

Bosworth Matters

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What P.C. Nelson Saw in the F.F. Bosworth Revival Meetings

How the Experience Moved Him to
Begin His Own Healing Ministry

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P.C. Nelson (1868-1942)

Photo courtesy of Flower Pentecostal Heritage Center

"Few theologians or educators made a greater impact on the Assemblies of God than Peter Christopher ("P.C.") Nelson," wrote historian Darrin J. Rodgers in the Foreword to Nelson's *Bible Doctrines* (2009). Nelson, he noted, "emerged as one of the most articulate Pentecostal theologians of his era."

But before Nelson gained fame as a scholar, author, and founder of Southwestern Bible School (now Southwestern Assemblies of God University), he was a healing evangelist whose ministry was inspired by the miracles of healing he witnessed in the revival meetings of F.F. Bosworth. The brief time he shared with Bosworth left an indelible impression on him as a preacher of the gospel. The experience, which included the laying on of hands, dramatic answers to prayer, miraculous healings, and multitudes finding Christ as Savior, helped to transform Nelson's theology on divine healing. At the same time, the experience prompted him to leave his pastorate and become an evangelist who preached what he called the "full gospel" of Christ that included salvation for soul and body.

Man of many languages

Nelson, an immigrant from Denmark, was born in 1868. He was a linguist and a preacher with strong Baptist roots. He earned degrees from Denison University and Rochester Theological Seminary. He reportedly had a reading knowledge of 25 languages. According to his book publisher, "He taught Latin, Greek and modern languages at several universities and could hold religious services in several languages."

That linguistic ability alone generated praise and respect from the people who knew him. "Nelson's academic prowess was legendary," according to Rodgers, who is director of the Flower Pentecostal Heritage Center in Springfield, Mo. He suggested Nelson's "linguistic achievements, in particular, merit further attention."

Although much has been written and discussed about his contributions as an educator and theologian, little has been noted about his experiences with Bosworth. A glimpse of his time with Bosworth is suggested by Eunice M. Perkins in *Joybringer Bosworth: His Life Story* (1921). She wrote: "Other ministers and consecrated laymen have gone out from the Bosworth meetings to conduct similar services, and God is working in mighty power thru them. Evangelist P.C. Nelson, formerly of Detroit, is being used marvelously in this great service, in Kansas, Minnesota, and other places."

Noticeable pattern in healing ministries

It seems that Nelson's experience was similar to the experiences of several revivalists who participated in the post-World War II healing revival. In his book, *Only Believe: An Eyewitness Account of the Great Healing Revivals of the 20th Century* (1999), Don Stewart mentioned a number of preachers who attended revival meetings of famous evangelists and became so moved by the experience, they felt led to begin their own healing ministries. He reported, for example, the testimony of T. L. Osborn who attended a meeting held by William Branham in 1947. Osborn witnessed the healing of a deaf girl when Branham commanded the spirit of deafness to leave the girl. Stewart wrote: "Osborn, sitting in the audience felt flooded with the power of God while an inner voice whispered, 'This is what you should be doing.' Stewart noted "Osborn began holding crusades that very year."

Stewart reported O.L. Jagers began his healing ministry after he attended a Branham meeting in Arkansas. When A.A. Allen attended a 1949 revival meeting held by Oral Roberts in Dallas, Texas, he felt inspired to launch his own healing ministry. According to Stewart, that experience "was the turning point for Allen." He explained: "The miracles of healing seemed very genuine,

and he found himself in an experience similar to that of T.L. Osborn in the Bill Branham crusade. Allen felt God speaking to him to launch his own healing ministry."

In Nelson's case, his sense of calling into the healing ministry occurred after his miraculous healing and the baptism in the Holy Spirit in 1920. He had suffered a serious injury when he was hit by an automobile on October 16, 1920 in Detroit. He reportedly endured "a week of intense suffering," which nearly cost him his life. But on October 23, 1920, the Lord healed him in answer to prayer. His next goal was to receive the Spirit baptism.

Note: *Most of the excerpts that follow were taken from a typewritten version of Nelson's Autobiography (1924). The work is available at Flower Pentecostal Heritage Center (<https://ifphc.org>).*

"After my healing with intensified interest, I began to seek the Baptism in the Holy Spirit," Nelson wrote in his unpublished autobiography. In a booklet about his Spirit baptism, he noted that Nov. 16, 1920 was "one of the greatest days of my life, for at two o'clock that morning, the Lord Jesus baptized me in the Holy Spirit, and filled me so full of His glory that I could not tell it all in English." He received the baptism after a time of prayer and tarrying. When it happened, he spoke in an unknown tongue. Soon after his Pentecostal experience, he heard reports and testimonies about divine healing occurring in the revival meetings of Bosworth. He recalled:

Immediately after receiving my baptism in the Spirit, I heard of the mighty works of God in connection with the revival campaign conducted by Evangelist F.F. Bosworth in Carnegie Hall in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. The Labor Tribune of that city printed most astonishing reports of the miraculous healings in that meeting, and I decided to go to Pittsburgh and make a close personal investigation of these reports and testimonies. To my delight, I found the meeting in full swing from morning to after midnight, and talked with many who had been healed by the Lord in a most marvelous way. I was asked to preach in the afternoon, and to assist in the healing services that afternoon and night.

