosphere as though the angels themselves were present and joining with us. And possibly they were. It seemed to still criticism and opposition, and was hard for even wicked men to gainsay or ridicule. ... In fact it was the very breath of God, playing on human heart strings,*

*or human vocal chords. The notes were wonderful in sweetness, volume and duration.* <sup>28</sup>

The Azusa Revival was a transforming experience for countless who participated in it.

Many found tremendous joy and the power to share Christ with others.

This same joy is also found in the testimony of Tom Anderson who testified:

*Beloved, I was saved about seventeen months ago from a wretched life. When I called on God, He heard my prayer and saved me instantly. What convinced me of the reality in salvation, was the peace that came into my heart.... And God has healed my body after being afflicted over six and a half years. When all physicians failed, the man Christ Jesus healed me.... But, beloved, God sent His transforming power through the blood of Jesus and burst all the shackles, and shook off the handcuffs of hell, and today I am a free man in Christ Jesus. Then He sanctified me wholly and gave me a clean heart. Then He baptized me with the Holy Ghost in January 22, at Azusa mission. Dear ones, all I live for is Christ. I sold out, body, soul, and spirit to Him. My desire is to point souls to the bleeding Lamb of Calvary that takes away the sin of the world. The Holy Ghost, the third person of the Trinity, speaks through me in the languages of the nations whenever He chooses to and He is now engaged in pulling the rope which rings the joybells of heaven in my heart. And there is a revival going on in my soul continuously, and the choir singing and praising God in the unknown tongues.* <sup>30</sup>

Tom Anderson was transformed from living a wretched life to living a life of peace. As a result of his experience, a revival was birthed in his soul and he was filled with a desire to point people to Jesus Christ. The baptism of the Holy Spirit was for young and old alike. A Mr. Campbell testified of having received this experience at age eighty-three. Viola Price, a young

girl, received this experience at age eight. <sup>31</sup> Mrs. Lucy Leatherman tells of her experience:

*... I praised and praised God and saw my Saviour in the heavens. And as I praised, I came closer and closer, and I was so small. By and by I swept into the wound in His side, and He was not only in me but I in Him, and there I found that rest that passeth all understanding, and He said to me, you are in the bosom of the Father. He said I was clothed upon and in the secret place of the Most High. But I said, Father, I want the gift of the Holy Ghost, and the heavens opened and I was overshadowed, and such power came upon me and went through me. He said, Praise Me, and when I did, angels came and ministered unto me. I was passive in His hands, and by the eye of faith I saw angel hands working on my vocal chords, and I realized they were loosing me. I began to praise Him in an unknown language.* <sup>32</sup>

The Los Angeles Times tells the story of a Jewish rabbi named Gold, who apparently held positions in some of the largest synagogues in the United States. Gold visited the revival, was healed of an ailment, and became a convert. <sup>34</sup> A Mr. Rosa testifies of coming to the Azusa Revival with much skepticism. After several days of attendance, he said that he obtained “a real hunger in my soul” and then one evening, was struck by the power of God. He states further:

*I was under the power of God for about an hour and a half, and it was there that all pride, and self, and conceit disappeared, and I was really dead to the world, for I had Christ within in His fullness. I was baptized with the Holy Ghost and spoke in a new tongue. I praise God for the light, and now I am walking in it. The desire of my heart is to see every man and woman that preaches the gospel of Christ, baptized with the Holy Ghost...* <sup>35</sup>

It is beautiful to see that his experience was not an end in itself. In his experience, God broke down his pride and his love for worldly things, and he was aware of the presence of Christ within him. Another individual who testified of spiritual



hunger, and subsequent transformation after his experience with the Holy Spirit, was the Reverend H. L. Blake. In his own words:

*I commenced to go down before the Lord, the hunger increased from day to day and was intensified so that I cried out from the depths of my soul, in the language of scripture, 'As the heart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after Thee, O God.' After about two weeks, earnestly seeking at the altar and in secret prayer, with other means as the Holy Spirit led, on Feb. 25, the Lord baptized me with the Holy Ghost and fire, and spoke through me in an unknown tongue as the Spirit gave utterance. ... Some may ask the question, What have you more than you had before you received your Pentecost [another term, here meaning, the baptism of the Holy Spirit]? I have far greater liberty and Divine unction on me in dealing with souls, and there has come into my life an overflow of love and joy with a deep settled peace planted in the depths of my soul, a something that is inexpressible and indescribable. To God the Father, Son and Holy Ghost be all the praise and glory forever. <sup>36</sup>*

Here Blake testified that, after this experience, his preaching was filled with anointing. He was transformed by receiving an overflow of love, joy and peace for which he could only praise God.

Another minister testified of the Holy Spirit coming upon him. Immediately, he began speaking in tongues and we are further told:

*He is filled with divine love. His family were first afraid to see him speaking in tongues, thinking he had lost his mind, but when his wife and children felt the sympathy and divine love which the Holy Ghost puts in people's hearts, they said, 'Papa was never so sane in his life.' <sup>37</sup>*

The direct result of this minister's baptism in the Holy Spirit was of him being filled with divine love. This love shone through him and was felt by his family.

Countless people testified of being touched and changed by God in a dramatic way. Seymour continued to hold meetings at Azusa St. until his death in 1922.<sup>38</sup>

Azusa represented more than just a move of God; it

was a restoration of the Church to its New Testament beginnings. Seymour announced it as standing for "...the restoration of the faith once delivered unto the saints – the old time religion, camp meetings, revivals, missions, street and prison work and Christian unity everywhere."<sup>39</sup> In another article of *The Apostolic Faith*, he said; "All along the ages men have been preaching a partial gospel. A part of the gospel remained when the world went into the dark ages." The article continues; "Now, He is bringing back the Pentecostal baptism to the church."<sup>40</sup> The Azusa people referred to their revival as the "latter rain," taken from Joel 2.23. They taught that the "early rain" had fallen on the Early Church and they were now experiencing the latter rain. They were now ministering the full gospel. The experience of the Early Church and the experience of the Azusa Revival were like two great bookends on the Church Age.

The Azusa Street Revival may have become well known, but Pastor Seymour and the countless visitors who were touched by God's Spirit were not looking for fame; rather, they were intent upon one thing, meeting God. God not only met with them, but restored to them the New Testament experience of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. This experience may have seemed strange to the secular and the religious world, but it was not strange to those who were brought close to God by it. Dissolving structured format at the Azusa Street Revival may have meant breaking with tradition but, more importantly, it made it possible to be led by God's Spirit. The revival embraced struggling, marginalized groups such as the poor, women and Afro-Americans. At the Azusa Street Revival people were transformed. Among those men and women there were many who came into the meetings proud, but left the meetings humble, testifying that they had been filled with the love of God. People who are filled with the love of God have love to give to others, and it becomes their joy and purpose to share their experience. The story of their experiences creates hope in the hearts of those who long for revival in our present day.

**Shawn Stevens**

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37. Florence Crawford, ed., *The Apostolic Faith Vol. 1, No. 1, September 1906* (Los Angeles: The Apostolic Faith Movement), 2.
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39. William Seymour, quoted in Cecil M. Robeck, *The Azusa Street Mission And Revival*, 120.
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