

The Welsh Revival (1859)

(Quotes are taken from the book '*The Welsh Revival*' by Thomas Philips, written in 1860)

The Welsh Revival of 1859 shook a sizeable part of Great Britain and its effects were felt around the world. Thomas Philips wrote in 1860: '*The whole heathen world is being rapidly opened to the Gospel. The two great powers that have for ages opposed its progress throughout a large portion of the earth - Popery and Mohammedanism - are giving daily proofs of weakness and decay.*'

Oh that we would compare this and other 'awakenings' with many of the so called 'revivals' of the 20th Century! The reader will soon see the stark differences....

Characteristics: As with most true revivals there were defining characteristics of this revival. Although the teaching of doctrine is not a prominent feature of revivals, certain doctrines are evident in the churches of the great revivals.

There was *fearsome and persuasive preaching* which included the judgement and the wrath of God upon sin. They truly understood '*...the terror of the Lord*' to '*persuade men*' (2Cor.5:11).

There was a *genuine fear of God*.

There was dramatic increase in the *urgency in prayer*.

The Sovereignty of God's work was mysterious but evident. Revivals often broke out *suddenly* at different places at the same time.

Holiness. People who thought they were holy were severely struck with a realisation they were in need of God's work of sanctification.

The lost were reached suddenly and sovereignly.

The churches were Evangelical. They held to the 'doctrines of Grace' such as Justification ('*Sola Fide*') & Scripture alone ('*Sola Scriptura*'). The original term '*Evangelical*' was historically and doctrinally synonymous with the terms '*Protestant*' and '*Sola Scriptura*' ('*Scripture Alone*'). Modern Evangelicals have broadened '*Evangelical*' to mean simply the Greek word for '*Gospel*' ('*evangel*'). Thus we now have Roman Catholics and Pentecostal/Charismatics claiming themselves as '*Evangelical*'. The former violate true *Sola Scriptura* with *another gospel*; the latter with the addition of extra-biblical revelations, (including 'prophecy' as *foretelling* words from God rather than *forthtelling* written Scripture). To be truly 'Evangelical' in its original sense is to accept the doctrine of '*Sola Scriptura*' (*Scripture Alone*). The great revivals came to churches that held and preached this doctrine in its *original form*.*

The beginnings: The 1859 Welsh revival began in Bregan in Cardiganshire and by the instrumentality of two men - David Morgan (a Calvinistic Methodist) and Humphrey Jones (a Wesleyan preacher). However, Jones was soon laid aside with '*physical debility, mental depression and a change of views as to the mode of promoting a revival.*' (P.138) Jones became a recluse and not a part of his own denomination.

The Calvinistic Methodists had been favoured with many revivals in the past but this Welsh revival was not confined to one denomination and most orthodox evangelical denominations were awakened.

It is believed that Mr Jones preached a sermon which Morgan heard and everyone in the church put their head down and wept. The Following week prayer meetings were held every night and men who had never graced a church were present. '*There was a beauty, a loveliness about the holy*

Word which we had never hitherto perceived. New light seemed to be thrown on it. It electrified us, and caused us to weep with joy. The feeling became general. All present were under its influence. The hardest hearts were forced to succumb...We could have prayed all night...every heart was subdued. No one dared to speak, except by tears...we were at a loss to know what course should be adopted...at length the minister rose, and slowly and pathetically read several appropriate portions of the Word of God. We then sang, and afterwards prayed again. And thus the meeting was carried on for 4 hours...The effects were...we felt more serious, more ready to speak about our religious life, more anxious as regards the salvation of the world...' (P.12,13)

The effects: It is believed by writers at the time that up to 50,000 were swept into the Kingdom of Heaven in one year. Calvinistic Methodist churches were favoured the most with souls, followed by the Independents and then the Baptists. '*There are considerable additions to the parish churches ...and to the independents, Baptists, and Wesleyans. About 3000 have been added to the Calvinistic Methodists alone [In Llandovery]. The fire is spreading still...our prayer meetings are becoming crowded, and a powerful spirit of prayer has laid hold of the churches.*' (P.21)

