

# Nature of Revival - Part 2

by Richard Owen Roberts

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*Richard Owen Roberts emphasizes the necessity of revival in the church as a precursor to awakening in the world, highlighting the importance of biblical teaching and personal holiness.*

**Duration:** 1:00:12

**Scripture:** Exodus 32:1-4, Exodus 32:19, Exodus 33:1-3, Exodus 33:15-23, Psalm 73:28, Hebrews 6:4-6

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

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## Description

In this sermon transcript, the preacher reflects on a past revival in Wales in 1945 and compares it to the current state of decline in the world. He emphasizes the need for a radical turnaround and for the preaching of the Word of God to bring about change. The preacher cautions against focusing solely on experiences and highlights the importance of the Holy Spirit's stirring. The sermon concludes with a story of the preacher's son hearing about stirrings of the Spirit at Southwestern Seminary and reaching out to Wheaton College to share the news.

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## Transcript

The first word that I would call to your attention is the word awakening. Now, strangely, in Psalm 44, verse 23, God is urged to awaken. Now that does seem strange, doesn't it? When we think of the Lord, we think of one who neither slumbers nor sleeps.

But listen to these words. Why dost thou sleep, O Lord? Awake! Do not reject us forever. Why dost thou hide thy face and forget our affliction? Into the dust our body cleaves to the earth.

Rise up and be our help for the sake of thy lovingkindness. Now, did you ever ask? It would hardly seem appropriate, would it? But you see, the psalmist is facing a time like we're facing, and he's coming at the issue from a different angle than we're going to come at. But because there is no sense of the presence of God in the society, now, understanding things the way that we do, we know it's not because God is asleep that we're in this trouble as a nation.

But the terrible moral and spiritual decline that we have been experiencing over the last two decades is not because God is tired. Period. But because God is tired of our sin, and therefore he has withdrawn not because he needs rest, but because he cannot tolerate pride in man.

But this expression, awakening, some of you know that the term revival and the term awakening have been used interchangeably. For instance, during that period, I spoke of a moment ago, in this country, from 7,000 years ago, the great awakening. The same movement of the Spirit of God was in the ages.

And yet, while there is some correctness in the use of the term, and when we use these terms technically, we're speaking of two separate things that are destined. The church needs to be revived. And the world needs to be awakened.

Right now, the world doesn't know that there is a holy God, a God of all majesty and power, a God who always has his way, a God who is ever victorious. Right now, the world is under the impression, winning, that theirs is, and you tell them about Christ, and you threaten them with the judgments of God, and they don't think you know what you're talking about. But let an awakening come, and suddenly people who have no concept of God at all, and no fear of God, will be alive to realize that they have offended their own Creator, and that the one who made them for his own glory is going to destroy them, and that the sins with which they have toyed, and promoted, and enjoyed... But dear friends, you must understand, no awakening is going to happen in the world until first there is a revival in the church.

Because right now, the viewpoint that the... I believe I mentioned last night that at the present time, the average person cannot believe in Christ, because they cannot believe in those who call themselves Christians. They see the bickering among the churches. Some of them work right next to some loud-mouthed Christian who's always witnessing that their life is so hollow, so empty, so full of contradictions, that the man of the world says, I regard Christianity with contempt.

I would never ever in all my life let a revival come to the church. Let the church be restored to the purity of Christ. Let the holiness of God descend upon the church, and then... of the lives of the church.

But the world won't ask that question. Has first been revived? Well, I don't know if you feel a deep longing for an awakening in the world, but let me put it to you from the standpoint of an old man in this work more than 50 years, traveling incessantly, pleading with people to heed the word of the Lord. And time after time after time, sin congregations live as they can, unaffected, unshamed.

And all this time preaching everywhere I could, every time possible, always seeking to pour out my heart and the truth of the word of God, and watching our world decline, decline, decline. People often say to me, Oh, preacher, don't you get discouraged? Somebody said to me since I've been here in this Seattle area, What good has all your preaching done? And humanly speaking, how do I answer? Well, appearance-wise, I would say no good at all. Oh, an occasional person here or there who seems to be out.

But I tell you, I long for an awakening. I've often said to my father, Oh, Father, if just once I could preach, and every word would be hung on to, and every command obeyed, every auditor altered. Just once, Lord, before I pass from hence, just once, could I see the response to the word of God that is always there.

