

6. a Glimpse of Gethsemane

by David Matthews

David Matthews' sermon explores the profound impact of prayer and youth during the revival led by Evan Roberts, highlighting transformative spiritual experiences.

Scripture: Psalm 27:8, Joel 2:28, Acts 2:17, Romans 8:26, Ephesians 5:19, 1 Thessalonians 5:16

Topics: "Holy Spirit", "Revival Movement"

Description

David Matthews recounts a powerful revival scene in Trecynon where Mr. Roberts, a man deeply immersed in prayer, experienced a profound encounter with God, shedding tears of soul anguish. The youth, well-versed in Scripture, played a significant role in the movement, expressing wisdom and fluency in their prayers and testimonies. The Holy Spirit worked through these young hearts, leading to a nationwide awakening that transformed lives and challenged societal norms. The revival meetings were marked by an overwhelming sense of God's presence, with time passing unnoticed as people eagerly sought spiritual nourishment and transformation.

Transcript

LET US RETURN to the scene of the revival in Trecynon. During the service in Ebenezer, another striking incident occurred. After forty years, the scene still comes vividly to mind. Mr. Roberts had an experience which I believe was never repeated throughout his career. Prayer was the keynote of his tireless life. Nothing was ever done in a spirit of independence. No action taken or engagement entered into without definitely committing the matter to God. His soul appeared to be saturated through and through with the spirit of prayer. It was the atmosphere in which he moved and lived. He enjoyed uninterrupted intercourse with heaven. Whenever one looked into his face, he seemed to be engaged in intercession. It was an object lesson to all. Prayer was the breath of his soul. When this incident was far in the past he told us that he had asked God to give him a taste of the agonies of Gethsemane. Probably in his later Christian experience such a request would have been unthinkable. He and others who were prominent at this time of visitation were minors or novices in the deep things of God."

However, the fact remains, and I am a living witness of the incident, that the prayer was answered in a terrifying way. Falling on the floor of the pulpit, he moaned like one mortally wounded, while his tears flowed incessantly. His fine physical frame shook under crushing soul anguish.

No one was allowed to touch him. Those seated close to him frustrated any attempt at assistance which many willing hands would have gladly rendered. The majority of us were petrified with fear in the presence

of such uncontrollable grief. What did it mean? What good could possibly accrue from such manifestations in overcrowded meetings? Thoughts of this nature agitated our minds. No one doubted the transparent sincerity of the man, however mysterious the happenings. When Evan Roberts stood before the congregation again, his face seemed transfigured. It was patent to all that he had passed through an experience that was extremely costly. No one who witnessed that scene would vote for a repetition. One wonders whether such hallowed occurrences should be chronicled.

An unbiased observer would conclude that the youthful members vastly outnumbered the older folk in this marvelous movement of the Holy Spirit. They flung boundless energy into the work, holding nothing back. Their youthful minds having been saturated with Holy Writ during the years of Scripture training in the Sunday school, they were enabled to express their thoughts intelligently and scripturally in prayer or testimony as they were led or impelled by the Spirit of God. Even the very young, between nine and twelve years of age, prayed with wisdom and a fluency that sounded uncanny. One young lad, nearly blind, often startled congregations by his prolific quotations of Scripture. Visitors from other countries noticed this phase of the work. They did not hesitate to express wonder in the columns of the newspapers. "Your sons and daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions," the prophet Joel had announced. Why, then, should any doubtful misgivings invade the minds of men and women well acquainted with the Scriptures? Buoyant youth was expressing itself in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, as Paul exhorted.

This preliminary contact with the revival convinced me that the Holy Spirit was tapping unlimited resources by captivating these young hearts. Within a few weeks, that fact was brought home to the consciousness of the whole nation, with irresistible force. These "flaming" spirits swept through the black haunts of sin and degradation with quenchless zeal. They rescued fallen men and women whom Laodicean churches had apparently either forgotten or ignored.

