

# 5. an Agnostic Overpowered

by David Matthews

---

*The sermon illustrates a transformative revival meeting where an agnostic experiences a powerful encounter with the Holy Spirit, leading to his conversion.*

**Scripture:** Genesis 28:16

**Topics:** "Spiritual Revival", "Gods Strength"

---

## Description

David Matthews preaches about a powerful spiritual experience during a tumultuous revival led by Evan Roberts. Roberts, filled with grace and oblivious to his own spiritual abundance, reads from I Corinthians 13, emphasizing the importance of love above all else. Amid interruptions and challenges, Roberts remains calm and connected to God, leading to miraculous moments of salvation and spiritual ecstasy reminiscent of scenes from the Book of Acts. The revival breaks linguistic barriers, challenging prejudices and bringing a radical change in the hearts of the people. Despite facing scrutiny and attempts to undermine his ministry, Evan Roberts endures with God's strength, maintaining the simplicity of his faith.

---

## Transcript

WHEN THIS GLORIOUS spiritual tumult was at its height, there came a sudden calm. Hearing a movement behind me in the pulpit, I looked up. Evan Roberts was on his feet. He looked straight down at me. Our eyes met for a few seconds. I solemnly avow that those eyes searched me through and through. They burned like coals of fire. In a split second, my innermost soul seemed to be laid bare. I feared and I shook. The lustre on his countenance eloquently proclaimed the abundance of grace overflowing his heart. Best of all, he seemed utterly oblivious of it. Had there been a cover nearby, I most assuredly would have sought it.

Then a wonderful thing happened--at least, so it seemed to me. Measuring the huge pulpit Bible with both thumbs, he opened it exactly at I Corinthians 13. Not another page was turned. Then, in measured tones he read--not preached, please remember--Paul's magnificent love poem, "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity [love], I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity [love], I am nothing -- nothing -- nothing." Emphasizing that word "nothing" and repeating it with deliberation and awful Solemnity made us all cringe

It was a painful experience for the flesh. There was no attempt at rhetoric. It was just a plain, simple, unadorned reading. But will anyone forget it? I think not. That fadeless scene has only deepened with the passage of the years.

Before Mr. Roberts had finished reading, a clear voice in petulant mood, rang out like the booming of a heavy gun. "I want to ask a question." Confusion would have ensued but for the unruffled calm of Mr. Roberts. Lie did not look in the direction of the speaker. "I want to ask a question," again challenged the querulous voice. The rude interruption produced no visible effect upon the manner or mood of the evangelist. Evan Roberts appeared immovable. His eyes were closed and his lips were moving. Evidently, he was in touch with his Lord, probably committing the situation into the hands of his Master. To my inexperienced mind, the situation was perilous.

Just then, someone started one of the popular melodies that was much in vogue during the revival, "O! 'tis lovely! O! 'tis lovely! All my sins are washed away." Somehow one expected the building to collapse with the pressure of glory within its walls. Again and again the sweet words were repeated. Spiritual ecstasy lifted the people heavenward. Above the sweet melody came another exasperating challenge: "If you do not answer me, I will come to the pulpit to ask my question." The speaker, a local man, was well known to the majority present. For years he had been associated with a small but conceited coterie of men who arrogated to themselves resounding titles. Ordinary folk called them agnostics. They were, in many respects, very fine individuals who, by familiarizing themselves with questionable literature, had been led into unbelief. All of them were once members of the Sunday school. Later experience proved that the young man figuring in this interruption was one of the excellent among men, because no one heeded his interruption, he proceeded to carry out his threat. All evening he had been sitting remorsefully in the gallery. He moved toward the stairs, the crowd hindering rapid progress; his intention was to reach the deacon's pew, if not to occupy the pulpit. It was a defiant action. God has His own way of dealing with defiance and arrogance. As the man came slowly down the crowded stairway, the unexpected happened. As in the case of Saul of Tarsus, on the Damascus road, the Holy Spirit overpowered this man--he would have collapsed on the stairs had not the people upheld him--constraining him to cry out for mercy and pardon. What a scene followed! When the people realized the full import of what had happened, the shout went up, "He has been saved! He has been saved !"

Riotous enthusiasm broke loose. People surrendered to what appeared to be a delirium of religious excitement. Restraint was gone. Tears and laughter were intermingled. Songs and sobs filled the air. Scenes from the Book of Acts were re-enacted. Saul's prostration was viewed anew in the light of the things happening. "Haleliwia!