'There is scarcely a congregation in the whole of the Welsh district of the country which has not been more or less moved. I am not able to furnish you with the exact number added to our churches, but I am certain that at least two thousand have joined our societies [Welsh Congregational churches] since April 1859...the majority is made up of young people from fifteen to thirty.' (P.45-46)

An immediate result of the revival was less discord and more unity in prayer with other churches of the same persuasion. Drunkenness in most places almost ceased and in some areas could not be found at all. Many Public Houses (Pubs) closed, (12 closed in Bethesda). There was a social revival as well as spiritual; moral standards were heightened; repentance was openly evident; the 'Sabbath' (Sunday) was more strictly observed; and cursing and swearing in quarries ceased. '*Sinners and some very notorious ones, are flocking to the church by the scores, and I may say hundreds,...in the town of Aberystwith about 400 members have been added to the Calvinistic Methodist church alone. Several of the most ungodly people in the town have been converted. Eight publicans have taken down their signs, and become teetotallers. The work commenced here one Friday night when Mr. David Morgan was preaching...the chapel filled to overflowing.*' (P.19)

Another wrote: '*...Something awfully strong takes hold of the minds of the people...We have seen numbers with weeping eyes leaving...but unable to go further than the door; they feel compelled to return again, and offer themselves as candidates for admission into the church...at the close of the public service, 20 or 30 of the worst characters remaining behind, to be spoken to and prayed for.*' (P.20)

[Ysgoldy, Llanddeiniolen, 1860] '*The public houses are nearly emptied...we do not now require a police officer...The two chapels have become too small to contain the hearers.*' (P.115)

'There is...a considerable change in the aspect of the neighborhoods...The temperance movement gathers strength, and some of the public houses are gasping for breath, as though they were in the last struggle.' (P.30)...*One of the most*

remarkable things is the disappearance of drunkenness.' (P.39)

[Flintshire] 'The public houses are empty and the people flock to the house of Lord...on the 9th of January all the shops were closed, and during the whole of that week business was suspended at halfpast six in the evening. The chapels were crowded every evening, even on the evening of the market day...I have had the pleasure of seeing some who were among my hearers when I came here...make a profession of Christ, after sitting 23 years under my ministry.' (P.66)

'On every occasion care is taken to instruct the people in the true and unchangeable principles of religion. They are cautioned against resting in a mere outward profession. They are told that excitement is not conversion, that an awakening of the conscience to a sense of guilt and danger does not always result in a change of heart. It is strongly and constantly urged that whatever hope or confidence they may have in their own minds as to their having 'passed from death unto life' - it is a mistake, a delusion, unless it is accompanied by a hatred to sin, and a renunciation of it in every shape and form; a love to holiness, and the practical discharge of every moral duty. They are told that the Bible is to be the standard of religious feeling, as it is of religious faith. In short they are admonished to seek a thorough change of heart, and to furnish evidence thereof in holiness of life'. (P. 82)...I have gathered from enquiry that not one person in every 50 of those who have assumed a profession of religion within the last 4 or 6 months, has relapsed into the world.' (P.117)

Modern 'revivals' have been characterised by the phenomena of 'slaying in the spirit' whereby people are overcome and usually fall backwards to the ground by a force said to be the Holy Spirit. Many of the supporters of this phenomena attempt to root this phenomena in the past true revival meetings, where people did fall to the ground. However, these were called 'faintings' or 'prostrations' in which people fell forwards on their face. This was not a common thing as it is today and it was also during and under the influence of some of the most powerful preaching in history. John Wesley, George Whitefield and Jonathan Edwards wrote of people falling on their faces during the preaching in repentance and crying out to God for mercy and salvation from their sins. This is a far cry from the falling backwards into altered states of consciousness, (ASC). Many of the revivalists also stated clearly that even many of the 'faintings' were demonic or fleshly activity. There was also no human agent mediating and no 'catchers' as we see in churches today. They fell forwards and often with a fear for their lives!

