

The Awakening of 1905 in North America

by J. Edwin Orr

J. Edwin Orr's sermon highlights the transformative impact of the 1905 revival in North America, emphasizing the power of prayer and community engagement across denominations.

Duration: 27:37

Scripture: 2 Chronicles 7:14, Psalm 85:6, Joel 2:28, Matthew 9:37-38, Acts 1:8, Acts 2:17, Romans 12:2, Ephesians 5:14, 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18, James 5:16

Topics: "Holy Spirit", "Revival Movement"

Description

This sermon recounts the powerful revival that swept through the United States in 1905, sparked by the Welsh revival. It emphasizes the impact of prayer, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and the transformation of individuals, churches, and communities. The sermon highlights the unstructured nature of the revival, the emphasis on repentance and new life, and the societal reforms and civic righteousness that followed in various cities.

Transcript

In my last talk to you I told you about the wonderful awakening in Wales at the beginning of this century. Now supposing you heard that in Nova Scotia the churches were packed, thousands of people being converted, all days and nights of prayer. Supposing you found that crime had almost been wiped out, what would you do here? You'd pray, Oh God, do the same thing in California.

So, that's actually what happened in 1905. When the news came of the Welsh revival, people began to pray all over this country. I told you that at the beginning of the century most of the big denominations had their own program of events.

The Methodists of the twentieth century forward movement, they were going to win two million souls to Christ, and they raised twenty million dollars to do it. They said, with a better knowledge of how to work, a great religious awakening might be secured at the opening of the twentieth century. The Baptists, North and South, were working in the same way, Presbyterians likewise.

The great evangelist of that time was Wilbur Chapman, a Presbyterian. And all over the United States, people were keyed up for blessing in the twentieth century. But nothing much came of these human efforts until news came of the Welsh revival.

Even the high church Episcopalians were stirred up. They talked about the Welsh revival brought about by the strong breath of God's Holy Spirit, and they asked, How long will it be until it comes to the United States? The Baptists said, Let's cease talking about revivalism and let's get on our knees and pray for revival. And a Southern Baptist magazine said, Will the revival be repeated in this country? To answer the question, we are, as usual, doing the inconsistent thing.

We read that the Welsh revival grew out of prayer and has no machinery. And now we set to work to get all our machinery going. The Methodists also said there is evidence of the coming of a general religious revival from border to border.

Presbyterians said, All the country seems to be on the lookout for a great outpouring of the Holy Spirit. The revival began in Pennsylvania. It began in a town called Wilkesbury in December of 1904, in a Welsh church, a small church of Welsh emigrants where the people all spoke Welsh, and therefore preferred to worship God in their own language.

The Reverend J.D. Roberts reported 123 converts in that tiny little church, most of them men. Then the revival spread to Scranton, and then town after town. Revival broke out in Newcastle, in Pittsburgh.

The leading Baptist periodical in Pennsylvania devoted a whole issue in March 1905 to describe the revival in Pennsylvania. By early spring, the Methodists in Philadelphia alone were claiming 10,000 converts. They had 6,101 on probation.

That means new converts who had to wait six months before they would be admitted to membership. In New Jersey, the young people societies of Christian endeavor increased 10 percent, some societies increasing from 10 percent to 300 percent. On the coast of New Jersey, there was such a revival in Atlantic City that not more than 50 unconverted people remained in a population of 60,000.

In November of 1905, a great awakening in Newark, New Jersey, in which Pentecost was literally repeated during the height of the revival with its strange spectacle of spacious churches crowded and overflowing, and great processions marching through the streets. In 1904, connected in New York State, the local ministerial association heard of the revival in Wales and thought, What can we do? They said they didn't have any special evangelists in Wales, so let's just start meetings. So they took Emmanuel Baptist Church for afternoons, packed out with women, and the biggest church in town was the State Street Methodist Church, packed with 1,200 nightly.

Sometimes, 800 and 1,100 waited behind in aftermeetings. I've read the Schenectady Papers. You know, in a smaller town they have an obituary column that tells, especially elderly people, to look to see who among their friends has just passed away.

The Schenectady Gazette ran a column entitled, Yesterday's Conversions. If you want to know who was converted, that's where you looked. In Troy, New York, it was said, No such unanimous and spontaneous movement had been known in the city for a generation.

It began in January with a week of prayer, held in the Second Presbyterian Church, but it developed into a revival of church members of six Baptists, ten Methodists, seven Presbyterians, one Christian, one congregation, and one Episcopal Church. The revival spread all over. When the revival reached Calvary Methodist Episcopal Church, New York City, it produced a site never before duplicated.

