

Days of Revival: Australia, 1860s

by John Watsford

The sermon recounts the revival in South Australia during the 1860s, led by John Watsford, a Methodist minister, and highlights the power of revival in converting people and spreading the gospel.

Scripture: 2 Chronicles 7:14, Psalm 85:6, Matthew 9:37, Acts 2:17, Galatians 5:22

Topics: "Holy Spirit", "Revival Movement"

Description

John Watsford recounts the numerous local revivals that occurred in South Australia during the mid-nineteenth century, sharing stories of deep spiritual transformations and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Despite facing challenges and heavy responsibilities, Watsford witnessed the power of prayer, with sinners being converted and believers being baptized with the Holy Spirit. The revival not only impacted the church meetings but also extended to homes, businesses, and suburbs, leading many to seek God and experience profound joy and salvation. Watsford acknowledges that while some may fall away after experiencing revival, many stand firm in their faith, emphasizing the importance of not opposing the work of God during times of spiritual awakening.

Transcript

[Numerous local revivals occurred in South Australia during the middle of the nineteenth century. The following record is taken from the journal of John Watsford, a Methodist minister who began his work in South Adelaide in 1862. -- Editor]

It was a difficult, emotional day when I left my home in New South Wales to begin a work in South Australia. However, fully believing that the Lord had sent me, I went in His name. I had not only to follow a great and successful ministry, but having been appointed chairman of the district, a heavier responsibility was laid upon me than I had ever had before. However, the Lord was my helper.

The principal church in the circuit was a fine building that accommodated about 1,300 people. We had it crowded Sunday after Sunday. The Lord heard prayer and poured out His Spirit in a very remarkable manner. Soon there was so much demand that we had to carry on our meetings every night. This went on for weeks, and each time we met, sinners were converted.

Our midday prayer meeting continued daily for six months. On occasions, as many as two hundred people were present, and each meeting was a time of great power. The local preachers, leaders, and Sunday school teachers were all baptized with the Holy Spirit and heartily entered into the work. It was delightful to

see our local preachers going out in different directions on a Sunday morning, all full of love for souls and longing to bring people to Jesus.

Some of the cases of conversion were very striking. A young man who worked as a stonecutter was brought under deep conviction of sin. He came to the meetings in great distress night after night but could not find comfort. He became pale, wasted, and sorrowful. We tried in every way to show him the simple plan of salvation, and we prayed for him many times. However, his trouble remained.

One Sunday afternoon, as I was returning with a local preacher from an appointment, we saw someone coming toward us about a mile from Adelaide. As he drew near, I said, "Why, that is P--. Where can he be going?" When he was near enough for me to see his face distinctly, I said, "Depend upon it, P-- is saved. Look at his face." There was no mistaking that all the sadness and despair were gone. His face now shone with a brightness that told of joy. He cried, "Glory be to God! I'm saved! I'm saved! I could not wait. I had to hurry out to tell you."

Another young man was convinced of sin at one of our meetings and soon found the Savior. A few weeks after, he became violently ill and died. His sufferings at the last were very great, but his faith was firm and his end was triumphant. After his death, entries like the following were found in his diary: "Last night I dreamed that I was in heaven, and so real did it seem, that when I awoke, I felt the wall of my room to make sure that I was still on earth."

Many young men were among the converted. No sooner were they saved than they began to seek others. One band of twelve was distinguished by their earnest zeal for Christ. By distributing tracts, inviting others to God's house, and speaking to people about their souls, they were made a great blessing. Twelve or fifteen years after the revival, this band met again in Adelaide. They were not all present. One or two had removed to other lands, and two or three were in heaven, but the rest were still faithful to God. They sent me a telegram the day they met, and I greatly rejoiced with them.

The work was not confined to our meetings. Many in their homes and at their businesses were overwhelmed and began to seek God. One evening, about eight o'clock, a young man came running to my house and said, "Come away, sir, and see my brother and his wife. They have been on the floor all night crying for mercy." I ran with him and found them in great trouble. I pointed out the simple plan of salvation by faith in Jesus, urged them to receive Christ, and then went to prayer. Their sorrow was soon turned to joy.

One afternoon a well-known businessman in the city rushed into my yard without his hat and cried, "Oh, Mr. Watsford, come and pray for me, a poor, guilty, wretched sinner." Nor was the work confined to the city, but also spread into the suburbs, where many were added to the Lord.

In this, as in most revivals, there were some whose transformation did not last. But this cannot be a strong objection against revivals as some affirm. Many who are brought to God in a quiet way, without excitement, fall away also. In the same way, many begin to weep and pray when they face affliction, but when the crisis is past, they forget the vows they made when in trouble.

We had a very painful case of this nature in Adelaide. The doctors had said that there was no hope for a certain sick man. Knowing that he was unprepared to die, this man was filled with fear and begged his friends to send for me. I visited him with our city missionary, and we were encouraged to find that he seemed to be sincerely seeking the Lord.

Day after day, we visited him. He was always glad to see us, and he seemed to join in our prayers most heartily. Then one day we were told that we could not see him. We asked the reason. Was he worse? Had the doctors forbidden us? We found out that he was better, and that the doctor had said the danger was past. However, now he did not want to see us anymore.

Undoubtedly, there are other cases like this one, but others who are brought under conviction during times of affliction have gone on to live holy lives after they are raised up again. So in revivals, while many backslide, many stand fast.

I venture to say that if we went through our church today, we should find that the majority of our members were converted in revivals. What is the chaff to the wheat? Great care is necessary in times of revival to guard against mere excitement and to gently suppress all mere wildfire. But at the same time, members of the church, however much they may desire what is quiet and orderly, must be careful not to be found fighting against God in opposing revivals.

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