

Bosworth Matters

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What Oswald J. Smith Discovered in the Revival Meetings of the Bosworth Brothers

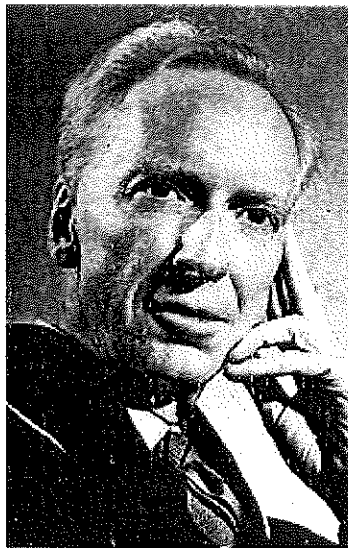
By Roscoe Barnes III, PhD

Author, *F.F. Bosworth: The Man Behind "Christ the Healer"*

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Oswald Jeffrey Smith
(1889 - 1986)

Reminder: "F.F. Bosworth History" is now on Twitter. Follow @bosworth_fred

In 1921, the revered Oswald J. Smith attended a divine healing campaign in Toronto, Canada that had a profound impact on his life and ministry. It was an experience that changed the way he saw evangelism and also resulted in his personal healing. The campaign was held by F.F. Bosworth and his brother, B.B. Bosworth. The event was so important that Smith wrote about it in his autobiography, *The Story of My Life* (Peoples Press, 1950).

According to Kevin Kee, author of *Revivalists: Marketing the Gospel in English Canada, 1884-1957* (McGill-Queen's University Press, 2006), it was during the Bosworth meetings that Smith first encountered the miraculous in a revival setting. He wrote:

"Smith's first taste of divine healing had come in the Bosworth Brothers Evangelistic Campaign held in Toronto's Massey Hall in 1921. The Rev. W.A. Roffe, the superintendent for the Christian and Missionary Alliance in Canada, had arranged the visit of Pentecostal evangelist and faith healer "F.F." Bosworth and his brother, "B.B.," an accomplished musician and son leader. Smith threw himself into the campaign with characteristic vigour."

Biographer Lois Neely said that Smith had never seen anything like the Bosworth meetings, but he concluded the miracles of healing were undeniable. Smith reported: "The lame are walking, the deaf are hearing, the cancers are gone – these things no one can deny."

Smith was a Canadian pastor and strong proponent of missions. The founder of The People's Church in Toronto, he was a popular speaker and the author of 35 books, many of which were highly regarded. He published over a 1,000 poems and was known as a formidable voice in Fundamentalism in Canada. Kee described him as "one of Canada's foremost evangelists in the first half of the twentieth century" who lived to be 96. During his distinguished decades of ministry, he reportedly preached over 12,000 sermons in 80 countries.

What Billy Graham had to say about Oswald J. Smith

According to Kee, Billy Graham saw Smith as "one of the greatest evangelists of all time." Graham said much more in his Foreword to *Fire in His Bones: The Official Biography of Oswald J. Smith* by Lois Neely (Tyndale House Publishers Inc., 1982). He began by saying Smith's name "symbolizes worldwide evangelization." He suggested Smith's "evangelistic campaigns at home and abroad have been among the greatest and most successful in the history of the Christian Church." Graham further stated: "No other man has influenced so many people in so many diverse ways." In terms of personal influence, Graham described Smith as "the most remarkable man" he had ever met. He said Smith's books "had a tremendous influence" on his life and ministry. Graham closed with the following statement: "Dr. Smith will go down in history as the greatest combination pastor, hymn writer, missionary statesman, and evangelist of our time."

What Oswald J. Smith Discovered in F.F. Bosworth's Revival Meetings

Smith was energetic in his efforts to support the ministry of the Bosworth brothers. Moved by what he saw, he embraced a number of theological and practical ideas about divine healing that he believed would enhance his ministry as an evangelist and pastor. The views he came to accept included the following:

- 1. Miracles of physical healing validated some of the teachings of fundamentalists.**

According to Kee, Smith "seized on the miracles of physical healing occurring in Massey Hall as a vindication of fundamentalist beliefs."

2. Miracles were proof of God's intervention.

As a direct consequence of working with the Bosworth brothers, Smith came to see that "God's action on earth was not limited to natural processes, as liberal Protestants argued," Kee asserted. He added: "The miracles were proof that He intervened directly in the lives of ordinary women and men."

3. Miracles that were confirmed helped to refute the claims of cessationists.

The physical miracles of healing seen by Smith were likely seen as being similar to the "notable miracle" in the ministry of Peter and John in Acts 4:16: "What shall we do to these men? for that indeed a notable miracle hath been done by them is manifest to all them that dwell in Jerusalem; and we cannot deny it." No doubt, healing reports that could not be denied carried weight in the argument against cessationism. Smith's first-hand experience with the miraculous prompted him to answer the critics, according to Kee. In a newspaper article to his readers, Smith wrote: "Never again will the higher critics and skeptics be able to plead ignorance in this city. They may not believe in the miracles of the Bible, but they are now faced with miracles of an unquestionable character right in their midst."

4. Miracle of healing on a personal level inspired him to write a book about his experience.

Smith had suffered from an eye condition that was "exasperated by intense headaches," according to historian Gerald W. King. His vision was sometimes blurry. But in an act of faith, he "stopped wearing his glasses," King wrote. "His eyesight gradually improved while the headaches dissipated." Eager to share the message of healing, Smith published a small book, *The Great Physician* in 1927.

5. Miracles of healing may draw people to Christ.

Smith found that divine healing can be an important -- and most effective -- tool of evangelism. He noticed how the crowds grew and how many came to Christ even when the Bosworth brothers ministered on the topic of healing. According to Kee, "Smith later observed that 'miracles of healing have frequently been used of God to gain a hearing for and to secure faith in the Gospel Message.'"

6. Miracles of healing were not experienced by all.

Over time a number of problems began to appear among those who prayed for the sick. As a consequence, Smith's interest in divine healing started to wane, Kee noted. Smith had concerns about the many people who were not healed after receiving prayer. Kee suggested, "Smith was troubled that, in biblical times, all were healed, but many left the services of the Bosworths and others still afflicted by their infirmities."

7. Miracles of healing, though biblical and genuine, were not without controversy.

Smith was bothered by the role of money in the healing campaigns. He felt an emphasis on offerings put the church and healing ministries at risk of becoming "commercialized." Kee

quoted him as saying, "The apostles made no money out of their healing ministry. Perhaps God is seeking to find a man even now whom he can trust along this line."

Related blog post:

"What P.C. Nelson Saw in the F.F. Bosworth Revival Meetings: How the Experience Moved Him to Begin His Own Healing Ministry." See here.

Note: My book, *F.F. Bosworth: The Man Behind "Christ the Healer,"* can be purchased here with a 25% discount. Use the discount code: **bosworth25**.

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