

## WHAT GOD WOULD LIKE TO DO AND WHAT GOD MAY DO

In his first letter to the Corinthians, in the context of a crisis in which the church desperately needed the Lord to act on their behalf, the Apostle Paul made an interesting comment. He said, *“When you are assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus...the power of the Lord Jesus is present”* (1 Cor. 5:4). Jesus had once told His disciples that where two or three are gathered in His name, there He is in their midst (Matt. 18:20). But here Paul suggests that these gatherings of Christ-followers can expect more than just His presence. His *power* is also present.

I take this to mean at least a couple of things: First, when we are gathered together God’s power is available to us, it can be activated by us, it can be displayed in our midst, it can be directed and applied to the people or circumstances that need His help.

Second, if the power of the Lord is present when we are gathered together, then God is poised to do things *during* our gatherings that only He can do and that He otherwise may not do. In other words, it is when we gather that we get to see God at work. It is when we ought to *expect* to see God work.

Pollsters tell us that there has been a significant decline in church attendance since the pandemic started in March of 2020, and I’m not talking about those who for health concerns are not yet able to come back to church. I’m talking about those who, after staying home for several months, have decided that they do not need or want to ever go back to church.

I believe that is a seriously unwise decision for a number of reasons, not the least of which is that, by choosing to forsake the assembling of the saints (as the writer of Hebrews describes our gatherings), they forfeit the opportunity to be witnesses of and affected by God’s power in our midst.

As we enter into a new year, as we enter into a new phase of our church’s 130-year existence with our new building, I think it would be beneficial (and I think it would also be fun) to spend some time imagining some of the things God would *like* to do and *may* do when we gather in this building...if we let Him, if we trust Him, and if we ask Him. Please note that the things I am going to mention are not the result of my own wishes or dreams, but the result of what the Lord Jesus has already revealed in His word.

### **When we gather in this place, God would like to:**

#### **1. Reveal Himself**

God is not hiding from us. He is eager to make Himself known, especially to His own people who seek Him *together*. In our gatherings He would like to pull back the curtain of heaven, as it were, and show us who He is. In such a way that it would magnify His glory, His grace, His kindness, His generosity, His love, His holiness, His power, His faithfulness, His trustworthiness. In such a way that we might be drawn to Him, enthralled with Him, and amazed by Him. In such a way and we might be compelled to want more and more of Him, and that we might love Him with all our hearts, soul, mind, and strength. This can happen:

- As we worship Him in spirit and in truth. Worship is not just the activity of us ascribing to our Lord the glory that is due Him, but an activity in which God opens our spiritual eyes to see Him more clearly. In other words, worship is a reciprocal activity. As we offer to Him our adoration and praise and thanksgiving, He responds by revealing more of Himself.

- As we pray together in this place. James admonishes us, *“Draw near to God and He will draw near to you”* (4:8). “Nearness” in that context is not a reference to geographical proximity, but to intimacy, communion, connection. It is in that intimacy of drawing near to God corporately that He often reveals Himself and His heart more fully (I find it interesting that in other countries people do not say, “What church do you go to?” They ask, “Where do you pray?” This is a house of prayer)
- As we faithfully and accurately preach and teach His Word. Not just select portions of Scripture that appeal to our felt needs and preferences and biases, but His entire Word. What Paul called “the whole counsel of God” (Acts 20:27). The primary way God reveals Himself is through His word, and the primary purpose of preaching and teaching is to make God and Christ known. (Ill. of studying Matthew).
- As we partake of the Lord’s Supper and hear each other’s testimonies and witness people being baptized.

If there were no other reasons to meet together except to meet with God and know Him better, that would be enough. But there is more. When we gather in this place, God would like to:

## 2. Reveal His will

He wants to communicate His desires, His intentions, and His directions. That’s because He has things for us to do and places for us to go and people for us to meet and encounters for us to have. And most of that will take place outside the walls of this building—in our families, neighborhoods, and communities—even in other countries of the world. He intends to build His church and make disciples and impact this community and reach the nations and enlarge His kingdom through us, and we will discover how He wants to do that during our gatherings in this place. This can happen:

- As we seek the Lord together for His direction
- As we search the Scriptures together. In the normal course of hearing the word taught on Sundays, but also by exploring the Scriptures about particular matters and uncertainties that arise.
- As we surrender our lives to Him and become living sacrifices (Romans 12:1-2)
- Through our fellowship with one another (His Spirit lives in us, and He expresses Himself through us to one another)
- During challenging or traumatic events and circumstances (C.S. Lewis, “Pain is God’s megaphone to rouse a deaf world”)

## 3. Perform miracles

We read earlier that when we are assembled in His name, His power is present. That means that He is poised to do things that only He can do—things that cannot be done unless He does them. Such as:

- Opening spiritually blind eyes and spiritually deaf ears so that people can understand the Gospel and put their faith in Jesus. (Rom. 1:16)
- Spiritually resurrecting the dead. Paul said, “Once you were dead in your transgressions and sins...but now He has made you alive in Christ...” (Eph. 2:1-3). The theological term for this is regeneration, but Jesus simply called it being born again (John 3:1f.). Paul called it becoming a new creature (2 Cor. 5:17). It is the work by which God breathes new life into spiritually dead people, transferring them from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light, adopting them as sons and daughters,

and installing a new operating system in them (the Holy Spirit). And it happens *when* someone believes the gospel and puts their faith in Jesus.

