

The Movements Between World Wars

by J. Edwin Orr

Revivals are spontaneous, unstructured movements of the Holy Spirit that can bring about deep spiritual awakening and a renewed commitment to God.

Duration: 24:38

Scripture: 2 Chronicles 7:14, Psalm 85:6, Isaiah 57:15, Joel 2:28, Matthew 5:16, Acts 1:8, Romans 12:11, Ephesians 5:14, Colossians 3:1, James 4:8

Topics: "Spiritual Revival", "Powerful Prayer"

Description

This sermon recounts historical revivals and movements of God in various countries, highlighting the impact of prayer, powerful preaching, and the work of true Christians in bringing about spiritual awakenings. It emphasizes the role of individuals like W. P. Nicholson, John Sung, and others in sparking revivals amidst challenging circumstances, leading to conversions, missionary work, and lasting spiritual transformations.

Transcript

In 1921, the British government gave the people of Ireland a free choice whether they wanted to continue an association with Scotland and England and Wales or to go on their own. The South voted for going on their own, but the North didn't want to do that. The result was a kind of civil war, and it came along religious lines because most Catholics were in favor of independence, and most Protestants didn't see why they should separate from their friends in Scotland and England and Wales.

But then riots began, assassinations, burnings, lootings, murders, with retaliation and a bitter, bitter feeling. The true Christians, the praying people, got so desperate they prayed, O God, send anyone, anyone, just to bring the people back to yourself. The Lord has a sense of humor.

He sent them a man from Glendale, California. He was an Irish-American called W. P. Nicholson, and he began to preach in Bangor, Northern Ireland. It was in the midst of these riots and troubles.

Nicholson had been a sailor before the mast. He said he was most religious when he was drunk, but he was converted at home in 1899. He went to the Bible Training Institute in Glasgow.

Then he joined Wilbur Chapman's evangelistic team in Australia and New Zealand and then came back to this country. It wasn't until 1920, after the war, he was able to go back and visit his native country. So he started in 1920 in this town of Bangor, a very old city going right back to the days of St. Patrick.

The largest buildings were packed. It wasn't until 1921 he was able to come and follow it up. He went to Port Adon.

More than 900 inquirers were counseled, although it was a revival among Christians. Then he went to Lurgan, then he went to Newtonards. When he came to the city of Belfast, conditions were so bad that people used to lie on the floor of the streetcars because of the bullets going through the windows.

But Nicholson's preaching was so powerful, it was regarded as one of the things that brought the Civil War to a stop. Now he was a very rough-tongued man. He didn't speak of his holiness the Pope.

He always called him the old bachelor on the Tiber. The Prime Minister of Northern Ireland took him aside and said, Mr. Nicholson, you're doing a great work, but please don't say anything to make it worse with our Roman Catholic fellow citizens. Nicholson thought it over.

He said, all right, I'll lay off the Catholics. I'll take it out on the Plymouth Brethren. He did.

He was a Presbyterian. He used to lay into the Baptist and the Plymouth Brethren because of Believer's Baptism and so forth. Yet they were the denominations that grew most through his ministry.

When I say he was a rough-tongued man, I remember he was preaching in Newtonards Road Methodist Church. A man in the front seat began to heckle him. Nicholson didn't suffer fools gladly.

He said, I'm giving you one more chance. The man heckled him the second time. Nicholson hesitated.

Then he said, if you open your mouth again, I'll put you out. This rather shocked the church people. They thought that a remark of good manner is just to take no notice.

But when the man heckled the third time, Nicholson put his notes in his Bible, closed the Bible, came down from the pulpit, got him by the shoulder, marched him up to the door and pushed him out, closed the doors, came back again in dead silence, came up to the pulpit and said, now, where was I? That was too much for a Presbyterian lady. She came up after Mr. Nicholson. What a thing to do in a gospel meeting.

What was wrong with it? Putting a man out from the sound of the gospel, I've never heard the like of it in my life. He said the man was preventing people from hearing the gospel. Oh, she said, you're impossible to talk to.

