

Garland, Texas - the Welsh Revival of 1904-05

by J. Edwin Orr

The sermon explores the profound impact of the Welsh Revival of 1904-05, led by Evan Roberts, emphasizing its origins in prayer and its transformative effects on society and the church.

Duration: 22:54

Scripture: Psalm 85:6, Joel 2:28, Matthew 5:14, Acts 2:17, James 4:8

Topics: "Holy Spirit", "Revival Movement"

Description

This sermon delves into the remarkable Welsh Revival of 1904, focusing on the pivotal role of Evan Roberts and the powerful movement of God's Spirit that transformed lives and communities. It highlights the prayerful beginnings, the impact on individuals and society, and the lasting legacy of revival that extended beyond Wales to influence regions like the United States.

Transcript

However, I'm taking a little bit of the time tonight because so many people have asked me questions about the Welsh Revival and about Evan Roberts, whom God so signally used in that revival, but I thought I'd like to give a little snippet of information at this present time. I knew Evan Roberts personally. I was not alive during the revival, which took place in 1904, but like the other great movements, it began in prayer.

There was a speaker of the Keswick Convention in England, Joseph Jenkins, who was pastor of a church in Newquay in Cardigan in Wales. He talked to his young people one Sunday morning and he said, What does Jesus Christ mean to you? The young people were a little embarrassed. They were godly young people, they always began their meetings with prayer, with scripture reading, they loved to sing the Welsh hymns.

But he persisted, What does Jesus Christ mean to you? A young man spoke up and said, Jesus Christ is the hope of the world. No, no, he said, I don't mean that. What does he mean to you? A girl called Flory Evans, who had been converted only three weeks, spoke up and said, I love the Lord Jesus with all my heart.

It was so sincere, it so deeply moved those young people, that Dr. Martin Lloyd-Jones, the famous Welsh preacher, told me that was the beginning of the Welsh revival. Joseph Jenkins formed the young people into a team. He took them with him in preaching.

Seth Joshua, the outstanding evangelist of Wales at that time, visited that church in September. I have read his diary in the University of Wales archives. 19th September.

I tried to close the meeting, but it would continue on beyond human control. I know, or knew, his son Dr. Peter Joshua, who died just last year, an outstanding American Presbyterian minister. He said his father tried to close the meeting, said now young people, it's three minutes to twelve, tomorrow's another day, let's have the benediction, go home and get some sleep.

He pronounced the benediction, there's a slight pause, and then someone would start to pray or sing. Then he would try again, he said young people, tomorrow's another day, and someone said it's tomorrow already. That's rather contradictory, but you know what they meant.

He was so moved. Mrs. Jessie Penn Lewis wrote to a magazine in London saying, a cloud no bigger than a man's hand had appeared in Wales. By the time that was published, something else was underway.

Now Evan Roberts was a coal miner. He was a Sunday school teacher, but he felt called to the ministry and he was studying at Newcastle Emlyn College when Seth Joshua came back from that church and told of the local revival in Newquay. And Evan Roberts' heart was stirred.

The students of the seminary petitioned the principal to cancel all classes and let them attend Seth Joshua's next meeting at a place called Lyne-Anner. The principal said, you'll learn more in one week of revival than three years of study at college. So the students all went down there.

The evening meetings were packed, but the morning meetings, in those days they didn't have babysitters and people at work, people at school couldn't come. So only the nice old ladies of the parish were there, plus the theological students. But one morning Seth Joshua said in Welsh, O our glued pligne, O Lord bend us.

And this young fellow Evan Roberts, 26 years of age, went forward and prayed, O God bend me. That was a deep experience for him. He said to his roommate, Sidney Evans, do you think God could give us a hundred thousand souls? Now if one of my students came and said, I want to go into evangelism, do you think God would give me a hundred thousand souls? I would put it down to enthusiasm.

But Evan Roberts was deadly in earnest, and it's very interesting, in the next five months there were a hundred thousand conversions. He went to the principal, he said, I can't concentrate on my studies. I keep hearing a voice that says you must go back and talk to young people in your home church.

