

1. the Welsh Pulpit and Revival

by Robert Ellis

The sermon highlights the importance of the preacher as an ambassador of eternity, the significance of spiritual revivals, and the role of prophets in reviving the church.

Scripture: Isaiah 40:8, Jeremiah 1:5, Matthew 28:19, Acts 1:8, Romans 10:15, 1 Corinthians 2:4, Ephesians 6:19, 2 Timothy 4:2, Hebrews 4:12, 1 Peter 1:24

Topics: "Revival Preaching", "Prophetic Ministry"

Description

Robert Ellis emphasizes the importance of preachers being sent by God, serving as ambassadors of Eternity in the temporal world. He highlights the need for messages from preachers to be like breezes from the eternal hills, permeating the atmosphere with eternal truths. Ellis points out that spiritual revivals produce great preachers with outstanding messages, such as Luther, Calvin, the Wesleys, and others, who bring about significant changes in nations. He stresses the necessity of the prophetic voice in the pulpit to prevent spiritual stagnation and the rise of idolatry. Ellis reflects on the rich history of Welsh preachers, from John Elias to Christmas Evans, and the impact of revivals on the Welsh pulpit.

Transcript

"AND how shall they preach except they be sent?" (Paul). The preacher is the ambassador of Eternity in the court of Time. In the court but not of it. His authority is eternity, his headquarters the realm of the eternal verities. His only concern is to permeate the court of time with the atmosphere of the eternal. He receives power and inspiration for his tremendous task from beyond the confines of the temporal. Is it meet to congratulate a preacher for a timely sermon? Ought not his messages to be as breezes from the eternal hills? All the great preachers of the church are the products of the spiritual realm, from John Chrysostom, Wycliffe, Savonarola, and Knox, down to our own day. When the church becomes enamoured of the Delilahs of time, and succumbs to the overtures of the temporal, then follows a period of spiritual stagnation and the desert wind withers her spiritual life. "Awake, O North wind and come thou South, blow upon my garden." And with the winds of heaven comes the prophet. Spiritual revivals always produce men with the outstanding message. The Reformation gave birth to Luther, Calvin and Knox whose message shook political and Papal thrones to their foundation. As the late Professor Richard Morris tersely put it-- "Martin Luther with his clarion blast shook the Papacy to its very foundations." The same sentiment was voiced by the late Rev. Joseph Jenkins concerning Calvin--"A man with eternity as his platform, and hell becoming pale before his message." When the hour of God struck during the third decade of the eighteenth century, the trumpet blast of the Wesleys, Whitfield, Rowland, Harris, and

Williams echoed through Great Britain and a nation changed in a day. The Church realised the inadequacy of the altar when the pulpit was devoid of the prophetic voice. During the absence of the prophet the people rise up to play and dance before the golden calf sponsored by the weakness of the priesthood. God speaks from the mount of His Revelation and then the prophet arrives. What is true of the church universal is true of the Church of God in our beloved Wales, a land exalted unto Heaven where great preaching is concerned. Of Wales it can be said as of Bethlehem--"And thou Bethlehem in the land of Judah art not least among the princes of Judah."

As we glance back across the centuries and retrace our meditations from the day of our patron saint, such names as Penry, Walter Caradog, Vavasor Powell, Wroth, Erbury, John Elias, Christmas Evans, and Williams y Wern, remind us as a nation of our terrific responsibility in the light of God's gifts to us in saintly leaders. What thrills and pathos are ours when we read the heart-pleadings of the young John Penry for Welsh preachers, men who could help the people of Wales to explore the riches of God's word in the vernacular! What a treasure he left to his four little daughters in bequeathing four New Testaments (his sole property)--what a gold mine! The only answer the church gave to Penry was the reading of homilies. But the eternal throne had greater blessings in preparation for Wales. Griffith Jones, Llanddowror with his evangelical preaching and his circulating schools may be regarded as the morning star of the eighteenth century revival in Wales.

"In the fullness of time, God sent His trumpeters through the land--Howell Harris of Trevecca saw his own sinful state and wonderful Saviour during Palm Sunday and Easter Sunday 1735." After that wonderful vision which is the first and foremost equipment of a great preacher, the whole of Wales experienced his thunder and lightning. And what of Daniel Rowland, Llangeitho, who began his career as a curate to his elder brother and ended as a curate to his own son? In one feature he was different from his fellow revivalists. From the remotest parts of the Principality they flocked to Llangeitho year after year to the monthly communion, a congregation between 1500 and 2500. Rowland dwelt on the terrors of Sinai until people felt in their very bones their hopelessness. Then with angelic voice and countenance he would hold up the cross, and with tears of joy and repentance their jubilant notes would resound through the Vale of Aeron. One remarkable thing on the day of his funeral was the presence of 100 preachers who were his sons in the faith. The Reverend William Williams, the sweet singer of Wales, preserved the rich fruits of the great awakening in his wonderful hymns. Ben Bowen, the young poetic genius who died after crossing the threshold of the twentieth century, maintained that the flowers of the Vale of Towy were so soaked with the dew of hymnology that they would never wither.