What would the Lord have done if the Lord had been here? Well, said Nicholson, if the Lord had been here, he would have cast the devil out of the man. I couldn't do that, so I just shoved the two of them out together. Now, you can understand a man with that kind of sense of humor drew the working class, the working men.

In fact, the biggest shipbuilding yards in the world are Harlan and Wolfe in Belfast that built the Titanic. And the men marched en masse in their dungarees, straight from work to the meetings. And when they couldn't get into some of the churches, they carried away the railings and part of the wall.

One Episcopalian vicar welcomed 400 inquirers. Seventy-seven volunteered for Sunday school work, 51 for open air ministry, 123 for Bible class, and 56 for confirmation. That was the sort of thing that was going on.

I was only nine years of age when that movement started. It was evangelism, and yet at the same time all over the country was this spirit of revival, and it came about because the Christians prayed. By the way, 12,409 were counseled in the inquiry rooms, and I noticed the last half-dozen moderators of the Presbyterian Church of Ireland were converts of Nicholson.

At the same time there was a revival in East Anglia, that's in the eastern part of England, under Douglas Brown. And a revival in Scotland, in Aberdeenshire, under a fisherman called Jock Troop. I knew Jock Troop well, I knew Nicholson as well.

I was rather amused to read in a book that Jock Troop preached at a roar. He only dropped his voice for emphasis. Now, some preachers shout when they want to emphasize something, but he always shouted, and then he lowered his voice to emphasize the point.

But what a wonderful movement they had in Scotland. Now, I was converted in 1921. My own mother led me to Christ, so in one sense I could say I was a product of that time of revival in Northern Ireland.

At the same time, there was stirring in other parts of the world, but it wasn't until I was in my late teens and early twenties that I got busy in Christian work. And in 1935, I went to Norway, the first foreign country of my experience. And there I saw a revival that seemed to be affecting a whole nation.

There was a Swedish Finn, some people in Finland speak Swedish as their mother tongue, as well as Finnish, who came to Oslo, the capital of Norway, and took some meetings in a church called Bethlehem. It was most unlikely that revival would begin there, but actually that's what happened. Frank Munges was his name, M-A-N-G-S.

He's still alive, and he began preaching so powerfully that after a while, Bethlehem Church asked people being converted there, please don't join us, we've got too many. Go and look for another church in town. And it became a blessing to the whole city.

Then a strange thing happened. There was a movement, some of you older people may remember the Oxford group movement. It became moral rearmament.

It was very weak in theology, but they used to challenge people to get right with God. When they went to Norway, they had to get interpreters to tell the people what they were saying in English turned into Norwegian, and they picked on several very godly evangelicals to interpret for them. Now, could you imagine if someone whose theology wasn't very clear came to preach in Southern California and somebody from World Vision, for example, interpreted? You know that their messages would get a much more evangelical flavor through the interpretation.

The result was nationwide revival in Norway. I arrived there in January of 1935 not knowing a soul, yet I found all the churches packed. I stayed in the Baptist Seminary with the students.

We used to go from six until midnight, just from one church to another, finding every church full. Now, you know today there are some churches in Los Angeles that are full, but could you imagine this happening every night in every church? That was the great revival of the 1930s in Norway. It was the first time after I'd grown up that I saw such a movement.

I was traveling then as an evangelist, started out on a bicycle, but in 1935 I went to Canada. The first invitation I had was to preach for Dr. Oswald Smith in the People's Church. The church became too small,

so we took the Massey Auditorium to conclude the meetings.

Then I went to the Moody Church for Dr. Harry Ironside and kept ministering throughout Canada and the United States. Sometimes we saw touches of what Americans like to call real revival. Now, when Americans speak about holding a revival, they say, we're going to have our revival in such-and-such a time, but then they speak about real revival.

I wish they'd just used the word revival for revival, but they often use the word revival for a week of meetings. But in 1936 I went to speak in the chapel of Wheaton College in Illinois. Some of the students had been praying for revival there.

It was the 13th of January, I happen to know, because that evening on the 13th of January I spoke to 11,000 people in the Chicago Coliseum. In those days I was called the boy preacher. I've grown up since then.