Mr. Phillips, he said, is that the voice of the Spirit or the voice of the devil? And the principal said very wisely, the devil never gives orders like that. So he went home. His parents said, why aren't you at study? Are you in trouble? Have you been sent down? No, he said, they give me time off to speak to the young people.

What young people? In our church. Well, they said we were in church on Sunday and the pastor made no announcement. Evan Roberts says he doesn't know yet.

Now what would you say if you're a pastor and somebody came back from a Bible school after two months study and said, I've come to preach. Well, you'd be careful not to hurt his feelings. You'd be even more careful not to hurt the people's feelings.

So he didn't invite him immediately to start preaching. He said, how about coming to the prayer meeting on Monday? Monday night was prayer meeting night. He didn't ask him to speak to the prayer meeting.

At the end of the prayer meeting, when they were getting up to go home, he said, our young brother Evan Roberts feels he has a word for you if you care to wait. Many went on home, but 17 people waited. And Evan Roberts began like delivering a telegram.

I have a message for you from the Lord. You must confess any known sin and put any wrong done to man right again. Second, you must put away any doubtful habit.

Third, you must obey the Spirit promptly. Finally, you must confess your faith publicly. Those became the four points of the Welsh Revival.

All 17 responded. The pastor was so pleased, he said, we have a mission service tomorrow night. Would you speak there? He spoke at the midweek service on Wednesday.

On Thursday they had a temperance meeting, but they turned it into a general meeting. On Friday they had class meetings. They combined them.

The crowds got so big. On Sunday a visiting minister came to preach, and Evan Roberts sat on the pew with his family. But the people got up at the end of the evening service and said, we'd like to hear Evan Roberts again.

So they had another meeting. And next week the break came. You say, what do you mean the break? There was a deep moving of the Holy Spirit.

It's very interesting that at the same time in North Wales, a Baptist pastor, R.B. Jones, was preaching. And the prayers of the people drowned out his preaching. Such a move of God's Spirit.

The newspapers in Wales were very interested. The Western Mail sent down a reporter a report on this. He said it was a most unusual meeting.

There didn't seem to be an order of service. Yet the people didn't want to go home. And he said when the meeting closed at 425 in the morning, make a note of that John, when the meeting closed at 425 in the morning, they didn't want to go home.

They were standing outside the church, still talking. And then a very British remark from the reporter. He said, I felt that this was no ordinary gathering.

But the news was out. And a landslide of interest came. On Saturday every grocery store in that industrial valley was emptied of groceries by people coming to the meetings.

And on Sunday every church packed to suffocation. The movement was on. Now you jump to conclusions.

You said then Evan Roberts became the Billy Graham of Wales. Nothing of the sort. He was not really an evangelist, a harvester.

He was a revivalist. He spoke to revive God's people. And the resulting conversions followed.

He wouldn't announce his meetings. Can you imagine? Wouldn't announce his meetings. I talked to Dr. Merton Lewis.

He died some years ago. He said he was just seven years of age when Evan Roberts came to their valley. He wasn't expected.

His father came back from the mines. He was a coal miner. Took a bath, put on his Sunday clothes, and said, come mother we're going to the meeting.

They went to the big church in the village, packed to suffocation, four o'clock in the afternoon. They couldn't find a place, but when they saw a mother with three little children they made room for her. Evan Roberts arrived unexpectedly at seven.

The church was so crowded he climbed on a bench and walked on the shoulders of the men up the aisle and climbed over the front of the pulpit. He only said one word in Welsh, Gwedion. Let us pray.

That's all they ever heard him say. Because just as in Korea, everyone began to pray simultaneously aloud. You say, what kind of praying was that? Everyone was so in the presence of God, he didn't know that anyone else was praying.

I've heard that not only in Korea, but I've heard that in the Soviet Union, where the Spirit of God was moving, that people prayed simultaneously. I said to Merton Lewis, it was an ejaculation prayer, like you know you go to a meeting where people say, Jesus, Jesus, or Lord, Lord, Lord, or help us Lord, or something like that. No, no, everyone praying his own prayer.

