

# The Awakening of 1904 in Wales

by J. Edwin Orr

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*The sermon explores the profound impact of the Welsh revival of 1904, highlighting key figures, societal changes, and the power of prayer in igniting spiritual awakening.*

**Duration:** 29:18

**Scripture:** 2 Chronicles 7:14, Psalm 85:6, Isaiah 44:3, Joel 2:28, Matthew 5:16, John 3:16, Acts 2:17, Romans 12:2, Galatians 5:22-23, Ephesians 5:14

**Topics:** "Holy Spirit", "Revival Movement"

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## Description

This sermon delves into the powerful impact of the Welsh Revival of the early 20th century, highlighting the widespread spiritual awakening that swept through Wales and beyond. It explores the transformative effects on individuals, communities, and even societal norms, showcasing the profound changes brought about by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit during this revival period.

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## Transcript

It is no secret what God can do, what he's done for others he'll do for you. What he's done before he can do again. That's what I want to talk about tonight.

Now you can understand if this were the year 1999, everyone would be having a special program or project for the next century. And in 1899 that was the case. For instance, the Methodists decided they were going to evangelize the whole of the United States.

They raised \$20 million, they said they were going to win 2 million people to Christ, and they also added, with the knowledge that it was a nationwide movement, they believed they could secure an awakening at the beginning of the 20th century. But it didn't come that way. Then one Methodist said, God, wait until we got our project out of the way before he sent revival.

The same was true of the Baptists. They had Baptist advance. The Presbyterians were engaged in a great evangelistic crusade.

But from the spiritual point of view, there are all nights of prayer at Moody Bible Institute. Over in England at the Keswick Convention, they had special prayer for revival in the 20th century. In the Nilgiri Hills in India, the missionaries and nationals were praying for revival in India.

There was the same sort of movement in Korea at a place called Wonsan. In Melbourne they had 10,000 people in prayer circles praying for revival in the 20th century. So you could say that it came about in answer to prayer.

Now the worldwide awakening of the early 20th century came at the end of 40 years of evangelical advance. Those were the days of Moody. Those were the days of success.

Now in Wesley's day, the revival came after a long night of infidelity. But it was different. This was more like a blaze of glory at the end of the 19th century.

It was perhaps the most extensive evangelical awakening of all time. It affected revived Anglicans and Baptists, Congregationalists, Disciples, Lutherans, Methodists, Presbyterian, Reformed. It spread throughout all of Europe and North America and Australasia and Africa.

On the mission fields, more than five million people were converted to God in the two years of the greatest excitement of the revival. In the wake of the revival, there arose the Pentecostal denominations. Dr. Martin Lloyd-Jones died earlier this year, the famous Welsh preacher, whose church was Westminster Chapel in Buckingham Palace Road.

He said to me once, if you want to find out something about the Welsh revival and its beginnings, get the records of the church at Newquay in Cardigan, which I did. The pastor was a man called Joseph Jenkins. He was what they call a Keswick man.

Most Americans don't understand, they've heard the word Keswick, sometimes they pronounce it Keswick, but it's Keswick. By the way, this was the first year that Keswick ever had a Pentecostal ordained minister speak there, Chuck Smith. But the Keswick movement was committed to holy living.

You know that the Wesleyans, the Methodists, believe in a crisis of commitment, whereas the Presbyterians and Baptists believed in growth and grace. Keswick emphasized a crisis with a view to a process. In other words, you get to the place where you say, Lord, you can have all of me, and then you grow in grace.

So they combined both emphases. Joseph Jenkins said to his young people one Sunday morning, What does Jesus Christ mean to you? They were embarrassed. Now, they were decent young people, they always began their meetings with prayer and singing.

They loved to get around the piano or organ and sing Welsh hymns. They would give little testimonies, generally recitations, if you know what I mean. But this was their Christian social club.

It just so happened they were church young people. They went on picnics together, that's where boy met girl and so forth. Then there was a silence, and when Joseph Jenkins asked a second time, a young fellow spoke up and said, Jesus Christ is the hope of the world.