[Glamorganshire] 'We have no cases of physical prostration; persons are not struck to the ground here, as in Ireland and Scotland; but we have many cases of very sudden and powerful changes...' (P.32)...'The soul is in danger - on the brink of, almost in Hell; they see it - they feel it; and in deep mental distress cry for deliverance. A Saviour is revealed to them in their despair; they behold him - believe in him; they are rescued - saved; they know it, they rejoice, and in forgetfulness of themselves, and indifferent to all around, they sometimes leap for joy! It should be stated however, that judicious ministers and elders do not encourage what may be regarded as an excessive exhibition of feeling, more especially when it interferes with the usual order of the public service, or when it disturbs or hinders the devotion of others...' (P.129,130)

Prayer! 'The first symptoms of the work appeared...in a revival of the spirit of prayer...We all wished to pray. We all

delighted to pray. We were all impelled to pray, by an unseen power. Those who had, a few weeks before, very little inclination for prayer meetings, and very seldom attended them, are among the foremost in promoting the work...This had a marked influence on the world...Many became deeply concerned about their souls, and earnestly sought the Lord for mercy, through the blood of Jesus, shed for the remission of sins. It became evident to all that our prayers were answered - that the spirit was poured out from on high; for almost every night was seen the tears of the penitent, were heard the sighs and sobs of the mourner and broken hearted, and the cries of those who saw their lost condition..' (P.41)

[Stansbatch] '...A little girl came forward, seeking the Lord in deep distress. When we were directing her to the Saviour, a man was heard sobbing and weeping bitterly, and crying aloud for mercy. 'O God,' he said, 'have mercy upon me; oh! save me or I die.' He was the little girl's father. He rose and moved to his little daughter, and threw his arms round her neck, and both, weeping and broken hearted, knelt down, and continued in earnest prayer for about 15 minutes. The father continued in great distress for many days. At a subsequent meeting he told us...that the Lord had mercy upon him - that his burden had been removed - that his sins had been forgiven - and that he knew now what it was to rejoice on Jesus.' (P.44)

[North Wales slate quarries] '[The workers] were in deep concern for their souls...they followed their work in this state of mind, occasionally weeping on account of their lost condition as guilty sinners before God. After dinner...making their way to the top of the hill...about 500 in number...they held a prayer meeting. Whilst they prayed the Holy Spirit was poured out upon them...nearly all present wept and sobbed aloud...prayer meetings were multiplied and held in the open air amongst the quarrymen.' (P.47-49)

'...in the prayer meetings, a sense of awful condemnation, and an agonising dread of God's wrath, seemed to overwhelm them, so that they were forced to cry aloud for mercy. Sometimes they would fall down on their knees...a brother would attempt to pray but his feelings would soon be so overpowered that he would be obliged to sit down or...fall down on their faces...I will defy the hardest and most callous sinner to remain five minutes within hearing of these prayers without being in tears. In fact they are not prayers, but the broken accents and the agonising groans of souls, held, as it were, over the flames of Hell...When the law has done its work with them, and the Saviour found...it is then all thanksgiving and praise...

...Young men, from 15 to 20 years old continue to pray often till midnight and sometimes until three or four o'clock in the morning. Women, also, have their prayer meetings by themselves, and they are as warm in it as the men.' (P.51,52)

'There are clear signs of that which the Bible represents as conviction of sin - the pricking of the heart - a broken and contrite spirit - repentance towards God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ...' (P.63)

'... meetings for prayer are separately held by six different parties: first, by little boys from 6 to 12 years; secondly, by boys from 10 to 15; thirdly, by young men; fourthly by girls from 8 to 15; fifthly by young women; sixthly by adults of all ages.' (P.67)

Such was the mighty 1859 Welsh revival - a revival in which God sovereignly brought an urgency in prayer and holiness unto the Lord. *The Lord was glorified* and in His mercy He saved multitudes of lost sinners. **Terry Arnold**

* See *Diakrisis* July/2000