

## 5. w.w. Lewis

by Robert Ellis

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*The sermon explores the profound impact of personal spiritual experience and the necessity of centering one's life on Christ amidst persecution and challenges.*

**Scripture:** Matthew 5:11, Acts 5:41, 1 Corinthians 10:31, Philippians 1:21, Colossians 3:17

**Topics:** "Personal Revival", "Spiritual Transformation"

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### Description

Robert Ellis delves into the profound impact of the 1859 revival on the subsequent revival of 1904 in Wales, emphasizing the spiritual transformation that transcends all aspects of life. Through anecdotes of individuals like W.W. Lewis, the sermon highlights the evolution of spiritual perceptions and the deepening of faith amidst skepticism and doubt. The sermon underscores the importance of experiencing a personal revival, characterized by a shift from intellectual orthodoxy to a heart-centered orthodoxy, leading to a profound surrender to Christ and a complete reorientation of one's life around Him.

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### Transcript

IN our study of revival and its relation to Wales, we realise the penetration of the spiritual into all spheres of life. A new vision and a regenerated character cannot be confined to one sphere or stratum of life. The influence of the 1859 revival can be felt in the revival of 1904, although many adherents of the former stood doubtfully for a while upon the threshold of the latter. This incident is related of one of the fifty-niners (to use the description given of the Phillip Jones). Visiting one of the meetings of 1904 and sitting by the door, he became rather sceptical of this revival. According to his estimation it was not the same as '59. No revivals are ever exactly the same. There is nothing stereotyped about God's work. But as the meeting went on, someone struck up the Welsh hymn-- "Wrth gofio'i riddfannau'n yr ardd" (a hymn by an inspired blacksmith of Carmarthenshire describing the suffering of our Lord in Gethsemane and Calvary). Then the old fifty-niner nodded his assent, and as the singing went on and the blacksmith described the path to the Cross and the nailing to the tree, his assent became audible; he failed to stifle the "Amen." And when the congregation were lost in the last picture, and the old blacksmith challenged us to remain silent--what heart could not melt--the old fifty-niner's prejudices went to the winds, and to his feet he jumped in joyful praise-- "Thank God they have the same thing." We notice again the same inexplicable "That" which Peter could not define on the day of Pentecost--"this is 'that'." We can explain organisation, but the organism that gave birth to it remains beyond explanation.

In the case of the Rev. W. W. Lewis or W.W. as he was affectionately known by his compatriots, we witness the direct influence of 1859 upon 1904 in both the social and religious spheres. He was born in Cardiganshire in the northern part of that county, the part that gave to Wales many eminent men in the realms of theology and literature. Wales would be poorer were it not for Doctor Lewis Edwards who, according to the Rev. John Evans, Eglwysbach, did much work out of sight. His theological classic-- "The Doctrine of the Atonement" was regarded as second only to the Bible as food for the mind. His "Literary Essays" still remain a monument to his literary and critical abilities. There also were born Principal David Charles Davies, saint, scholar and preacher, and the Rev. John Roberts (Ieuan Gwyllt) the musician--preacher to whom Wales is indebted for introducing the deep treasures of J. S. Bach to our religious music, and the soul-stirring music of his own tune "Moab." And what of Doctor Cynddylan Jones who could write theology like a novel, and could command the spirits of the deep in theology to leave their depths and array themselves before artisans and agricultural workers.

W. W. Lewis was nurtured in that atmosphere until 14 years of age, when his parents had to leave the solitude of Cardiganshire for the hustle of the Metropolis. 1868 was one of the great years in Welsh social and political history. The General Election of that memorable year put to the test the loyalty of Welsh Nonconformity to its principles of individual and religious freedom. Many had to pay dearly for this expression of their loyalty and among them were the parents of W. W. Lewis. Was there any connection between 1859 and 1868? History answers in the affirmative as the names of S. R. Llanbryn-mair, David Rees, Capel Als, and Gwilym Hiraethog suggest. Rather than bend the knee to ecclesiastical tyranny, his parents left their home in Cardiganshire for London. At the tender age of 14, W. W. Lewis was transplanted from the solitude of agricultural Wales to the bustle of the modern Babylon. As evidence of the solidarity of his own qualities and up bringing, the transfer from the rustic life of an agricultural county to the pulsating life of the world's largest city effected little change in him, who proved in his subsequent life that he was a "cedar of Lebanon, which He hath planted."