"Ni wywa blodau Dyffryn Tywi mwy,

Mae gwllith emynau Cymru arnynt hwy."

In the wake of Harris, Rowland, and Williams came the commentator Peter Williams, who succeeded better in commending the Word than in commenting upon it. He experienced conversion under the ministry of the Rev. George Whitfield. His marginal notes on the Bible created a little stir. He was accused of Sabellianism. One of his contemporaries suggested for that reason the urn of Sabellius was often shaken in his presence. Yet he was a mighty man of God, a fire for the salvation of souls. Peter Williams's Bible is still a monument to his literary labours and Water Street Chapel, Carmarthen, a reminder of his care for his converts.

With the passing of the eighteenth century God did not forget Wales. Some historians testify that the Principality had revivals every decade until 1859. The giants in intellect, eloquence and grace, John Elias, William Williams, and Christmas Evans were products of revivals. In them the Welsh pulpit realised the value and power of drama, poetry, and philosophy sanctified. In their wake followed the Beddgelert revival, the channel being a rustic unpolished preacher, Robert Dafydd, Brynengan, "that the excellency of the power may be of God and not of us." That revival gave Wales John Jones, Talsarn, David Jones, Treborth, and William Jones, America (they were brothers). John Jones was a Saul among his brethren. One instance will suffice for us to realise his power. Concluding his sermon on one occasion he said--"Here is the best description I can give of the two great masters, God and the Devil. Let us divide the house and let each one choose his Master; I'll do my best to give the Devil fair play. Let him have the first chance and let everyone that desires to be his servant own him publicly. Now are you ready? 'Blessed be thy name O Prince of Hell!' Let each servant in this service say Amen. Amazing silence! Perhaps you didn't understand me or else you wouldn't be so quiet and reluctant with your Amen. Come again. Here is the second chance. 'Blessed be thy name for ever and ever Beelzebub.' Say Amen." Fear and trembling caught the people and the preacher broke the terrible silence with his trumpet voice. "Now or never to own your Master. One chance! Be men! Own Satan in a religious meeting as well as in the fair! Are you ready? Blessed be thy name O Prince of Darkness. May the crown be on his head. Let the Deity be dis-enthroned! Hurry with your Amen." The silence and fear were painful. In this atmosphere of intense sincerity the preacher turned-- "Well, let us turn to the other side. Are you followers of the Son of God, ready to own your Master through thick and thin? If you are, prepare yourselves and remove the rust from your Amen. If you are ready we shall begin--'Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ--though he was rich, yet for our sakes he became poor.'" The preacher failed to finish the verse. One mighty Amen filled the chapel. The preacher remarked-- "There, followers of Satan, God's family are not ashamed to own their Master."

William Jones, his brother, served his Master in the Western hemisphere and undoubtedly heard the divine "Well done." David Jones, Treborth, another of the triumvirate, was an accomplished poet in the strict metres and a hymn writer as well as an acceptable preacher. His was the gift of the prophet--"And lo, thou art unto them as a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice." On one of his preaching itineraries through Cardiganshire during a certain corn harvest the Rev. John Jones, Blaenannerch, sent a letter to the Secretary of the Caernarvonshire Presbytery beseeching him to call the Rev. David Jones home because he feared that there would be no food for man or beast during the following winter. The people were leaving the harvest and following the preacher, intoxicated with the wine of his preaching.

One of the most fruitful years of the Right Hand of the Most High in the history of his church in Great Britain is 1859. That wonderful manifestation of the power of God began, in an obscure prayer meeting in Hamilton, Ontario. The wind bloweth where it listeth; it swept across the States, took the Atlantic in its stride, descended on Ulster, resulting in Pentecostal scenes, and crossed the Irish Sea to Scotland. During this stage a young Welsh Wesleyan preacher, Humphrey Jones, came across the sea in the fullness of the blessing of the Gospel of Christ. He came into contact with another young man of similar spiritual aspirations and yearnings after perfection, namely the Rev. David Morgan, Ysbyty Ystwyth, Cardiganshire. A carpenter by trade, David Morgan, through the instrumentality of "great David's greater Son," the carpenter of Nazareth, spread the flame of revival through Wales and more than 36,000 were added to the churches. Among these converts were pulpiteers of no mean stature-- the Rev. John Evans, Eglwysbach, a giants in intellect, whose sanctified oratory and dramatic powers led hundreds to a saving knowledge of Christ. The Rev. Doctor Dinsdale Young the eminent Wesleyan, testified to his listening for

over an hour to Eglwysbach preaching--although he understood not a word, yet the monoglot Englishman had utterly forgotten himself. One name resounded very often in his ears--Iesu Grist. Like a true disciple of Wesley, John Evans was enthralled by the Saviour and could well ratify the spiritual experience of Charles Wesley--"Jesus, name, all names above."