You ever feel that way, preacher? Longing, longing, longing for people to hear the word of God. I frequently read the passage in 1 Thessalonians 2, where Paul is commending. Wouldn't you love, even if you're not a preacher, wouldn't you love to live at a time when every word of God that you quoted to your family, your friends, Oh, dear friends, these terms, I don't know how some people can be excited by all that noise.

I long for the word of God to come like a mighty, the force and the power of which I've spoken, and for the impact upon lives. But let me leave the terms revival and awakening, the word fire. Now, no doubt, this expression in connection with revivals is derived, but oh, the need.

Just take your own personal life. Do you not frequently mourn before the throne of grace when you see the chaff in your own life? Isn't it astonishing, and doesn't it hurt the heart to realize that even though we yearn to be holy, and yearn to walk in power, that much of our strength is drained by stuff. My wife and I, out of necessity, had to put our home up for sale six years ago.

And it's a lovely home. When we bought it, we thought we would die there, but we had to sell it. And it was for sale for six years, and finally it sold last Tuesday.

And we had some advance warning. I mean, we had a contract, and we hoped it was going to go through. So we had to begin to get rid of stuff.

I'm still in bewilderment at the realization of how much stuff there was. I began, when the contract was submitted six months ago, moving my books, 75,000 of them, mostly dragged up from the lower level, carried by this poor old man. Every day I took a van load down to our office building.

Then, over the last two months, I had to deal with my wife's accumulation. I tell you, it was incredible. I won't bore you with the details.

And even despite this horrendous experience, oh, how blessed it would be. And it's not just our person. It's about equal in value.

It would be a wonderful blessing. Now, the world looks at us and they say, well, I don't think you're any different from us. And every once in a while, we have a good look at ourselves, and we have to ask, where am I different from the world? I'm the only man I know that lived in a house that occupied 10,000 square feet.

And when I'm talking about stuff, I'm not talking about a trunk load. 10,000 square feet filled with stuff. Oh, at one time, it was all justifiable.

Our offices were there. Employees were working out of our home. We needed every inch of that space.

But when we no longer needed it, we still had it, and then we filled it with, well, I don't need to use the word again, the fire of God. And think about those sins that have plagued you, going way back. Secret sins.

Sins that nobody else knows anything about. Sins that you have groaned over, wept over, sought to repent of, longed for deliverance, even knew some nature of divine power over, and then sooner or later, their ugly head popped up and said, Oh, no, that's the fire of God, consuming, besetting sins. Oh, dear friends, when you're thinking about revival, don't think about a little flurry of excitement.

Don't think about an intense period. Think about the fire. That leads me to draw a contrast that I think is very urgent.

Now, I don't pretend that I'm the world's expert on revival, but I do admit I'm the only man I know that spent his entire life on this subject, and I do know I have the largest library in the world on the subject. So I'm centered, or word-orientated. Now, look, we know that we're called to pray for revival.

What kind of revival have you been praying for? Just anything that comes? Or have you been specific? If there is a choice, is there not wisdom in choosing wisely? If you have the right to aim a prayer instead of just scattering prayer, is there not wisdom in aiming the prayer toward the highest and the best? Now, perhaps you're not familiar with the terms I've used, and wouldn't gain enough from my having said that to know what to spell out for you. The difference between an experience-centered revival is a revival in which the focus is upon experiences, whereas a word-centered revival is a revival in which the focus is upon the word of God. Now, let me just ask you right off.

Let's pretend this is just most needed. Now, to help you to think with me about these, I'm going to put the question to you. Can you illustrate from history a word-centered revival? A word-centered revival.

Can you illustrate from history? In other words, can you name a revival that was word-centered? All right, I'm hearing two things. The Welch Revival, and, well, I don't want to. Yes, Wesley Whitfield? All right, now let's start with this brother here.

We all are at least familiar with the term, the problem. That happened, of course, in the 1500s. And what does that consist of? Well, essentially, I'm not sure you all heard what he said, but he mentioned Wickliffe.

In the early days of that movement, Luther himself, he then was used, the Holy Spirit, at Wittenberg Union. They didn't feel burdened to encourage. Now, most of our preachers today spend a high time. These men preached the great doctrines.

These men, well, this brother over here, in the 1500s. Well, any notion of what the book might have contained? It was his prison epistle. As John Bunyan wrote Pilgrim's Progress while in prison, and Paul the Apostle wrote glorious books while in prison, year after year, but it was an experience-centered revival.