Praise the Lord! . . . Diolch Iddo! . . . A'r Ri hen bo'r goron! ... Crown Him Lord of All!" excitedly cried the delighted people. In another part of the church they were singing, "Come to Jesus, come to Jesus, come to Jesus just now." All over the church sinners were asking, "What must I do to be saved?" Willing workers moved as fast as the crowded pews would allow them, ministering solace to distraught souls. Moments like those do not often recur during a brief lifetime. We were all in the grip of a spiritual maelstrom. Uppermost in my mind was Jacob's expression, "The Lord is in this place, and It knew it not."

"Throw out the lifeline, throw out the lifeline," sang someone, and the crowd joined in. English choruses were taboo in our unilingual congregations. Freely, but shyly, I confess that I had never heard a single English chorus sung in our orthodox assemblies. To make such an attempt would have been rated almost a "sin against the Holy Ghost." Such a statement may seem strange, but it is, nevertheless, strictly true.

The only exception would be the rendering of choruses from the great oratorios of the masters, in our Eisteddfod, our famous competitive meetings. But the singing of gospel choruses in another language was unthinkable.

The Celt found it easier to express his deepest religious emotions in his native Welsh language than in the less-familiar English idiom. But this revival burned all linguistic barriers. And, to our amazement, there was nothing incongruous in it. With what appreciation did they sing, "Throw out the lifeline to danger-fraught men, and "Let the dower lights be burning." The Moody-Sankey hymns seemed to take on an entirely new meaning. Revival makes a radical change in our prejudices.

While this commotion went on, my eyes often rested on the evangelist's face, which shone with an unearthly luster, as Moses' face must have done when he descended from Sinai. It was all so strange to me. Never in all my experience of religious gatherings, extending at that time to over a quarter of a century, had I seen anything comparable. As the Lord Jesus, on the turbulent waters of Gennesaret, gazed calmly at the lashing seas so the evangelist calmly viewed the scene around him. Somehow one expected to hear a voice saying, "Peace, be still."

"Will someone go outside? To the left of the church you will find a woman in spiritual distress. Will you help her to find the Saviour?" This extraordinary utterance came from the lips of Evan Roberts. Profound silence struck us all. It was found to be just as he had said. There was a "calm" of amazed wonder! What manner of

man is this? was the unexpressed thought of those in that church. It made one feel uncomfortable.

My own thoughts were anything but calm. What power was it that enabled this young man to make such confident assertion? How could he describe the soul-agony of a single individual when he was surrounded by a multitude, and that soul not even within the building? Bunyan-like, my thoughts were "tumbled up and down." Before an explanation reached me, another request came: "There is a young man in soul-distress at the far end of the gallery. He is anxious for salvation. Will someone please help him?" Turning inquisitively around, the people in the immediate neighbourhood saw such a young man, ploughed deep with conviction of sin. He was helped. The crowd once more burst forth in the glad refrain, "Diolch Iddo," invariably sung when a soul had been known to "receive the blessing" and to have entered into the glorious freedom of Christ. But the question persisted

--how could the evangelist have known? Those persons sitting nearby evidently had been ignorant of anyone in urgent need of spiritual comfort and help. Closer acquaintance with the Scriptures in later years taught us that the prophet Ezekiel did similar things on several occasions when consciously led by the Holy Spirit. Did not our Lord declare on one occasion, although pressed by the throng, "Who touched me

It seems that the spiritual intuitions of the revivalist had been greatly quickened when he received the baptism of the Spirit that made him a world figure. Did it not also make him peculiar, in the estimation of many? This became more apparent as the meetings progressed. For instance, in Liverpool some months later, he astounded the people surrounding him by announcing that there was a person present trying to hypnotize him. Next day, glaring headlines appeared in the city newspapers. Leaders of all denominations fulminated at such unwarranted interference by an unsympathetic spectator. Critics of the revivalist endeavored to prove by this incident that Ryan Roberts was losing his mental equilibrium.

Circumstances, however, soon proved that their vitriolic aspersions were made too hurriedly. Proof was advanced later that a professional mesmerist, engaged in one of the city's entertainment halls, was actually present with the avowed intention of paralyzing Evan Roberts' power. This extraordinary incident created confusion in the minds of many adherents of the revival. Much that Mr. Roberts did, and even more that he did not do, was reported around the world. Special reporters dogged his footsteps. Night and day inquisitive newspapermen watched every movement, sending each uttered statement to the ends of the earth. This made an indelible impression upon his sensitive nature. God alone enabled him to endure the publicity. It would have ruined the simplicity of his faith, for the circumstances through which he was called to pass were extremely nerve-wracking.

---

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/david-matthews/5-an-agnostic-overpowered/>

# *Grow in Your Walk with Christ*

---

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

**[www.sermonindex.net](http://www.sermonindex.net)**