His presence in later life was grandeur itself. If we could buy a magic wand, turn aside the veil of the past, and have a view of our stock, undoubtedly we would envisage on the stage of the dim past the Roman, the Viking, and the Norman. We could see them in W. W. Lewis--the majesty of Rome in his step and profile, while the horned headdress of the Viking had its spiritual equivalent in the helmet of salvation. If there is one word, which epitomises this man of God and his message, it is the word majestic. In his zeal for Christ and His Kingdom, "the moral equivalent of war," W. W. Lewis revealed 'the sanctified qualities of a great general.'

Although the family left Cardiganshire, they did not turn their backs thereon. No place was good enough for their son, not even the senior Universities. The Welsh University was recently established and thither William was sent. Was not the Rev. Thomas Charles Edwards, the son of Doctor Lewis Edwards a convert of the '59 revival, its first principal? He had a passion to educate his fellow-countrymen spiritually and intellectually. How interlocked are the years 1859, 1868 and 1904! What a privilege to be at the feet of this Gamaliel in knowledge and grace! Thence to Trevecca with its hallowed memories of the 18th century revival and a further four years "at the feet of Principal William Howells, the polished, preacher and saint, and Doctor John Harries Jones, one of the stars of the '59 revival and a scholar of fame. W. W. Lewis' first pastorate was at Llangors, Breconshire, then Elizabeth Street, Dowlais, followed by pastorates at Seion, Carmarthen, and Terrace Road, Swansea; He may now be regarded as a Welsh giant in the English pulpit. He was a master in both languages. To quote the words of his contemporary and "twin-soul " the Rev. E. Keri Evans: --

"He is none the less cultured because he did not proceed towards a degree. Perhaps indeed he is more so, if that definition of culture as 'what remains after we have forgotten all we learnt' be accepted, for the simple reason that the reaction of study on mind is deeper and more lasting when it is pursued out of love for a subject rather than in quest for a degree, when very often it is like food bolted, not properly masticated and afterwards assimilated. In any case Mr. Lewis possesses a mind of excellent powers well trained."

As in the case of his colleagues in the Revival of 1904, the spiritual life of Mr. Lewis can be divided. Not into a life of open sin and manifest sainthood or from Heterodoxy unto Orthodoxy. He never knew what it was to go "on to orthodoxy." He never deserted it. When we hear people jubilantly express their joy at the return of leaders from a life of intellectual prodigality we are tempted to say-- "They had no business to leave the Father's house." T. C. Edwards, Howells, and John Harries Jones under the unction of the spirit of God displayed the grandeur of Gospel truth in such a convincing manner as to keep W. W. Lewis with a firm grip of the eternal verities. Yet, very early in the 20th century, he experienced a change when he came to minister at Seion, Carmarthen (the name Carmarthen conjures up the names of the other two--

W. S. Jones and Keri Evans--completing the triumvirate). Keri Evans explains the difference thus: --

"The difference is rather that between possessing religion and being possessed by it, between orthodoxy of the head and orthodoxy of the heart."