A student came to me afterwards and said, your word on revival stirred me, but when are we going to see revival at Wheaton? I said, what are you doing about it? He said, we're having half-nights of prayer. I said, maybe it will come when you pay the price and put things right with God. The students redoubled their prayers, and in February they had their evangelistic meetings, and a very godly man, Robert McQuilken from Columbia, South Carolina, came.

The students were sure God was going to visit them through his ministry. But alas, Dr. McQuilken developed laryngitis and couldn't speak a word. His song leader was a man called Homer Hammondtree, and he appealed to Moody Bible Institute, Northern Baptist Seminary, and other places for speakers to pinch hit for the man who was ill.

One morning at chapel, they were closing the service, when a student passed up a note. We heard about revival again. When are we going to see revival? Dr. Wilson of Kansas City had spoken that morning on the Holy Spirit, but he was in a hurry to catch a train to Kansas City, and he left before pronouncing the benediction.

His song leader was concluding. He said, well, I'm sure God will answer our prayers when we do what he tells us to do. A student stood up and said, I wrote that note.

I'm supposed to be a big man on campus, but things are not right in my life. And he began confessing his faults before the congregation. Somebody shouted from the gallery, let's all get to our knees.

That meeting went on day and night. There was one humorous thing happened. At Wheaton, they didn't allow the students to smoke.

Some students who couldn't give up the habit found that they had a fail-safe method of doing it without being detected. If they went into chapel and went straight down the stairs to the basement where they had the furnaces, nobody would know they were there. They could smoke the cigarettes, throw the butts into the furnaces, no evidence, and then come up another series of steps right up to the platform.

But they couldn't do that until the students were going out, and then they were counted out for attendance. It's a sure method. But this particular morning, they said, who's preaching this morning? Ten-thirty, then eleven o'clock struck.

Who is it? The meeting went on when twelve o'clock struck. One fellow turned pale. He says, it's the rapture, and we're left behind.

But what happened as a result of that awakening? Twenty-five of the seniors that graduated that year became famous missionaries. I knew Jimmy Balote, who went to China, became secretary for all of eastern Asia for the Southern Baptists. Don Hillis went to India.

Now he's general director of the Evangelical Alliance mission. Kenneth Hood went to Costa Rica. Wilbert Norton went to the Congo.

I could go on. Among those that stayed in this country were Dr. Carl Henry, a famous theologian, Harold Lenzel, who has entered Christianity today, and I could mention others. That movement really stirred the whole company of students.

I went up there to see what was happening because the president sent me a telegram. The great revival had broken out in Wheaton. I went from there to Atlanta.

I preached for a young Scottish minister called Peter Marshall. That was before he became famous. Then I went to Columbia, South Carolina, where the students of the Columbia Bible College, a missionary college, were praying for revival, now that their president had come back and told them what had happened at Wheaton.

They were hoping that perhaps something would happen before long, but that week we saw revival break out again. It's very interesting that some seniors from Wheaton and some seniors from Columbia got together at Ben Litton Conference Grounds that summer and started the Student Foreign Mission Fellowship, which today draws those crowds to Urbana. You've heard 17,000 students coming to study missions at Urbana.

That arose from that movement. Now there's something further one could say. While the tide seemed to be out in the western countries between the two world wars, generally speaking, with exceptions, there were great revivals on the field.

For instance, in China. In 1927, a movement began in Shanghai. What a movement it began among young Chinese.

Some of them became very famous as evangelists. I knew quite a number of them. Before the 30s were up, I traveled in China with what was called the Bethel bands.

When they went to Peking, Christians would come at 10 o'clock at night with bedding and sleep all night in church so as to get a place in the crowded-out early morning prayer meetings. That movement touched every part of China. Every part.

One of the leaders was Andrew Gee and another was Dr. John Sung. Dr. John Sung had a Ph.D. from Ohio State University, but he became an evangelist, and like W.P. Nicholson, was rather rough-tongued. He did things that Orientals didn't do.

For example, while he was preaching on, Because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spit you out of my mouth, he got carried away and spat on his interpreter. And that's something that Chinese people never do. They never do a thing like that.