One man was praying, Oh God, give me another chance and I'll put things right. And the mother was praying, Oh God, my boy hasn't written to me since he went to Liverpool two years ago. Lord, what about my boy? Somebody else praying something else.

One man took his elbow and hit Mr. Lewis senior and said, Would you stop praying? Tell me how I can become a Christian. I can't stand this. Evan Roberts left at 10 o'clock at night to go to another meeting.

His leaving was a commotion, of course, he had to climb on the shoulders again and walk back. But the meeting went on. Mr. Lewis at two o'clock in the morning said, Come mother, we better take the children home to bed.

One child had fallen asleep, another was toppling over. They walked home in the drizzle, put them in the bed, so close to daybreak that Mr. Lewis sat in the rocking chair in front of the kitchen fire and slept till daybreak, went off to the mines again, came back at three, took a bath, and said, Come mother, we're going back to the meeting. Went back to the same church, the meeting going full tilt.

He said, That's incredible. Didn't you hear Robert Coleman say that's what it's like at Asbury College? But could you imagine a whole country like that? It was phenomenal. The reports were in every newspaper in the Western world.

You look up any Dallas paper of 1904 towards the end of 1904, you find reports of the Welsh Revival. Not only were a hundred thousand people converted, but the social impact was astounding. By the way, as far as those converts were concerned, five years later a man wrote a book to debunk the Welsh Revival.

You'd hardly believe this, but he said of the hundred thousand figures that joined the historic denominations, after five years only 75,000 were still in membership. Only 75,000. Of course that didn't take care of the immigration from Wales.

Wales is a very poor country, hilly and rocky and mountainous. Lots of them emigrated to Pennsylvania, to Canada, to Australia, and so forth. I decided to research that, and I found the number who remained in fellowship was eighty-two and a half percent, which was astounding.

But as I say, the social impact was even more amazing. Drunkenness was cut in half, but it caused a wave of bankruptcies. You say, how could a revival cause bankruptcies? Mostly taverns couldn't sell their booze.

You know, they buy their stock of liquor, but they have to sell it to pay their bills. They couldn't sell it. They went broke one after another.

Crime was cut in half. I've studied the records of the crimes supplied by the police. In some places the police were unemployed.

They sent for a sergeant of the police to answer questions, what do you do with your time now? Imagine asking the police in Dallas, what do you do with your time? I don't know what it's like in Dallas, Ruud, but in Los Angeles, if my wife were to call the police and say, I think there's a prowler outside, they'd say, well, we're too busy to come, but if you hear anything more suspicious, call us again. But in Wales, the police were unemployed. The sergeant answered some questions.

He said, well, before the revival our main job was to prevent crime or to control crowds at market days, football games, and the like. Since the revival, practically no crime. So we just go with the crowds.

A councillor said, what do you mean you go with the crowds? Well, councillor, he said, you know where the crowds are now? They're packing the churches. Every church packed every night. But do they need the police to direct them to the church? Oh, he said, you don't understand.

We have 17 police in our station, but we've got three excellent male quartets. If any church wants a quartet to sing, they notify the police. Judges were presented with white gloves, not a case to try.

I don't know what it's like in Dallas, but in Los Angeles, if a man commits a murder, it may be a year before he's tried. There are so many cases on the calendar. But the Chamberlain would get up and say, Your Worship, there are no cases to try.

No robberies, no embezzlements, no rapes, no murders, nothing. There were even slowdowns in the coal mines. I didn't say strikes, just slowdowns.

So many Welsh coal miners were converted and stopped using bad language that the horses that dragged the trucks in the mines couldn't understand what was being said to them, and transportation slowed down. This was the Welsh revival. There are so many people that say, Why didn't it last? I traveled all over Wales in 1934, thirty years later.

I used to test the meeting. How many people here were converted in the Welsh revival? A majority over a certain age. Well, why not under that certain age? Because they weren't alive or they were only babies at the time.

Someone asked Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones in Toronto in 1934, and he replied, I would say that the main leadership of the Welsh Church today are the converts of the revival. I might mention in passing, in 1974, some journalist wrote a series of three articles ridiculing the Welsh revival and slandering Evan Roberts.

