



WIND FROM HEAVEN

By those who come near Me I must be regarded as holy; and before all the people I must be glorified.

—LEVITICUS 10:3

IT WAS JUST ten days into the new year of 1997. In those few days I had already been to Europe and Asia to minister. I was excited as I once again boarded a plane, this time to South America. I had never been to the nation of Brazil and was honored to have been invited to speak at a national conference taking place in three of its major cities. After flying all night I was greeted by some very hungry and expectant leaders at the airport. They had been anticipating these meetings, and their enthusiasm revived me.

The first service was held that very evening in the capital city of Brasilia. After a few short hours of rest, my interpreter and I were picked up at our hotel and taken to the meeting. Cars crowded the parking lot and streets, and I could see that the meeting would be well attended. As we approached the building, I could hear music as it escaped through a five-foot opening left for ventilation between the top wall and roof. My own excitement and anticipation mounted as I listened to the music of

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familiar praise choruses being sung in Portuguese—the primary language of Brazil.

Once inside, I was ushered directly to the platform. The auditorium, which held approximately four thousand people, was full. The platform was rocking with high-intensity praise music. The music quality was very good, for the musicians were skilled and flowed well together. The singing was also excellent, the leaders gifted with very good voices. Yet I quickly noted a complete absence of the Lord's presence. As I scanned the crowd and musicians, I thought, *Where is God?* So immediately I questioned, *Lord, where is Your presence?*

As I waited for His reply, I noticed what was happening in the building. Through the bright lights of the platform I could see the people milling about. Many stood with their eyes open looking at something or someone in the building. Many appeared to be bored. Their hands were thrust into their pockets or hung heavy at their sides. Everything about their body postures and countenances gave the appearance of a casual crowd waiting patiently for a show to begin. Some talked to one another, and others roamed the aisles, wandering in and out of the auditorium.

I was grieved. This was not an evangelistic outreach but a believer's conference. I knew there may be some in attendance who were not believers, yet I also knew that the majority of those present in this nonchalant crowd were "Christians."

I waited, hoping the people would enter into a true reverence of the Lord. I thought, *Surely this atmosphere will change.* But it didn't. After twenty or thirty minutes, the music tempo slowed to what we call the "worship songs." Yet what I witnessed was far from true worship. This same casual behavior I had observed when I entered the auditorium had moved forward into the service.

When the song service ended, it seemed as if over an hour had transpired, but it was actually less than forty minutes. Those present were told to sit down. They sat, but the underlying rumble of casual conversation continued. One leader took the microphone to exhort the people, yet the people talked on. The leader read from the Bible

and taught. The entire time I heard the dull rumble of many voices speaking and many people moving about in the congregation. I also noticed many paying no attention to the speaker. I could scarcely believe what I was witnessing. In frustration, I turned to my Brazilian interpreter and asked if this behavior was normal for their services.

He shared my disgust. “Sometimes I have to address it and ask the people to please pay attention,” he whispered. At this point, I was becoming angry. I had been in other meetings where the people behaved this way, but never to this magnitude. In each of those meetings I had encountered a similar spiritual atmosphere—heaviness, void of God’s presence. I knew now that my question—*Lord, where is Your presence?*—had been answered. His presence certainly was not here.

The Spirit of God then spoke to me and said, “I want you to directly confront this.”

When I was finally introduced, the murmur had diminished but was still present. I stepped up to the podium and stood there looking at the crowd. I was determined to say nothing until I had their attention. I felt godly indignation burning within my breast. After a minute, everyone fell silent, realizing nothing was happening on the platform.

I did not introduce myself or greet the crowd. Instead I opened with this question, “How would you like it if, while you spoke with someone, they ignored you the entire time or continued to carry on a conversation with the person next to them? Or if their eyes roamed with disinterest and disrespect?”

I paused, then answered my own question: “You wouldn’t like it, would you?”

I probed further: “What if every time you rang the doorbell to visit a neighbor’s house you were greeted with a careless attitude and monotone sigh, ‘Oh, it’s *you* again; come on in?’”

I paused, then added, “You wouldn’t visit them anymore, would you?”

Then I stated firmly, “Do you think the King of kings and Lord of

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lords is going to come into a place where He is not given due honor and reverence? Do you think the Master of all creation is going to speak when His Word is not respected enough to be listened to attentively? You're deceived if you do!"

I continued, "Tonight when I walked into this building, I did not sense the presence of God at all. Not in the praise, not in the worship, not in the exhortation or during the offering. There is a reason: the Lord never comes where He is not revered. The president of your nation would be granted great honor on this platform tonight simply out of respect for his office. If I stood here with one of your favorite soccer players, many of you would be on the edges of your seats. You would be eagerly anticipating and listening to every word he spoke. Yet while God's Word was read a moment ago, you barely listened, for you esteemed it lightly."

I proceeded to read what God requires of those who come near Him:

By those who come near Me I must be regarded as holy; and before all the people I must be glorified.

—LEVITICUS 10:3

For the next hour and a half, I preached the message God had burned in my heart. The words came with boldness and authority, and I did not fear what the people would think or how they would react.

If they run me out of this nation tomorrow, I don't care, I would rather obey God! I told myself—and I meant it.

You could have heard a pin drop in the silent moments between each of my statements. For that hour and a half there was no further crowd noise. There was no further disrespect. The Spirit of God had arrested the people's attention by His Word. The atmosphere was changing by the minute. I could sense the Word of God pounding through the hardened shells of their hearts.

At the close of my message, I asked every person present to close their eyes. The call for repentance was pointed and brief: "If you have

treated what God calls holy as common, if you have lived with an irreverent attitude toward the things of God, and if tonight you have been convicted by the Holy Spirit through His Word, are you ready to repent before the Lord? If so, stand to your feet.” Without hesitation, 75 percent of those present rose to their feet.