He said, No, no, I don't mean that. What does he mean to you? A girl called Flory Evans, who had only been converted three weeks, spoke up in first love and said, I love the Lord Jesus with all my heart. And it was so sincere, there was a sense of the presence of God in that little meeting.

Joseph Jenkins formed the young people into a team. He went around preaching and used them for testimony. And Mrs. Jessie Penn Lewis, a famous woman Christian in Wales, wrote to the Life of Faith, a

magazine in London, and said, There's a cloud no bigger than a man's hand arising in Wales.

Now, the outstanding evangelist of Wales at that time was a Presbyterian called Seth Joshua. His son, Dr. Peter Joshua, is retired, living in Port Wynemy around the California coast. Seth Joshua went to that church for a week of meetings, organized in the usual way.

But there was such power. I have read his diary, you'll find it in the National Archives of Wales, 19th of September. I tried to close the meeting several times last night, but it went on without human control.

Peter Joshua said his father would say, Now, young people, it's three minutes to twelve. Tomorrow is another day, so let's have a benediction, and you can go home and then have the benediction. There will be a slight pause, and then someone would say, Let us pray, and they'd start again.

But he said, Now, young people, it's after twelve. Tomorrow is another day. Someone said, Today is tomorrow.

This is tomorrow now. Seth Joshua went from there, probably the best campaign he'd ever had in his life up to that time. But he hadn't seen anything yet.

And he went to Newcastle Emlyn College, where there was a young coal miner, 26 years of age, studying for the ministry. His name was Evan Roberts. I knew Evan Roberts well, but of course not in 1904.

I'm not that old. Evan Roberts was a very spiritual young man. He taught Sunday school, but he worked in a coal mine.

I tried to find out what he did. On Sunday he went to church twice, he went to Bible class in the Sunday school, he went to a prayer meeting on Monday, he went to a mission meeting on Tuesday, the midweek service on Wednesday. On Thursday he attended a temperance meeting, and on Friday they had class meetings.

I couldn't find out from his diaries what he did on Saturday night. But I think I know. In those days, in the homes of the poor, on Saturday night each member of the family had the right to use the kitchen where there's a fire burning, to use the old galvanized iron tub for a bath.

That's when they performed their ablutions. You see, before World War I there weren't many bathrooms. Did you know that there wasn't a bathroom in Buckingham Palace in Queen Victoria's day? You say, what did they do? They used perfume.

When Evan Roberts heard of the moving of the Spirit in Yuki, his heart was moved. The students petitioned the principal of the college to close down classes for a week and let them all go to the next meetings being held by Seth Joshua. Principal Phillips said, You'll learn more in one week of revival than in a year of theological study.

So he closed down. The meetings in the evening in Blainanach were crowded, but in the morning at ten o'clock not many people. In those days young mothers didn't have babysitters.

People at work or at school couldn't get away, so just the students and some nice old ladies at ten o'clock in the morning. But the nice old ladies are often the powerhouse of the Church. It was in that meeting that Seth Joshua prayed in Welsh, O our glib and pligny, O Lord, bend us.

And Evan Roberts went forward with tears and brokenness and prayed, O God, bend me. This was the beginning of the public phase of the awakening. Evan Roberts was so stirred up that he said to his roommate, Sidney Evans, Do you think God could give us a hundred thousand souls? That sounded like big talk.

But within five months there were a hundred thousand Welsh people converted from outside the churches, not counting all those converted in the churches. He took his savings out to pay his way. He said, I was so filled with the Spirit, I was willing to pay God for the privilege of preaching.

But he went to Principal Phillips and said, I can't concentrate on my studies, I keep hearing a voice that says you must go home and speak to the young people. Mr. Phillips, is that the voice of the Spirit or the voice of the devil? And Principal Phillips said, the devil never gives orders like that. You can have a week off.

When he arrived home his parents said, Why aren't you studying? Are you in trouble? No. Well, why have you come home? Well, I've come to speak to the young people. He said, We were in church on Sunday, there was no announcement made.