Before 2,200 packing the church, 364 were received into membership on the 2nd of February. Two hundred and eighty-six were on probation, that means new converts. Two hundred and seventeen of them adults, 134 of them men, sixty were heads of families.

When the cleansing wave reached Brooklyn, the Baptist temple, five hundred people waited behind for counsel, for salvation. What about New England? Here's what the Baptist said, as the news continues to come from the churches, the conviction is confirmed that additions to the churches in New England during the month of April were larger than during any one month for many, many years. Great revival in every part of New England.

What about the South? The Atlanta newspapers reported that nearly a thousand businessmen had united in intercession for an outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Then, with a unanimity unprecedented, stores, factories and offices closed in the middle of the day for prayer. The Supreme Court of Georgia adjourned.

Even saloons and places of amusement closed their doors to enable patrons to go to united prayer meetings. An awakening began in Louisville. The great Methodist Henry Clay Morrison of Asbury College said, the whole city is breathing a spiritual atmosphere everywhere, in shop and store, in the middle and on the street.

Salvation is the one topic of conversation. In Danville, Kentucky, the first of February, 1905, all employers and employees attended prayer meetings in a body. They said, Danville's day of blessing has come.

Paducah, Kentucky, an awakening described by the Southern Baptists as a great Pentecostal revival within our own bounds. The word Pentecostal was a small p in that particular case. The movement swept the city from November 1905 until March 1906.

One church, First Baptist, received into membership more than a thousand new members. Its pastor, Dr. J.J. Cheek, an old man, died of overwork, and the Southern Baptists said a glorious ending to a devoted ministry. I'll be 70 on my next birthday.

The Lord said, you've only got one more year left and you'll lead a thousand to Christ, I would say, amen. What a way to go. Now you say, well, what kind of movement was it? Who was the evangelist? No evangelist, just everybody was an evangelist.

Here's a typical report from a Southern Baptist pastor in Tennessee. Last month we held revival services. I failed to get anyone to assist me.

Why? Because everyone is so busy on their own. So I had to do the preaching myself. We had a great meeting.

There were 60 conversions, and the church was greatly built up in a great outpouring of the Spirit and a great ingathering of souls. The revival went over Florida like a tidal wave. The leader was an evangelist called Mordecai Hamm.

By the way, it was under Mordecai Hamm later that Billy Graham was converted to Charlotte, North Carolina. The revival began in the northeast corner of Texas in the Piney Woods in a town called Paris. The pastors were concerned over the fact that on Sunday night there were more people in the theater than in church.

So the Baptists and Congregationalists and Methodists and Presbyterians and others got together in united prayer meetings, and a great movement began. The revival reached Houston, not so big then but a fair-sized town. A tidal wave of spirituality rolled through the city.

Not only crowded the churches, but closed all the gambling dens. Revival swept Dallas, Waco. The Chancellor of Baylor University in Waco told me that was the year that so many students went from Baylor to the mission field.

Kansas City, the Southern Baptist Convention met, and it says, It is manifest to all that has come by an awakening, an interest in the subject of evangelistic work. There is an atmosphere of evangelism. The revival spread into Ohio, then into Michigan.

It began with such lessons from the Welsh revival. Then the Methodists in Saginaw said, We are in the midst of a most gracious religious awakening, unlike anything seen in these parts for many a year. The unction of the Spirit outpoured.

There were many gracious revivals in the Albany district, that's over on the other side of Michigan. A thousand conversions in Albany, eleven hundred in Lansing, five hundred in Big Rapids, and then the Edwards said, We can't keep track of them all. In Owasso, the whole town awakened to Schola, a church filled with Pentecostal power for five weeks.

In Grand Rapids, one church received 118 on probation. And the pastor said, The revival certainly has hit this city. In Lansing, the Methodists claimed 700 conversions, of whom 740 joined the churches, 740 out of 700.

Nowadays, it's the other way around, to say so many went forward, but only 250 joined the churches. They said, This is not guesswork. Actually, the 700 that were converted collected another 40 on the way to the meeting.

In the spring, the churches were still responding to the thrill of a vigorous, thoroughgoing revival triumph. I won't worry you with the details. When the revival reached Indiana, it swept Indianapolis, it was reported as a great day for the Baptists, but the Methodists said it was a great day for the Methodists.

What happened in Chicago? All the pastors got together in Chicago, in the Loop, to discuss what to do when the revival came. The plan in Chicago was to urge pastors to hold their own meetings in their own churches and help each other as the needs suggest. But they had a central prayer meeting for ministers, and there they shared news.

