

Daniel Rowland of Llangeitho

by Horatius Bonar

Daniel Rowland's ministry was marked by his fervor of spirit, singleness of eye and heart, and compassion for souls, and his preaching had a profound impact on the people of Wales, leading to mass conversions and a revival that spread over several counties.

Scripture: Romans 10:14

Topics: "Preaching The Gospel", "Revival"

Description

Horatius Bonar highlights the remarkable ministry of Daniel Rowland of Llangeitho, Wales, who, like George Whitefield, was known for his fervent faith and zeal. Rowland's preaching transformed lives, moving from a focus on judgment to proclaiming the peace of Christ after experiencing his own spiritual awakening. His ministry was marked by extraordinary revivals, drawing thousands who were deeply impacted by his words, which were described as powerful and life-changing. Despite facing persecution and eventual ejection from the Church of England, Rowland continued to preach with unwavering dedication until his death at seventy-seven. His legacy is one of compassion, transformation, and the profound impact of the gospel on both his life and the lives of countless others.

Transcript

Daniel Rowland of Llangeitho, Wales, stands next to his contemporary George Whitefield in might, faith, and zeal. In natural boldness and energy of character, tempered with gentleness and love, he had few equals. In fervor of spirit, in singleness of eye and heart, in compassion for souls, he is marked out among a thousand. The success of his ministry was truly marvelous. He blazed like a torch in majestic brightness, illuminating the darkness of his native mountains. He went forth in the strength of God, enduring storms of persecution and carrying with him from valley to valley the glad tidings of salvation. The power of the Spirit seemed to follow his footsteps, and his words were like sharp arrows. Multitudes flocked to hear him, and thousands owned him as their father in Christ.

An old man of much shrewdness who had heard both Whitefield and Rowland was once asked by a friend as to the respective excellencies of these two mighty men. Whitefield, he thought, might have had the greater power in arresting and alarming the unconverted, but Rowland excelled him in building up and comforting the children of God. His sermons were exact in method, full of matter, and impressive by reason of their edge and point. Once heard, they were graven for life upon the soul.

When overpowered by a rush of feeling, Rowland seemed to gather new power, substance, and animation. His bursts of emotion were also outbreaks of manly thought and vigorous truth. His word was as a fire and as a hammer breaking the rock in pieces, and he was singularly used by God in the ministry.

Interestingly, Rowland entered upon the ministerial office before he had experienced the power of the gospel upon his own soul. Hearing that a neighboring minister had been much blessed in arousing the careless, he resolved to follow his example. Thus he endeavored to thunder forth the terrors of judgment and to call on his hearers to flee from the wrath to come.

People soon flocked to him in crowds, and it is said that at least a hundred individuals were brought under conviction by his preaching before he himself had been converted. Yet even from the first he seems to have been in earnest about his people. Though in much ignorance, he was trying to fulfill his duty toward them. He knew that he was set over their souls, and he would not be contented until he saw some kind of impression produced upon them.

Rowland saw that if there was any truth at all in eternal realities, the people ought to feel something when they were preached to, rather than sit with dry eyes and mindless apathy when heaven or hell was set before them. Nor was he long disappointed. Being in earnest himself, his people caught the infection of his earnestness, and multitudes were moved and melted. Shortly after this period, he himself received spiritual life. Invigorated by fresh energy from the Spirit, his zeal was both purified and kindled into intenser warmth and glow. His conscience had been engaged in his previous work; now his whole soul and heart were thrown into it.

However, for some time after his own awakening, Rowland continued in something of the same terrific strain. The truth was that he was still in bondage and agony himself, writhing under the torture of an unappeased conscience. He spoke in the bitterness of his spirit, preaching as if within the sight of hell. His warnings were like the utterances of some solemn prophet. His voice was like the trumpet of doom.

It was nearly two years before he found full liberty and peace of soul. Light had for some time been dawning, but at length it burst forth into full brightness. Having found peace for his own soul, Rowland immediately began to preach that peace to others. From the first, his ministry had been the reflection of his own inward spiritual state. He preached the law because he felt the law. He preached terror because he felt terror. Now that he had tasted the liberty of Christ, he began to proclaim it. He had found forgiveness, and he preached from what he had experienced. He had been delivered from bondage and darkness, and he proclaimed the way of deliverance to others.

The change in his preaching was soon noticed and felt. He had cast down many wounded, but he now raised them up and healed them. He had broken the bones of many, but he now came to bind them up. He had been successful as a preacher of the law, but he was still more so as a preacher of the gospel. Most willingly and movingly did he now set forth the free salvation of Christ, entreating men to be reconciled to God.

The effects of Rowland's preaching after this time were remarkable, both for the greater numbers awakened and also for the manner in which their awakening took place. Formerly, they were overwhelmed with terror, but now they were melted under the influence of joy and love. It seemed like the outpouring of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost. So powerfully did the glad tidings affect their minds that many were unable to contain themselves, and according to the warmth of the Welsh manner, they would even leap for joy, making the hills and valleys echo with their songs of praise.

This glorious work was not confined to Llangeitho but diffused itself on every side, spreading over several counties. The number of those converted at this time was reckoned by thousands. The audiences that came together to hear Rowland were amazing. Ten to twenty thousand people often listened to him in the open air. At his monthly sacraments, he usually preached out of one of the church windows to the multitude standing outside. They came from almost every county in Wales, some of them walking seventy or eighty miles and returning home with praises on their lips.

During Rowland's ministry, several remarkable seasons of revival were experienced. At no time was his preaching unfruitful, but during certain periods, a larger blessing accompanied his ministry. It may be asked why it was not one perpetual harvest. In Rowland's case, it seemed as if a sifting season were required, for after he had been tested by divisions and trials, God poured out His Spirit in 1762. At that time, a most extraordinary revival of religion took place under his preaching that continued to flow for some time afterward.

The year after this revival took place, Rowland was ejected from the Church of England. His faithfulness, energy, unwearied labors, and extraordinary success were too much for the bishop of his diocese. Without any warning or specific charges, he was stripped of his license. He was reading prayers when two clergymen entered the church to deliver the bishop's letter of ejection. He obeyed upon the spot, and bidding farewell to the church and pulpit where he had so often preached with such marvelous success and power, he went out weeping and brokenhearted.

At the persuasion of his flock, he stood on the churchyard wall and preached to them. This took place in 1763, when Rowland was about fifty-three years old. Immediately a large chapel was erected for him, and the work of God went on in spite of all Episcopal efforts to quench the flame. The revival spread swiftly over Wales. "The outpouring of the Spirit," we are told, "was most marvelous in its effects. It seemed as if the whole chapel was filled at that time with a supernatural element, and the whole congregation was struck with uncommon astonishment and seized with peculiar emotions. Hundreds were bathed in tears. Some were overwhelmed with grief, others with godly sorrow, and still others rejoiced with joy unspeakable and full of glory."

Persecution began to increase against him. Not only were attempts made to prevent his preaching, but his life was threatened several times. In spite of all obstacles, Rowland pressed forward in his career of usefulness, and blessing followed his footsteps wherever he went. In fact, to the end of his life, this blessing accompanied him. Even to the age of seventy-seven, he went about preaching the everlasting gospel with marks of power.

He said to his people on the last Sabbath that he addressed them, "I am almost leaving, and am on the point of being taken from you. I am not tired of the work, but in it. I believe that my heavenly Father will soon release me from my labors and bring me to my everlasting rest, but I hope He will continue His gracious presence with you after I am gone." He slept in Jesus on Saturday, September 16, 1790, in the seventy-seventh year of his life and the fifty-third year of his ministry.

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