The fire of the revival entered our institutes of learning and who can measure the effects upon generations of students in every sphere? While yet a student at Balliol College, Oxford, at the feet of the renowned Benjamin Jowett, T.C. Edwards, son of Principal Lewis Edwards, came under the conviction of sin during the visit of the Rev. David Morgan to Bala. An old saint, Mrs. Rowlands of Bala, related to us the story of his conversion, how he was "a dry as dust preacher" before his conversion, and how, afterwards, the sacred flame burnt on the altar of his heart for the remainder of his life. He became the first principal of the University College of Wales, Aberystwyth, and then for a brief period followed his father as principal of Bala Theological College. The flame of revival and the light of scholarship dwelt harmoniously in his life. His great sermon on "For me to live is Christ" still lingers in many hearts in Wales. The preacher in a flight of imagination goes to the Emperor's Palace to ask Nero what life is to him. The answer is-- "Power." Turning from the throne room of the Palace into another room there is a man in deep thought. He asks him the same question, and Seneca answers-- "To live is to think." Then the preacher returns to Nero enquiring whether he has anyone else whom he can consult on the great question of living. At length the Emperor recalls that a strange Jewish prisoner has arrived and he directs the preacher down to the dungeon beneath the palace and bids him be careful because the steps are damp and slippery. The preacher, after going down two or three steps, scans the unhealthy dungeon and sees a prisoner in the attitude of adoration. "Pardon me, remarkable prisoner, can you tell me what it is to live?" The prisoner turns his beaming face on the preacher and then to the heavens and assures him "For me to live is Christ." The late Sir W. R. Nicoll, that shrewd judge of men, admitted that as a minister to listen to regularly, he would have chosen Principal Thomas Charles Edwards.

During the 1859 revival there were two students at the Memorial College, Brecon, who were destined to influence the lives of generations of ministers--E. Herber Evans, and David Rowlands, who subsequently became Principals, the former of Bala-Bangor Theological College, the latter of Brecon Memorial College. The saintliness of Principal Rowlands (Dewi Mon) left its mark upon all who came under his tuition. He numbly acknowledged the debt to the power of the gospel in his own life as a result of the 1859 revival. Principal Herber Evans was in the front rank of pulpit evangelists of his day. To quote Nicoll's biographer--"For sheer overwhelming eloquence he placed Doctor Herber Evans above every other preacher he had heard."

Other preachers of the first magnitude appear in the religious firmament of Wales in connection with this revival. The Rev. R. D. Roberts, Llwynhendy, the Baptist divine, with his sanctified Welsh 'hwyl,' and in the power of God, travelled the country with his mighty message, and turned the colourless, tasteless lives of hundreds into the sweet wine of a new relationship with God in Christ. And what of that colourful personality--the Rev. William Rees (Gwilym Hiraethog), poet, journalist, lecturer, but best of all a preacher of brilliant talents? In his sermon on Micah 6, 1-3, he portrays the prophet going to preach to the mountains--he had often preached to the people with no effect. God commanded him to contend with the mountains. He obeys and as he goes the people enquire whither he is going. "He is going to preach to the mountains." Their curiosity is awakened. "Let us go and listen to what he has to say in our absence." He goes and lifts his voice-- "Hear ye O Mountains, the Lord hath a controversy with his people. I have no quarrel with you, you are always obedient." And the mountains answer "Speak, holy prophet, thy servants

listen." The mountains teach a lesson to the uncircumcised. Then the people repent and ask "Wherewith shall we come before the Lord and bow ourselves before the high God?" Were it not for the lesson of the mountains no one would have known how long their obstinacy would have lasted.

Then there was that preacher of Herculean proportions-- the Rev. Edward Mathews of Ewenny, a revival preacher of whom Sir Henry Irving remarked after hearing him preach, that the stage had lost an actor of the first magnitude. The Welsh saints experienced greater thrills under the ministry of Mathews, than any English audience experienced at Drury Lane. One instance of his genius will suffice. Preaching on the words in Luke 4, 20 "And the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened upon him" he said: "A remarkable verse, remarkable things in it--a synagogue. When we think of it, a remarkable place, a small inartistic chapel and people going thither, nothing to eat, to drink, to buy, to sell, only things for the soul. Another remarkable thing--everybody in the synagogue--all there. They saw many people there before, but today, everyone. The houses were empty, everything could be stolen, but there was no one to steal--they were all in the synagogue. And all behaving in a remarkable way--gazing on Him. What a remarkable thing! Everybody in the synagogue and He also. Why was He not in the everybody? If the eyes of all were gazing there was no Him to be but there was a Him apart from the everyone, and everyone gazing on Him. A remarkable service, no speaking, no singing, no sleeping, nobody roaming, everyone gazing. I imagine someone saying--'they ought to worship,' but they were worshipping. Worshipping is gazing on Him. There is no one in the universe whom we can gaze upon, only Him. There will be no better work in Heaven than what took place at the synagogue that remarkable morning--worship, gazing for eternity upon Him."