Now, do you think we need now the last of a series? Wouldn't you agree, brother, we need the first of a series, not the last. Now, we're not predicting the end times. We don't know when our Lord, he may come tonight.

It may be a thousand years away. And in that we don't know when he's coming, we must think of the little ones. Do you think of the little ones? While I'm an old man, I think of the little ones just about every day.

We moved, as I've said, from our big house, and we're crammed now into a tiny little apartment, and we have the joy of living where our son and his family and our daughter all live. And every day, the little ones are around. When I'm home, they're hanging on to my leg, they're sitting on my lap, they're breathing their sweet nothings in my ears.

The little ones. And for the sake of the little ones, I have to carry an increasing burden for revival. Can I contentedly live in a day of moral and spiritual decline when the little ones are clinging to my knee? Can I say, oh, who cares what happens when the little ones are under eight? Must my heart not be stirred with anguish and concern? But Lord, please, don't let it be an experience-centered revival.

Let it be a word-centered revival. You say, Mr. Roberts, I'm not clear why you would make that distinction. Experience-centered revivals are short-lived.

Some of you may be aware of the fact that somewhere between three and four years ago, there was a stirring of the Holy Spirit that began at Howard Payne University down in Texas. It was a very legitimate work of God. University students were greatly moved, and many of them rushed to the microphone and

confessed unbelievably wicked sins.

I was immediately alert and aware of that movement, and the week that it was happening, I was in touch with this man who God was using in that situation and we conversed about it. The next week, another man from Texas called, and he said to Mr. Roberts, Have you heard any news from Fort Worth today? No, I said, Not yet. He said at Southwestern, the largest theological seminary in the world, between three and four thousand students, he said at Southwestern, chapel is still going on.

It began at ten. It was then between three and four in the afternoon. Deep stirring of the Holy Spirit.

I said, Thank you for calling. I'm glad for good news. My son who works with me was standing nearby, and when I hung the phone up, he said, Dad, what was that? Oh, I said, Good news from Texas.

Stirrings of the Spirit at Southwestern. He said, Dad, give me the phone. So I handed the phone across the table to him, and immediately he rang the college, which is next to our office, and got one of the professors, and he said, Professor, do you know what's happening at Southwestern today? No, I haven't heard anything, said the professor.

Tell me. So my son passed on the news, and the professor said, We must get some of those students from Texas to come to Wheaton College. My son said, Dad, we'll be glad to.

So in a week or two, some students from Texas came up to Wheaton, Illinois, and the students meet regularly on Sunday night at about 8.30 after the churches have had their evening service in what they call the World Christian Fellowship. And so these students from Texas spoke at Wheaton College on a Sunday. And that meeting, if my memory is correct, went on until four in the morning.

Deep, deep conviction, powerful stirring. The administration allowed them to meet again the next night after 9 o'clock. And a lot of big, great big trash bags were brought, and the students confessed to drug addiction and pornography addiction and immoral deeds and all kinds of things.

And for four or five days, they met every night in the bigger auditorium as the week progressed. And a powerful, powerful sense of conviction touched hundreds and hundreds of the students. But then it was over.

It was a word, or excuse me, an experience-orientated revival. It didn't last. It had good effect.

It was needed. It was wonderful. We thank God for it.

But I'll tell you plainly, Wheaton College needs a word-centered revival. Within a few weeks of that movement being over, all the same sins began to appear again. And sadly, while it touched students, it didn't touch faculty.

Now, those of you who know how to use your brain know that when you have a university revival and it touches only students, you have to ask, but if it touches faculty, then it won't be needed so frequently. But now, here's my point in telling you this precious account. No one on the faculty, I was one time on the faculty, no one saw the necessity of preaching.

And so there was no preaching done during that season of grace. Later, now listen carefully, later, there were students who had gone to the microphone and confessed horrendous sins, who later wrote articles condemning the movement, saying they had been forward, they had confessed, but the revival was a

fraud, because they were right back when they wrote in the sins that they had confessed. Now, dear friend, you see, now listen, there is a great difference between confession and repentance, but the students weren't told that.

It's not fair to expect students to know that. Somebody, you see, should have grasped that it will have many who are touched, who fall away, and it will not result in major social... Now, we live in a time when we already have with... As long as you're led to... When revival comes. Now, let me tell you what happened in Wales.