The pastor doesn't know yet. And what would you do if your pastor of a church and a young fellow just two months in Bible school came back and said, I've come to preach? The pastor was anxious not to hurt his feelings, but not to hurt the congregation's feelings either. So he said, How about Monday night? So Evan Roberts went Monday night, he didn't ask him to speak to the prayer meeting, but he simply said, Our young brother Evan Roberts feels he has a word for you if you care to wait.

And as he did, seventeen people waited. No doubt they all knew him and didn't want to see him stand there alone. But he got up and said, I have a message for you from God.

You must confess any known sin to God and put any wrong to man right. You must put away any doubtful habit. You must obey the Spirit promptly.

Finally you must confess your faith in Christ publicly. And by ten o'clock, all seventeen had responded. The pastor was so pleased, he said, Will you speak at the mission service tomorrow night? He spoke at the midweek service on Wednesday, they converted the temperance meeting into a general meeting, and on Friday they brought all the classes together for a general meeting.

On Sunday, some visiting clergyman came to preach by appointment. So Evan Roberts sat in the pew with his family. But the people got up on Sunday evening and said, We want to hear Evan Roberts again.

And the pastor said, If I make it right with the principal, could you stay another week? It was in the middle of that second week, which was rather hard and tough, that the break came. Now, you might say, What do you mean, the break? I've read the Welsh newspapers of the period, there were little snippets of church news, like the Reverend Peter Jones has just been appointed chaplain to the Bishop of St. David's. That was very interesting for the Episcopalians, but not earth-shaking, if you know what I mean.

Then there were items like Mowbray Methodist Church has had a very interesting rummage sale. Then suddenly a headline, Great Crowds of People Drawn to Lochor. That was Evan Roberts' home town.

They said, For some days now, a young man named Evan Roberts has been causing great surprise in the Moriah Church. He said, The main road between Swansea and Plymouthley, on which the church is

situated, was packed from wall to wall. People trying to get into the church, shopkeepers were closing early to find a place, steelworkers and miners were coming in their dungarees.

Now the news was out. The Western Mail sent down a reporter to report on this. He said, It was a most unusual meeting.

The meeting had no structure, it seemed to just go on. They didn't close until 4.25 in the morning, and even then people seemed unwilling to go home. And then a very British remark.

He said, I felt that this was no ordinary gathering. This was reported in the newspaper, and I suppose every praying woman in Wales started to pray. On Saturday, every grocery store in that industrial valley was emptied of groceries, people coming to meetings, and on Sunday every church filled.

And then the revival broke like a flood, like the breaking of a great dam all over Wales. The same week that the blessing came with Evan Roberts in South Wales, in North Wales a Baptist preacher, R. B. Jones, was preaching when the praying of the people drowned out his preaching. And the revival was sweeping Wales.

Now you immediately think, then Evan Roberts became the Billy Graham of Wales. Nothing of the sort. Billy Graham is an evangelist.

Evan Roberts was like a prophet, a revivalist, speaking to the church. He wouldn't even announce where he was having meetings. He went to one place, they weren't expecting him, but they were delighted to see him.

He got up in the pulpit and he said one word in Welsh, three words in English, Gwedion, let us pray. That was all they ever heard him say, because immediately all 1,800 people began to pray. Another occasion he stood up and said, How many of you believe the promises of God? There was a great roar of Amen.

Would you agree, he said, that a promise made by the Lord Jesus is specially precious? They all shouted, Yes. Do you know one that says where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst? Yes. Do we have two or three here tonight? Great roar of laughter, nearly 3,000.

Is Jesus here? Yes. I ask you, is Jesus here? Yes. Do you believe it? Yes.

Then he said, You don't need me. He put on his hat and coat and went to another meeting. The impact of that revival was astounding.

As I said, 100,000 people from outside the churches were added to the memberships, not counting maybe 100,000 more who were converted who were already members. When a man is a member of a church and gets converted, he doesn't resign and join again, so it doesn't show in statistics. Perhaps a quarter of a million people converted in five months, but of the 100,000 that joined the churches, it's interesting that five years later a critic wrote a book to debunk the revival, and his major criticism was that after five years only 75,000 still stood.