During the last quarter of the nineteenth century parts of Wales, especially North Wales, experienced an awakening under the ministry of that great man of God, Richard Owen, who reminds us of Paul's words--"How not many wise men after the flesh are called." What was true of Goldsmith's preacher was true also of this evangelist, "Men who came to scoff remained to pray." The following dialogue between the prodigal son and the Devil will suffice to prove the effective manner of his preaching: --

P.S. I will arise and go to my father. I have a father, My father has a large house with many servants and they have bread enough and to spare while I perish with hunger.

D. Don't go. I will increase your wages.

P.S. If that is the case, my father's house for wages.

D. Don't go. I will improve your table.

P.S. My father's house for a grand table. There is good bread and the best wine. I will arise.

D. I will give you a change of employment.

P.S. If I am to work I prefer tilling my father's fields. I will arise and go to my father.

D. Wait, don't be too hasty. You are in very poor health, Wait until you recuperate and then go.

P.S. Yes, I know I am ill. Nobody knows that better than myself, and I understand that I shall never recuperate if I can not go home. There is no hope for my recuperating only through a change of air on the slopes of Mount Zion. I will arise.

D. You are very ragged and untidy. Let me dress you up smartly. Your clothes are worn out, your boots are torn. You have lost your ring. Let me make a little improvement.

P.S. No, my father's house for new clothes, for boots on my feet. My father's house for the ring.

Richard Owen through the spirit of God led hundreds back to the Father from the far country.

It was during this revival that Doctor John Williams, Brynisiencyn, had his baptism of fire. He was undoubtedly the Demosthenes of the Welsh pulpit during the first two decades of the twentieth century, as his sermon on the good shepherd shows. After dealing with important days in the life of the shepherd, there is one outstanding day--the day of gathering the sheep home. They that are in the grave shall hear his voice. The porter of death shall hear his footstep and he will unlock the door in a second. He shall call them by their names--"Come ye, blessed of my father, inherit the kingdom." They will be sleeping. They have been sleeping long and deep. The world has tramped over their resting places for ages without disturbing their sleep "because they know not the voice of strangers." The shepherd calls and they are awake in a twinkling. The shepherd glances over them all. "You are all here, no scars of the wilderness left, no mark of the wolves' teeth, nor the lion's fang." The shepherd goeth before them--where? It is the beginning of an eternal summer and the shepherd is changing their pasture forever. Eternal farewell to the wolves. There was a time they feared the barking of the smallest puppies, now they can gaze upon the greatest views of eternity without fear. The following is an instance of his powerful preaching; it is the conclusion of a sermon on Mathew 21, 44. "In the regions of ice and snow on the Continent, immense pieces are gradually loosened by the rays of the sun. A huge precipice hangs over at that moment. The least tremor is enough to interfere with its equilibrium and to cause it to crash to the valley below. Thunder is unnecessary--the cornet of an old beggar is enough, or the bleating of a sheep in the distance, and then the terrible avalanche. The ungodly walks through the ravine of the avalanches. God's threats hang overhead. Walk slowly and quietly, brother, lest the precipice fall. A curse, one swear word is enough to shake the mountain. Watch, be careful. 'On whomsoever it will fall it will grind into powder.' Turn the stone into a foundation. The stone will be either on thee or under thee forever. Under thee as a foundation, on thee as eternal destruction."

Doctor John Williams preached this remarkable sermon at an association at Mountain Ash in the early days of the revival. Thirteen persons were converted and built their lives upon the rock of salvation.

It is true that these men have natural abilities, but they live in the memory of the principality by virtue of their contact with the powers of the world to come. It is not within the sphere of our undertaking, were we competent to do so, to give any psychological explanation. Sufficient has been written to prove the close relationship between revivals and the Welsh pulpit, and that the spiritual leaders of Wales are (according to Forsyth), "not in the lineage of the Greek orator but the Hebrew prophet. One comes with inspiration and the other with revelation." But God had not spoken His last word to Wales with the close of the nineteenth century. The last decade of the nineteenth century was a period, of spiritual decline in the churches, yet there remained a few names who asked "How long, Lord?" The answer came after crossing the threshold of the twentieth century. We shall deal with the answer in the next chapter.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/robert-ellis/1-the-welsh-pulpit-and-revival/>

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