Evan Roberts died in 1951, I think it was.

Now, do you know that according to common law, you cannot be charged with libel for slandering the dead? You could accuse George Washington of the most heinous crimes, and it's not anything against the law. That's an unfortunate thing. When I read these articles, it said Evan Roberts was an immoral man.

There were whispers of the many women in his life. His preaching was so aphrodisiac that the illegitimate birth rate in Wales went up. I wrote to the editor, I said, you haven't heard the last of this.

I knew Evan Roberts. He was what we would call a chaste man. So decent that the world wouldn't understand him.

But I went over to Wales on my own expense, and the principal of the Baptist College there arranged for me to speak in Bangor, Aberystwyth, Swansea and Cardiff. We had the biggest meeting in the biggest auditorium in Cardiff, admission by ticket, hundreds turned away. The Lord Mayor was there in his regalia.

And I told them what I discovered. I said, who was it that said that Evan Roberts' preaching increased the illegitimate birth rate in Wales? I found it wasn't a historian. It was a Baptist minister in Birmingham.

I called him up. I said, may I ask you as a fellow Baptist minister, where you got this? He said, my mother told me. I said, how would your mother know? Did she keep statistics? Well, she knew a girl that got into trouble during the revival.

I said, in the meetings? Oh no, he's not in the meetings, but perhaps of such excitement, you know, that some girl was careless. I said, I can't argue with an anecdote, but maybe for every girl who was careless, if there were any, perhaps a thousand girls quit fooling around. He said, but that wouldn't show in the statistics.

I said, no, non-pregnancies are never reported. Then I thought, indeed they are. I went up to London to Somerset House, where they keep all the records of births, deaths and marriages.

They have a whole section on illegitimate births. I found that the illegitimate birth rate in Radnorshire dropped 44% in one year. In Merenith, 44%.

In Glamorgan, 8%. But in every Welsh county, the illegitimate birth rate dropped. I felt like Samson taking the jawbone of an ass and slaying a thousand.

I almost felt like I'd come and say, well, Evan, I was glad to do it for you, because he was a man of God. A very liberal theological professor came to me afterwards. He said, oh, thank you for coming to Wales.

He said, my theology isn't like yours. But he said, the two godliest people I ever met in my life were my mother and my Sunday school teacher, and both were converted in the Welsh revival. Did you know that that revival swept the United States from coast to coast? Did you know that in Schenectady, the Schenectady Gazette ran a column called Yesterday's Conversions? If you want to know who was converted yesterday, there was this column to tell you who was converted yesterday.

Did you know that in Portland, Oregon, 200 stores closed from 11 to 2 for prayer? Portland, Oregon. It swept Texas like a tidal wave. I have a lot of friends in Southwestern.

When I was researching this, I asked my friends in church history, missions, and evangelism, can you give me any clue on the great revival in Texas, 1905? They said, we never heard of it. I said, Dr. W.R. White of Baylor says that was the year that so many Baylor students went to the mission field. They said, we wouldn't argue with Dr. W.R. White, but you've got the wrong date.

I said, why? 1905 was a bad year for Southern Baptists. He said, that was the year the landmarkers pulled out and started the organization Texarkana and so forth. You know, the people who think that Southern Baptists are not Baptist enough? Well, that's always an amazing thing to other people.

We think Southern Baptists are quite Baptist enough, if not more. But he said, we lost hundreds of churches, scores of associations in Arkansas and Tennessee pulled out. I said, well, look up your figures.

So they got the Southern Baptists annual. They said, would you look at that? The number of Baptisms in the residue, those that stayed true to the convention, went up 25% over the previous year. I shall tell you something else.

There were so many conversions in Texas. So many young men volunteering for the ministry, they knew that Louisville could never take care of them. So in 1905, they started a new seminary called Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

And my friend said, what do you know? Did you know all that? Did you know about the revival that swept Texas in 1905? Well, why don't you? It tells us to tell our children's children what God has done. Well, we don't do it. All right, Suzanne, will you come and sing for us again?

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