But Andrew Gee, John Sung, Leland Wong, I've mentioned a host of them, were used of God throughout the whole of China. A great revival that lasted during the 1930s in preparation for what the Church was going to go through in World War II and then the Communist Revolution. I spoke to you once before about what I found in the People's Republic of China this year.

There was such revival in China in the 1930s that the way was prepared for them to sit right through and stand steadfast for the Lord during those times of the worst persecution on earth. There was also revival in East Africa. I have a friend, he must be nearly 80 now, retired and living in Cambridge, a graduate of Cambridge University, a medical doctor.

He was in a little country called Rwanda in East Africa. It was that time under Belgian control. He and one of his black assistants didn't get along too well.

He was very interested in the preaching of the gospel, but those hospital assistants, they said, we are medical men, we don't go out preaching like these others. And Dr. Joe Church insisted that they should go out, and that offended some of them. One of them was so offended he went off in a huff, and he went to complain to his brother-in-law.

He said, the Europeans are rotten, the hospitals are rotten, they're all rotten. He was quite taken aback when this other Christian said, well, maybe the trouble is with you, maybe you're rotten. He was angry, and he was started back again for Rwanda.

He was held up at the frontier because the customs men were having their midday break, and there he put things right with God and went back and put things right with his fellow Africans and with the missionaries. And a revival began in East Africa that's continued from the early 1930s to the present time, more than 40 years. Most revival movements don't last more than a few years, but this movement is still going on.

Not so long ago I had two Ugandan students come to me, both working on their master's degree, one on Master of Arts, the other Master of Theology. And they mentioned in the course of their writing that a certain Episcopal rector, a black man, suddenly stopped in the middle of a Sunday morning sermon and said to the people, I haven't experienced this myself, and broke down and was converted in the pulpit. I said, that's a good story.

Who was the minister? And they said it was a man called Erika Sabiti. And I said, he's Archbishop of East Africa now. That's right.

He was the one before the one who was murdered by Idi Amin. Now that movement lasted right through the Mahmoud persecutions. Those black Christians were often tortured for their faith because they would not hate anyone.

At that time the blacks who had suffered so much because of exploitation hated the whites. But these Christians refused to hate anyone. Their movement is still going strong, and I would say they've captured East Africa.

The East African Revival Movement is still going strong. Now these were the revivals that happened during the time that the tide was out in United States and Great Britain and most of Western Europe. There was not much going on between world wars.

It's true that the Pentecostal evangelists were having blessing. You've read the stories of Amy Semple McPherson's great campaigns. You know that in Britain there was a great evangelist called George Jeffreys.

He was a friend of my parents. He founded the Elam four-square denomination over there. There were also some other great evangelists, Gypsy Smith, Lionel Fletcher, and others who were going.

But largely speaking there was no great revival between World War I and World War II. Yet in every part of the mission field the Lord's work went on as if the Lord said now you've had your chance. I'm going to give it to the people on the frontiers.

Next time I have the opportunity of talking to you about revivals, I'm going to tell you of some of the remarkable awakenings since World War II. Because there was a revival in Cuba before Castro. Most people don't know this.

I saw a revival in Brazil. I've seen streets packed from wall to wall. Young people sitting on the top of buses listening to the Word of God.

Churches packed till midnight. Praise services first thing in the morning. Not only did that happen in Latin America, in many parts, but the great movements of God in Indonesia.

Movements of God in Korea. Movements of God in parts of India. I told you already that there's a great movement of God in Nagaland that broke out five years ago and a hundred thousand people have joined the churches, as many as they had in membership after a hundred years.

It was being taught in most of our theological seminaries that these great movements of revival have given way to great organized evangelistic campaigns. I don't believe that. I believe there has been a series of world evangelists from George Whitfield to Billy Graham.

I thank God for them. But the great unstructured, unorganized movements of the Holy Spirit are continuing. I believe they will continue until the Lord comes.

Now as to what we do to prepare for them, I'll keep that for the other part of my message.

Audio: <https://sermonindex1.b-cdn.net/0/SID0180.mp3>

Video: <https://sermonindex2.b-cdn.net/DDiQWakivNs.mp4>

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/j-edwin-orr/the-movements-between-world-wars/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net