What he saw in the Bosworth meetings

Nelson had served for many years as a Baptist preacher and sincerely believed that the age of miracles had passed. He had read the Bible in its original languages and did not believe that miracles of healing were occurring in the 20th century as they did in Bible days. But his views underwent a change in the Bosworth revival meetings. For it was during his time in the meetings that he saw the power of God as he had never seen it before. Below is an overview of what he witnessed.

First, he "saw the multitudes come to hear the word of God, and to receive for soul and body from the Lord. The blind, the deaf, the paralytics, and the rheumatic and people who were afflicted with all kinds of internal maladies, were there in large numbers."

Nelson watched as massive crowds of people from diverse backgrounds came to be healed. They came with many types of sickness and disease. To Nelson, it was like watching the "early days of Christianity, when Jesus walked the shores of Galilee."

Second, he saw "the real meaning of the Gospel and its power to minister to man in all of his needs."

Third, he saw the reason Christ "began His healing ministry along with the preaching of the gospel, and commanded the Twelve, and then the Seventy, and the whole multitude of believers to heal the sick as well as preach the life-giving message."

Up to that time, Nelson said, he had been preaching an incomplete gospel. That was something he had done for 31 years. But thanks to the moving of the Spirit in the Bosworth revival, he decided to go forward preaching a gospel that included healing for soul and body.

Fourth, he "saw ... why the multitudes came to Jesus and clung to him," bringing to him the sick in droves from many different areas near Jerusalem.

Fifth, he saw that Christ wanted to connect with all people on all levels who had all kinds of problems, ailments, and afflictions through the actual hands of his followers. Nelson found that the Lord wished to do that "while he himself is sitting at the right hand of Power commanding the blessings down to us humble followers on earth to distribute to the multitudes."

Sixth, he saw why many people had turned their backs on their churches and why their congregations began to shrink under the leadership of educated preachers who had fancy equipment and "great financial resources."

Seventh, he "saw that there was power in the gospel of Jesus Christ when preached in its original fullness in the power of the Holy Spirit to draw back the multitudes which [had] deserted the worship of the churches to receive deliverance in soul and body by the mighty Savior...."

Finally, he saw his own futile attempts in evangelism. He had been "trying to win men and women to Christ by offering them a gospel in which there was no relief for their sufferings and afflictions, and little comfort for their sorrows." Nelson discovered that his previous method of "chasing after people to come to the services" was less effective than presenting them with "a gospel so rich and full that they could not be kept away."

Launch of his own healing ministry

The things that Nelson saw had a profound impact on his life and ministry. That brief time that he spent with Bosworth became a turning point in his life as it set him on a course for something different – and better – than what he had previously seen in his ministry. It was time, he reasoned, for the status quo to change. Despite being well educated and having a reading knowledge of 25 languages, he saw the need for a gospel of power that includes salvation for the soul and divine healing for the body.

After holding revival meetings in a Baptist church in January 1921, Nelson returned to Detroit where Bosworth was holding another salvation-healing meeting. As he had done in Pittsburgh, Nelson assisted by praying for the sick and by leading people to Christ for salvation. **"It was here that the Lord began to give me outstanding cases of healing in number," Nelson recalled. "It was great training school for work I was soon to undertake single handed."**

It was soon after the Bosworth meetings that Nelson sensed the Lord calling him to leave his church. "Feeling called of God to leave my pastorate to go out into the evangelistic field and close our work in Detroit, I immediately began a campaign on these new lines in Wichita, Kansas," Nelson wrote. "We began in a small way, and soon the meeting grew to such

proportions that the largest churches in the city would not hold the crowds, even on week days, and people came from ten different states to be healed by the Lord Jesus Christ."

Nelson went on to see many dramatic healings in his ministry. In addition to cripples, he saw the blind and deaf healed. In some cases, people discarded their crutches and wheelchairs. Reports of the healings, which apparently happened on a regular basis, helped to boost the attendance at his meetings.

Closing thoughts

Nelson's ministry of healing extended far beyond his church and Bible school. Through his writings, he reached a wide audience of readers. He also had an impact on the healing revivalists of the 1940s and 1950s. A prolific writer, Nelson authored a popular book titled, *Does Christ Heal Today? Messages of Faith, Hope and Cheer For the Afflicted*. It was promoted by healing evangelist Jack Coe and The Voice of Healing Magazine.

In his Introduction to Nelson's book, Coe wrote about the quality of the book's message and his relationship with the author:

"This book contains the most scriptural, yet simplified method to receive healing from God of any book I have ever read. It was my happy privilege to be closely associated with this great man of God while I was a student in his school."

Nelson and his writings also received praise from Kenneth E. Hagin, who said he sat under the teachings of the Pentecostal theologian.

Nelson's story shows that education, while important, is not a substitute for power. Although gifted and trained as a linguist, he needed help from above to fulfill the call of God on his life. While he excelled in his knowledge of known languages, it was only after he had spoken in an unknown language did he find the power he needed to become an effective preacher of the Gospel. Through his work with Bosworth, he discovered how he could be used by "Christ the Healer" in the ministry of healing and deliverance to the masses.

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