A determined effort, they said, has been made to reach the unsaved, and this is succeeding. Hundreds have already been baptized in the different churches. It has become commonplace in our ministerial gatherings for a pastor to rise and say, My church has never known such a blessing of salvation as we are now having.

The revival in Dixon, Illinois, was described as a cyclone. It hit the Baptist, Christian, Congregational, Evangelical, Lutheran, Methodist and Presbyterian churches. The evangelist was an obscure man called Billy Sunday.

This helped make him well known. In Burlington, Iowa, every store and factory closed its operation between 10 and 11 to permit all employees to attend services of prayer for revival of religion. Great revival

swept Louisville, St. Louis.

Redwood Falls, Minnesota, the awakening brought out 600 men, women and children, although the temperature was 22 degrees below zero. In Denver, the movement began on the 4th of January. On the 20th of January, the mayor of Denver called for a day of prayer.

At 10 o'clock in the morning, all cooperating churches were filled. At 11.30, almost every store was closed at the mayor's request, and four theaters downtown were crowded for prayer at noon. 12,000 attended these services of intercession.

The Colorado legislature closed. All schools were closed. Months later, they said Denver never had a winter like it.

I knew a man who was in that movement. They had a great simultaneous movement in Los Angeles. A hundred churches cooperated.

Los Angeles was not a big place in those days, perhaps 100,000. The aggregate attendance at the evangelistic meetings downtown was in excess of 180,000. 4,264 in choirs registered, 787 were children.

I was speaking at Temple Baptist Church, Pershing Square, and the pastor said to me, I never heard of that movement. I said, why don't you look up the records? He went to the deacon who kept the church's records, and he came back and said, you know, we took in 500 in one month. I said, the pastor's name was Burdett.

He said, that's right, this is Burdett Hall, this is our smaller hall here. Great revival in Redlands and Pomona, there's a report published called Portland's Pentecost. For three hours a day, business was practically suspended.

From the crowds in the great department stores to the humblest clerk, from bank presidents to boot blanks, all abandoned money-making for soul-saving. More than 200 major stores signed an agreement to close between 11 and 2, and the same thing happened in Seattle. I was associate pastor for some time with Oswald Smith in the Great People's Church in Toronto.

I said to him, what did you know about the great revival in 1905 in Canada? He said, I never heard of it. I said, come on. It swept Canada from coast to coast.

I can tell you of a great revival in Nova Scotia, and I can tell you of a revival in the Skeena River in British Columbia. In Winnipeg, First Baptist Church had 2,000 people standing in the snow waiting to get in. He said, I never heard of it.

I said, what year were you converted? He said, 1905. I didn't know anything about this, but you can understand how I felt when I read in The Methodist Christian Advocate, a great revival is sweeping the United States. Its power is felt in every nook and corner of our broad land.

The Holy Spirit is convincing the people of sin, of righteousness and of judgment to come. There is manifest a new degree of spiritual power in the churches. Pastors are crying out to God for help, and not a few of them are gratified to find the help right at hand.

In the Baptist magazine it said, Tidings of a revival come from every side. There's a quickening of spiritual impulse and life in the churches and in our educational institutions. I don't want to wear you with all the

details, but I got a hold of the Baptist reports and found everywhere a blessing, like Ohio, the cause never looked better, Michigan, the number of baptisms significant, Indiana, hopeful conditions, Illinois, more promising than for a dozen years.

In Iowa, one of the major emphasis was education, and there wasn't so much revival. In Wisconsin, the Baptists were growing in influence. These are just Baptist reports.

Whereas The Methodist said there's a stir in our Methodist camp. In 1903, that was the end of the Great Crusade, we made very little gain in membership. In 1904, the net gain was 32,000.

In 1905, it's not less than 60,000. It had doubled at one year. Great revival in other parts.

The Congregationalists were stirred. Among them, people like Washington Gladden, the disciples of Christ, the Lutherans. One Lutheran magazine reported that the revival wave seems to have crossed the seas and been breaking on our shores.

From widely separated points come tidings of great spiritual awakenings. I did collect some statistics. At that time, about a million immigrants were coming to the United States every year, most of them Roman Catholic.

Yet the increase in Protestant churches was far greater than that of the Roman Catholic Church. A Methodist editor said, The Spirit of God has been graciously poured out in many places in our country, but not more anywhere than in our colleges. Kenneth Scott Latourette said when he was a student at Yale in 1905, One quarter of all the students were enrolled in prayer meetings and Bible study.