Now, did that mean that 25,000 converts drifted away? Not necessarily so. First of all, Wales is a very poor country and people are always emigrating to Canada and to Pennsylvania, to Australia and so forth, or going to Liverpool in England to look for a job or to Birmingham. But the second factor was perhaps some of the old members couldn't take the new life.

They were the ones that left. In the third place, J. D. Morgan sort of gave the game away. He said, many were lost to the mission halls and to the Pentecostals.

What a way to be lost! This social impact was equally powerful. Judges were presented with white gloves, not a case to try. Now, if a man commits a murder in Los Angeles, it may be a year before he comes to trial, the calendar so crowded.

But in those British courts, the Chairman will get up and say, Your Honor, there are no cases to try. No murders, no robberies, no rapes, no embezzlements, nothing. Often a judge was presented with white gloves, a symbol of no cases to try.

They had emergency meetings in the district councils to discuss what to do with the police now that they were unemployed. Some had an affirmative program. They said, Well, we respect them for what they want to do, although they have nothing to do, so let's just continue to pay them their salaries.

Others said, We're wasting money. They called in a sergeant of the police on one occasion. What do you do with your time? He said, Before the revival, there were two main jobs.

One was to prevent crime, the other to control crowds at football games, at market days, that sort of thing. Since the revival, there's practically no crime, so we just go with the crowds. A counselor said, What do you mean, police spend their time directing traffic to meetings? No, no.

He said, We have seventeen police in our station, but we've got three good quartets. If any church wants a quartet to sing, they just notify the police. Drunkenness was cut in half.

I have the figures for the county of Glamorgan, in which Cardiff is situated. Cut down from 10,000 arrests a year to 5,000 within a year. But there are a lot of bankruptcies.

He said, How could a revival cause a bankruptcy? Nearly all taverns couldn't sell their booze. I came across a case in North Wales, a place in Anglesey, where a policeman was on duty outside a courtroom when he heard a burst of singing in the courtroom. So strange to hear people sing in a courtroom.

He rushed in. He found a prisoner had broken down and confessed he was a sinner, asked his advocate not to defend him anymore. The judge took his gavel and said, I adjourn the court.

Now, young man, may I speak to you, not as a judge, but as a Christian? And he told him, You have sinned against society, but I want to tell you first how to get right with God. And the young man accepted Christ there. And the jury burst into one of those great Welsh hymns.

And the policeman added his bass to the choir. About seven years ago, I read three articles in a leading Welsh newspaper attacking that revival of 70 years before. I felt my blood pressure rise.

They said Evan Roberts was an immoral man, there were whispers of the many women in his life, that his preaching was so aphrodisiac that people poured into the graveyards and that when the women became pregnant they blamed it on nightingales, and that an historian said that the Welsh revival had raised the illegitimate birth rate. I wrote to the editor and said, You haven't heard the last of this. I went over at my own expense, and I challenged him.

I said, Give me the name of the historian who said that the illegitimate birth rate went up. It turned out to be a Baptist minister, so I called him up and said, I'm a Baptist minister, I'd like to ask you some questions.

Did you say that? He admitted he did.

He said, My mother told me that. How did your mother know? Well, she knew a girl who got in trouble. I said, In the meetings? Oh, no, oh, no, he said.

The excitement of the times, perhaps some girl was careless. I said, Look, for every girl that was careless, if there were any, maybe a thousand girls quit fooling around because of the revival. But that wouldn't show in statistics.

I said, You have a point there. He said, I have an idea. I went up to London, and I went to Somerset House, got the births, deaths, marriages, there's a whole section of illegitimate births, county by county, city by city.

I found that in Radnor, Radnorshire, the illegitimate birth rate dropped 44 percent in one year. In Merrienshire, 44 percent. In Glamorgan, only 8 percent, but in every county in Wales it dropped.

You can't argue with anecdotes, but here are the statistics. We had a great rally in Cardiff in the biggest church there, hundreds turned away, and Lord Mayor was there with his regalia. I felt like Samson with the jawbone of an ass.

I slew a thousand, I can tell you, and I enjoyed it. You know, there were even slowdowns in the coal mines. You say, you mean a revival caused a strike? Not a strike, it's a slowdown.