There was this stirring, it had actually begun in a quiet way in... We bear the same name, but Evan wasn't a preacher, he didn't know how. He didn't have an adequate sense of the Word of God to preach, and so the movement focused on experience. There were wonderful converts, many marvelously revised, and others awakened and converted.

But the revival of Wales in 1945, now listen carefully, it was only an interruption of a downward slide. Do we need an interruption? We have been sliding downhill steadily for more than two decades. How much help would there be in interrupting that downward slide for six months? And then the slide continued.

Oh, dear friend, surely your heart tells you we need a radical turnaround, and things need to move up. And it's the preaching of the Word of God. So, if you're in a position of leadership and the Spirit of God begins to stir, don't you dare focus on experience.

It's what's happened in Toronto and Pensacola. There is some preaching, but they are not what would be called Word-centered movements. They're experience-centered movements.

There's some validity. I would never cheapen the word revival to define what's happening in those places. It's not what I know our nation needs.

Now, as I said earlier, don't misunderstand. I'm not saying to you that when there's great preaching of the Word of God, there is no experience. Why, indeed, the most marvelous experiences of all come directly through this.

As you were preaching, you saw someone come up. This dear man shakes his head, and this brother shakes his head. Those of us who preach, we watch people come.

We see sweeping over their faces. So I am not urging the abandonment of interest in. Well, I have not lost track.

And oh, what a precious term. Oh, I would like to think that every one of us knows something. Because there's nothing refreshing but the word fullness is used in connection with revival.

And oh, how blessed it is to catch the significance of this. In seasons of revival, God opens the portals of heaven, and he begins to pour his blessings down. Here's a brother with a large cup.

And the portals open just above, and the Lord starts. But the windows of heaven are still filled to overflowing. My dear friends, there is depth filled to overflowing.

And you can't conceive of a where there is not that overflow of the already filled cup. Now the world is never spilled upon out of our lives by anything other than our lives contain. If somebody knocks up against you, and you spill out of the cup of your life, you can only spill its contents.

And suppose there's bitterness in the cup. Suppose you've got some gripe against God himself, or some grievance with someone in the church. That's what you're going to spill.

But oh, to be filled with overflowing, with the fresh graces of Christ. And then every time we're jostled or knocked, or poked and spilled, it's the blessings from it spill. Another term, I've got to look at my watch.

Oh, here it is. I'll finish this this afternoon. But let me give you one more word.

The word glory. Glory. You see, this is a word regularly used pertaining to revival.

Oh, glory. I don't know whether you've got all of our books out on your tables, brother, but we have put out a book called Filled the Land. We have another book entitled Scotland Saw His Glory.

And all of you can remember that occasion when Moses had been up on the mountain with God and the people had complained to Aaron and he had built the golden calf and they had sinned wickedly against our Father. And God said, Now Moses, you get busy and you lead this people to the place where I have sent you. And the Lord said, Moses, I like the way you do things.

All right, I won't send an angel. I'll go with you again myself. And then, full of courage, Moses said, Lord, show me your glory.

So the Lord says, Come on back to the mountain. Moses, stand there in the cleft of the rock. Let me cover you.

Oh, all around us are people that know nothing of the glory of God. You know that precious psalm that says, The nearness of God is my good. My own personal experience throughout life has been exactly as the psalmist described.

Those precious seasons when God has drawn near to me, those are the best days. We run the danger of thinking more lowly, of accepting inconsequential things in place of what we really need. We can with one accord express to you the conviction that we desperately need revival.

We long for awakening, for fire, for fulness, for glory. And we believe that while there are indeed a series of arguments that we could raise before you in keeping with your word through Isaiah, Come now, let us reason together, saith the Lord. We could give you a sermon.

But above all the reasons for pleading with you to send revival, none rises so highly or takes on such gigantic proportions as the glory of your own name. For we are living amongst the pagan people who if they use your name at all do so with contempt and evil. Every day your glorious name is trampled in the muck and you're treated with disdain.

And we know of nothing that would bring you greater glory than to pour out your spirit upon the land in these days so that our Lord Jesus Christ might be elevated before all so that every day we break for lunch, may it be with a spirit of sobriety and yearning and help us to come again this afternoon to be stirred and moved in the direction that will ultimately bring you the greatest glory through Jesus Christ our Lord.

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