In one of the populous valleys, these young men and women walked in procession through the streets, singing hymns and visiting public houses to invite their habitues to come to the revival. Many of the places were completely deserted and others had their trade depleted, if not entirely crippled. In one such drinking place there was one solitary customer sitting gloomily alone. He was miserable because his friends had all been caught in the upsurge of revival. Suddenly the evening air was rent with the jubilant voices of happy songsters just outside the door. So infuriated were the man and woman in charge at the audacity of these zealous youths that they picked up some of the empty ale-pots lying on the empty tables and flung them out recklessly among the happy throng. They thus provided eloquent witness to the depredations made on the liquor trade by the spiritual awakening. Disgusted with the conduct of his host and hostess, the solitary figure, reluctant witness to this foolish, unbridled madness, rose from his seat, joined the enthusiastic processionists, then went with them to the church, there to surrender to Christ! What jubilation followed is more easily imagined than described.

Happenings in churches everywhere made one utterly oblivious of the passage of time. No one bothered about the clock. Hours passed like minutes. The ticking of the sanctuary timepiece was drowned in an avalanche of praise. Think of the frigid attitudes of the carnal worshiper, forever consulting the clock as the ordinary service proceeds. If, perchance, the minister exceeds the hour usually specified for such exercises, looks indicate the displeasure of stony hearts. When a "man of God" receives divine unction for the delivery of his Master's message, a watch on one's wrist may be a positive nuisance. Revival spells the death-knell of sanctimonious artificiality. Frigid regularity, however beneficial in other spheres of life, falls first victim to the impact of any spiritual movement.

When I left the heavenly atmosphere of the church for home, I discovered that it was five in the morning! I had been in the house of God for ten hours--they had passed like ten minutes! Pushing through a throng that made progress slow, I discovered on the outside of the church that there were hundreds of people patiently standing--waiting in the chilly November air. They had been there all night, hoping somehow, sometime, for an opportunity to get inside God's house. Outside of the crush caused by the multitude anxious to catch a glimpse of Evan Roberts, one became instinctively conscious of a beautiful silence prevailing all around. A Presence, invisible but very real, pervaded the atmosphere. The air seemed electrified.

Moving down the road, with thoughts alert and emotions quickened, I started whistling, "Throw Out the Lifeline." As I proceeded on my way home, it became evident that the haunting melody had gripped my heart. Was it my subconscious self? It is an indisputable fact that, under ordinary circumstances, nothing in Mr. Sankey's collection of hymns would have retained my attention for any length of time, for in my years of study of harmony my critical mind had engaged many times in enumerating and magnifying the irregularities in these simple, but heart searching hymns.

As students, we arrived at the conclusion that Mr. Sankey knew next to nothing about the rules that governed musical composition. This created a prejudice in my heart against anything that appeared cheap in hymns of the sanctuary.

Psychologically, a miracle had occurred. My spirit had evidently responded unresistingly to the spiritual atmosphere prevailing in the marvelous meeting from which I had just emerged. Yes! I found myself whistling abstractedly "Throw out the lifeline"--but what was that-- could I hear aright? Was my imagination playing hide-and-seek with me? Someone else was whistling. Who could it be at this early hour? Just a moment ago the road seemed deserted, with only my throbbing heart beating time to the little tune that had invaded the sanctuary of my soul. Yes, someone was drawing nearer, someone who had been caught by the same refrain.

Out of the gloom there emerged, to my great surprise, the fine form of a police officer, standing over six feet in height. For a moment we faced each other in silence. Then in jocular mood I remarked, "Have you caught the revival fever too?" Saluting smartly, as if in the presence of a superior officer, he answered, "Yes, sir, it's right in here," as he thumped his massive chest. After exchanging greetings and discussing the wonderful services, we moved in our different directions. The whistling persisted as sound of his footsteps died away in the distance. I noticed that the tune had not been changed--it was still "Throw Out the Lifeline." Never once were we privileged to meet again. I thanked God many times for this six-foot example of fine "muscular religion" at the outset of the great revival in Wales. How many times, I wonder, did he whistle that tune during his lonely beat through the nights? It was my first contact with the revival outside of chapel walls. It certainly was a good sample.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/david-matthews/6-a-glimpse-of-gethsemane/>

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