I live next door to UCLA. 36,000 students. Do you think that 9,000 are enrolled in prayer meetings? No.

What about the effect of this? The revival continued in 1905, 1906, and just after the San Francisco earthquake, which by the way also at the same time was a devastating earthquake in Valparaiso, Chile. Just after the earthquake came the remarkable outpouring in Azusa Street, the beginning of the Pentecostal movement. The strange thing is this, until I published this book of mine about 1973, most Pentecostal leaders didn't know that Azusa Street was preceded by a nationwide revival.

They thought Azusa Street was just a little thing on its own. Well, sure, it was something that spread. They began with about 120, but that year about a million people have been converted in the United States.

So people don't always know the background. The social impact was quite strong. Here's what they said in one great report.

We find evidence of a revival of righteousness in the popular and pulpit protest against sharp practice and double-dealing, indignation against swindling, oppressive corporations, dishonest officials and banks and trust companies, public wrath against political scoundrels, and the successful overflow of many such. Here's what someone said. Fancy someone in Wales saying, we must have an ethical revival first.

We must enter upon a crusade against profanity, obscenity, prize-fighting. We must close up the saloons and make kindling wood of the gambling tables and raid the brothels before we have a revival. No, he said, all these infamies vanish before the Spirit's baptism like bats and owls before the light of day.

Any of you have ever been in the Middle West and found your car covered with ice? You have to take a scraper and scrape and scrape to get the ice off so that you can see? Yet sometimes if you wait just one

hour, the sun melts the whole thing off. You don't have to work that way. The revival in Schenectady, which I mentioned, meant stronger and better citizens, brighter and happier homes, a cleaner city life, and the strengthening of all the churches and other agencies for good.

Here is what was reported from Philadelphia. We are in the excitement and enjoyment of a great civic righteousness revival. To a delegation of businessmen at the City Hall on June 1, our Mayor, John Weaver, said, The hand of the Lord is in it.

So apparently, in different parts, in Cincinnati, for example, civic reform followed the spiritual revival. It seemed to have profited from the wave of reform that swept over the country. The Methodists in their quarterly journal said, Throughout the Republic there are signs of the revival of the public conscience, which in many states and cities has broken party lines, rejected machine-made candidates, and elected governors, senators, assemblymen, mayors, and county attorneys of recognized honesty and independence, the first fruits of the living Christ as the Lord of all human activity, social, industrial, commercial, and political.

I wish that happened today. I spoke at the Rose Bowl on Saturday when I said that George Gallup had declared that the number of people in the United States who claimed to be born again had risen from 46 percent to 53 percent. Some people started to applaud.

And I stopped them. I said, I don't believe it. I don't believe that 53 percent of people in the United States are born again.

If they were, this would be a different country. Whereas the Wall Street Journal said, This must be the first awakening that has had no effect upon the morals of the nation. We ought to be ashamed to say that.

I think one of the reasons for it is that they don't preach repentance. They just try to enlist people. The only evidence of the new birth is the new life.

And if a man is not living a new life, I wonder if he has had a new birth. This revival was part of the wave that swept the world before World War I. Why was it forgotten? Well, I think there are reasons. First of all, Great Britain lost a million men in World War I. The French lost more than the British.

The Germans lost more than the French. The Russians lost more than the Germans. It was a blood-letting unprecedented trauma for the human race.

Perhaps that's why people forgot what went before. But I suppose there are other reasons. What we called in those days modernism began, undercutting the gospel.

On top of that, we found a new science of psychology, based largely on what was taught by Sigmund Freud, who spoke of God as an illusion. I know there are good Christian psychologists today, but the Freudian movement was anti-Christian, and that had a dominant say. But it's interesting that the light that was set ablaze in 1904, 1905, continued.

You might say, what was the relationship between this new movement of Pentecostalism and the general revival? Well, they were both unstructured, no doubt about that. For instance, anyone coming into this meeting tonight wouldn't have said it was a very structured meeting. That's my warning.

I'm learning to preach to time. But the meetings were sort of informal, led by the Spirit. That was true of the general revival, the Welsh revival period, and also of Pentecostalism.

The main difference was that the Pentecostal movement laid stress upon especially two aspects, two gifts of the Spirit, healing and speaking in tongues. Whereas the general movement was interdenominational, and the particular movement grew out of that. It led to a revival in Brazil, a revival in Chile, a revival in Mexico, and this was part of the revival all around the world.

What's the lesson? The lesson is prayer. What we need to do is to pray. We need to proclaim God's Word.

We can't organize revival, but we can prepare by prayer for what God is going to do. Amen.

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