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 they were saying, and transportation slowed down until they learned the language of Canaan. That's the Welsh revival. Some people say, well, why didn't it last? Well, the excitement couldn't last forever, could it? But I asked a pastor in Swansea, Mount Pleasant Church, how long did the Welsh revival have effect here? Well, he said, we were bringing in extra chairs for 20 years.

That's fair enough. But of course, since then, World War II. When I was in Wales in the 1930s, I used to say, and many were converted in the Welsh revival.

Practically everyone over the age of 50 raised his hand. Well, why not under 50? Because they weren't alive then. You see, that generation has passed away.

But the Welsh revival swept Britain. You know that in Nuneaton they were running special excursions on the railway to the prayer meetings. In Scotland, in Motherwell, near Glasgow, the streets were packed from wall to wall, and after the excitement died down, seven churches and four public halls filled every night for months.

The same revival broke out in Northern Ireland, in Lurgan, first among the Methodists, spread to the Presbyterians. The same revival broke out in Norway. So powerful was that revival in Norway under Albert Lunde, whom I also knew, that the Norwegian Parliament passed special legislation to allow a Lutheran layman to conduct Holy Communion.

The clergy couldn't keep up with the number of convicts. When the revival reached Denmark, the daily home mission of the Lutheran Church said, There hasn't been a winter like it since Christianity came to the Vikings. It broke out in Sweden.

One of the leaders was Prince Oscar Bernadotte, brother of the King with whom I prayed way back in those years, in the 30's. Revival swept Finland, it broke out in Germany, it broke out in France. I met some men from Silesia in Czechoslovakia.

The revival broke out there, in the Welsh mining area. It was recently in Belgium, the revival broke out in Charleroi, and this Belgian who was driving me said, There are more Christians in Charleroi than in any other part of Belgium. That's where the revival was most powerful.

The revival broke out in India. Have you ever heard of Amy Carmichael, who has written some choice missionary books? Lovely books. She was Anglican, and she describes it.

You know, of course, the Anglicans have a liturgical service. There's a time to stand, a time to kneel, a time to recite the Lord's Prayer, a time to recite the Creed. It's an ordered service.

This, to quote Amy Carmichael's diary, on October 20, as a little girl said in the orphanage, Jesus came to Donover. Oh, she said he'd been there before. But this time he came in such power, it's no wonder it struck the child as a new coming.

Now, the Anglican service was going on, according to the prayer book, when the one leading it, not named, was overcome. Then some people began to cry out. A teenage boy got up and tried to pray, broke down.

Somebody else tried to pray, broke down. Soon the whole upper half of the church, they were on their faces on the floor, men and women, boys and girls, oblivious of all others, she said the sound was like the sound of the wind in the trees or the ocean on the beach. This was the visitation of the Holy Spirit.

And she said for the next two weeks, actually she said for the next fortnight, we were like the apostles who gave themselves daily to the ministration of the Word and to prayer. I'd read that verse so many times, I didn't realize what it meant until I saw it amplified in history. The apostles in the day of Pentecost were so busy, like doctors in an epidemic, praying with people and giving them the Word.

That's what happened when the revival reached India. Do you know that in the next ten years, Christians increased 16 times as fast as the Hindus? Ten years. Great revival in every part of India.

The same revival was felt in China and Korea. One thing I must say in passing, I had a phone call once from a very famous Pentecostal scholar, and he said, I understood that speaking in tongues came from Wales to Azusa Street in Los Angeles. I said, I thought it was the other way around.

Oh, no, he said, I heard that some people spoke Welsh that had never spoken Welsh before. I said, oh, yes, those were people whose mother were Welsh and father were English, but if you speak in a language that you know, you're not speaking in tongues. He said, when did the speaking in tongues begin? I said, it began on the 23rd of December, 1907, two years later, in the home of a man called Thomas Maddock Jeffreys, in a place called Juan Fluid in the Ebbw Vale, about 8 o'clock in the evening.

Beyond that, I couldn't specify. Next time I talk to you, I'll tell you about how the same revival swept the United States, because in the wake of that revival, the Pentecostal denominations arose.

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