I bowed my head, praying aloud this simple, sincere prayer: “Lord, confirm Your Word preached tonight to these people.”

Immediately the presence of the Lord filled that auditorium. Although I had not led the congregation in a prayer, I heard sobs and cries rising from the crowd. It was as if a wave of God’s presence had swept through the building, bringing cleansing and refreshing. It was not possible for all present to come forward to the altar, so I led a prayer of repentance that could be prayed from where they stood. I watched as people wiped away tears. His wonderful presence continued.

After a few minutes God’s presence subsided. I encouraged the people not to lose their focus on their Master. “Draw near to God and He will draw near to you” (James 4:8).

A few moments passed, and another wave of His presence flooded the building. There were more tears as the crying intensified. His presence was even more far-reaching this time, and more people were touched by the Master. This lasted a few minutes, then again subsided. I exhorted the people not to drift between the waves but to hold fast their heart’s focus.

A few minutes later I heard the Spirit of God whisper to my heart, “I am coming again.” Immediately I sensed it and said, “He’s coming again!”

What I now write will in no way accurately represent what happened next. My words are too limited and God too awesome. Neither will I exaggerate, for that would also be irreverent. I interviewed three other leaders who were present to clarify and confirm what I now record.

No sooner had the word *again* left my lips when the following happened. The only way I know how to describe it is to compare it

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to standing a hundred or so yards away from the end of a runway as a huge jet takes off right in front you. This describes the roar of the wind that immediately blew through that auditorium. Almost simultaneously the people erupted in fervent and intense prayer, their voices rising and combining into almost a single shout.

When I first heard the rushing wind, I reasoned that a jet had just flown over the building. In no way did I want to attribute something to God if there was a chance that it was not. My mind raced to remember the proximity of the airport. It was nowhere nearby, and two hours had passed with no sounds of planes overhead.

I turned inward to the Spirit, realizing I could sense the presence of God in an awesome way and that the people had exploded into prayer. This was certainly not in response to an airplane's passing overhead.

If it had been a plane, it would have had to have been flying at the low altitude of no more than one hundred yards over the building in order to sound like that. And even at that, I would not have been able to hear such a mighty rushing noise over the din of three thousand people praying loudly.

The sound I heard was much louder, and clearly overpowered all the voices. With it resolved in my mind that the wind was the wind of the Holy Spirit, I still did not say anything. I did not want to relay inaccurate information or hype the people with overzealous professions of spiritual manifestation. The roar of this wind lasted approximately two minutes. When it subsided, it left in its wake a praying, weeping people. The atmosphere was charged with holy reverence. The Lord's presence was very real and powerful.

The awesome aftermath of His presence continued for fifteen to twenty minutes. Then I turned the platform over to the leader and asked to be taken out of the building immediately. Often I linger and talk with others after a service, but now any casual conversation seemed inappropriate. The leaders asked me to join them for dinner, but I declined. Still shaken by His presence, I responded, "No, I just want to go back to my hotel room."

I was escorted to the car. I rode back to the hotel accompanied by

my interpreter and a lady and her husband who were leaders. This woman was a recording artist, and her music was popular in the nation.

She entered the car, crying, “Did you hear the wind?”

I quickly responded, “That was an airplane.” (Though I sensed in my heart it was not, I wanted confirmation and was determined not to be the first to say anything.)

“No,” she stated and shook her head. “It was the Spirit of the Lord.”

Then her husband, a man I found to be very quiet and reserved, firmly asserted, “There was no plane anywhere near the building.”

“Really!” I exclaimed.

He continued, “Furthermore, the sound of that wind did not come through the soundboard, there was no reading on the board, or record of any noise.” I sat silently, in complete awe.

Later I learned the reason this man was so certain that the wind we heard was not caused by an aircraft. There were security personnel and police *outside* who also reported hearing a mighty sound coming from *inside* the building. Outside, no wind. Just another calm Brazilian evening.

His wife continued as tears streamed down her cheeks. “I saw waves of fire falling on the building and angels everywhere!”

I could hardly believe my ears. I had heard this same description used by a minister two months earlier in meetings in North Carolina. I had preached on the fear of the Lord, and God’s presence had fallen mightily on those assembled—more than a hundred little children wept profusely for an hour. A visiting minister told the pastor that she had seen waves of balls of fire falling on the building. This was also confirmed by three choir members.

Now, I just wanted to be alone with the Lord. Once in the privacy of my hotel room, all I could do was worship and pray.

I was scheduled to minister at one more service before departing for Rio de Janeiro. This time when I walked into the auditorium, the atmosphere was totally different. I could sense a restored respect for the Lord. This time the music wasn’t merely good but void of

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God's presence; it was wonderful, anointed, and the presence of the Lord was sweet.

David says, "In fear of You I will worship toward Your holy temple" (Ps. 5:7). All true worship is anchored in a reverence for His presence, for God says, "You shall . . . reverence My sanctuary: I am the LORD" (Lev. 19:30).

In this second service many received deliverance and healing. Many who had been bound by bitterness and had harbored offenses were set free. Where the Lord is revered, His presence manifests—and where His presence manifests, needs are met.

Now we can understand David's urgency:

Oh, fear the LORD, you His saints! There is no want to those who fear Him.

—PSALM 34:9

This is the message you hold in your hands today—the fear of the Lord. In these pages we will search, with the help of the Holy Spirit, not only the meaning of the fear of the Lord but also what it is to walk in the treasures of its truth. We will learn of the judgment that comes when there is a lack of holy fear, as well as of the glorious benefits found within fearing God.

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