- Opening closed minds, softening hard hearts, convicting of sin, and compelling us to repent
- Answering prayers that are prayed in this building
- Reconciling estranged brothers and sisters in Christ who assemble here
- Making brides and grooms “one flesh” (the merging of two separate identities to form a single, brand-new identity is something only God can do. “Therefore, what God has joined together...”)
- Healing (emotional, spiritual, and physical)

#### **4. Revive, refresh, and restore**

This church is not a place where people who have their act together come to preen or gloat. This church is a hospital where broken and wounded people come so they can be helped and healed. This place is a cafeteria where hungry souls can be nourished with lovingly and carefully prepared spiritual food. This place is a charging station where those who are depleted can be re-energized. And all these things are true and possible because the Lord Jesus is present when we gather, and He is poised to display His power in our midst. So, if you come to this place when you are weary, lonely, anxious, afraid, discouraged, disheartened, or even despairing of life, you’ve come to the right place. This is a place for you to find hope, comfort, peace, protection, strength, encouragement, motivation, and healing. This is a place where God intends to express His love to you through the others that are here.

#### **5. Train and equip people to do the work of the ministry.**

- Those within our congregation (ELLS, Biblical counseling, personal one-on-one discipleship, missions)
- Those in other churches/ministries (i.e. how to establish an ELLS type of ministry of their own, ELLS International partnerships)

#### **6. Call individuals to vocational ministry**

- Pastors and Biblical Counselors
- Missionaries

#### **7. Sanctify us and prepare us to see Jesus**

Listen to these verses from the New Testament.

- *<sup>13</sup> May He strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all His holy ones” (1 Thess. 3:13)*
- *<sup>23</sup> May God Himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.*
- *<sup>24</sup> The one who calls you is faithful and He will do it (1 Thess 5:23-24).*

**When we gather in this place, God may:**

#### **8. Start new ministries and plant new churches *from* this place.**

Jesus did not say to Peter after His confession, “I tell you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will *maintain* my church, and the gates of hell will not prevail against it...” He said, I will *build* my church...” The church and the kingdom are dynamic. They are inherently

expansive. And if God is with us, if we have God's favor and God's blessing, then we will grow and expand, because that is what God does. (Illustration of Dan Tuggy's grandpa who planted two churches in Venezuela, and from that church there have been 73 churches planted in that country)

## **9. He would like to send some of us to the uttermost parts of the earth to fulfill the Great Commission**

Emmanuel Bible Church has been in existence for 131 years. God has preserved and protected this church for those years, and if anything of eternal consequence has occurred in those years, no one but God can take credit for it. In the last two years, all of us have seen just how vulnerable local churches are to distraction, division, and destruction. I am under no illusions about EBC. We are vulnerable, too. It is only by the grace of God that we have survived 2020 and 2021. (In a very recent poll, 38% of pastors in the U.S. have either left the ministry or are seriously considering leaving.)

When we had our Dedication Service on November 21 and were celebrating God's marvelous provision of this wonderful facility, Dan Dettwyler (our general contractor) made a comment that I have thought about many times since. If I remember right, prior to making his comment he apologized for "raining on our parade." Then he reminded us that along with all the potential for good that can result from having a state-of-the-art facility, there is also the potential for a great deal of harm. He said if we are not careful to keep our eyes on Jesus, if we are not careful to preach and teach the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, then there may come a day when what is preached from this platform behind this pulpit is a distortion of the gospel that can prevent people from truly knowing and following the Lord Jesus.

Let me ask you something. Do you think this could ever happen to us—that after 131 years of walking in the light, our light could be extinguished because we turned away from the Lord and His Word? It has happened to some of the most famous churches in history who have had the most famous pastors, including the church at Ephesus. If it could happen to Ephesus, it could happen to us.

Lest we think that the things I just mentioned about what God would like to do and what God may do are guaranteed because we have a nice building, or because we currently have godly elders, or because we know how to do church after all these years, let me remind you that it is only by God's grace that we will make any progress.

Does God want us make progress? I know he does. Is it guaranteed? Absolutely not. We will make progress only if we keep our eyes on Jesus. We will thrive only if we hold fast to the truth. And, by the way, that can change in one generation. If our children and their children do not love Jesus and keep their eyes on Jesus and hold fast to His truth then fifty years from now, God forbid, this building could be a storage shed for grass seed.

Let me close by reading two familiar passages of Scripture that are appropriate for our discussion. *Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. <sup>2</sup> Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—His good, pleasing and perfect will (Romans 12:1-2).*

*Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. <sup>2</sup> Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and*

*perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God (Heb. 12:1-2).*

Let us all hold fast to Jesus. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus. Let us keep Jesus central to everything we do. Let us let Him have His way in our gatherings.

## **What God Would Like to Do and What God May Do in this Place**

**In this marvelous new facility, God would like to:**

1. Reveal \_\_\_\_\_
2. Reveal His \_\_\_\_\_
3. Do \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ people to do the work of the ministry
6. \_\_\_\_\_ people to ministry
7. \_\_\_\_\_ us thoroughly and \_\_\_\_\_ us to see Jesus

**Through this marvelous new facility, God may:**

1. Start new \_\_\_\_\_
2. Plant new \_\_\_\_\_
3. Send people to the \_\_\_\_\_ parts of the earth

**This is not automatic**

**What we *must* do**