Forsyth implies the same truth when he writes: --

"The once born are the chief spiritual peril in the church. The religious outlook without the religious experience, with a taste for religion but no taste of it, who treat Christianity as an interpretation of life rather than a recasting of the soul and view the church as the company of the idealists rather than the habitation of the spirit." Prior to this the Rev. W. W. Lewis went through that experience of the "recasting of the soul." His previous intellectual orthodoxy became a living reality. Orthodoxy is condemned when its advocates lead a worldly life. When the cross remains framed in the creed and excluded from character, orthodoxy is at a discount. The practice of the tenets of faith is impossibility without a new nature and a surrendered life. The surrendered life is the best advertisement of orthodoxy. Personal experience is essential yet ineffective unless through it Christ and the Holy Spirit are operative in creed and character. After this revival in his intellectual and spiritual outlook, one thing alone counted in the life of Mr. Lewis--the fact of Christ. The great change of centre had taken place. Christ as a living person and not orthodoxy as a system or intellectual activity became the centre. Christ is all and in all A similar change took place in the life of that saint of God--Doctor A J. Gordon. As a result his ministry was changed. He used to choose his texts, arrange his service and compose his sermons but hence forth Gordon obeyed God and the result was that the Church was changed Many who admired Gordon left, while others who loved God remained. This reminds us of an incident in a Presbytery meeting in Cardiganshire when the Rev. Joseph Jenkins, New Quay, was honoured of God, when preaching before the Rev. Evan Phillips, Newcastle Emlyn. As soon as Jenkins sat down his fellow preacher whispered in his ear: "You didn't make that sermon, you received it." W. W. Lewis made his sermons before his re-generation; afterwards he received them from God.

Inevitably after this spiritual experience and before the outbreak of the revival of 1904, the eyes of the faithful were upon him, and he was called upon to address meetings in Cardiganshire, doing so at the request of the Rev. Joseph Jenkins and John Thickens, Aberayron (mystic--historian--who is still with us).

He and a few others were oases in the spiritual desert of the latter part of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th. Those Conventions in Cardiganshire were harbingers of the spring of 1904. When the Springtide came in, thousands came into the fellowship of grace. In the new life special food was necessary and in the divine wisdom there had been prepared men like W. W. Lewis to minister to the young in the faith. What a combination of qualities he had for such work--tenderness and strength, knowledge of the word of God and obedience to the will of God. He did not place a very high premium upon emotion (a trait absent in the Viking character). Keri Evans sums up this aspect in the following words: --

"He is not unemotional. I think he is capable of strong and deep emotion, but he is unmusical and so satisfied with his state of deficiency that he is prone to make it a standard for others. He has no patience with those who seek to express religious emotion in singing. He has done yeoman service from the time of the revival down, in seeking to keep the musical expression of emotion from becoming mere self-indulgence leading to nothing beyond itself."

In a mission held for the deepening of the spiritual life, emotions began to run amok and one of the spiritually inebriated brethren in the "Big Seat" jumped up to the level of the table and remarked-- "Isn't it glorious, Mr. Lewis? Then came the rapier thrust-- "Is it? A calf can jump." The religious convictions of W.W. were too deep and solid to allow jumping. The emotional preaching so prevalent and popular in his day was never countenanced by him. Of one popular preacher he made the remark, that he made people cry in their sins not for their sins. He did not prepare his spiritual meals to the accompaniment of emotional orchestration. He was a surgeon. He wielded no baton. His was the lancet and even in the medical realm he was no physician; he preferred the operating theatre to the dispensary. In a conversation on this aspect of preaching, a lady from Cardiganshire remarked that during a mission held by W. W., Lewis and W. S. Jones one of them thrust a dagger into her heart and the other speaking after him kept turning it round in the wound. He applied the same methods to himself, for he led a rigidly disciplined life. We are reminded that when; he gave up smoking he did not take the trouble to burn his pipes. He was so sure of not returning that way again that it was not necessary to "burn the bridges."

His solid sayings still linger to strengthen those who heard them, as for instance when Nantlais as a young man told him that his great problem was to crucify himself, and W.W. answered-- "Don't try young man, be faithful to Christ, others will see to the crucifying." When they were preaching together in a Presbytery, Nantlais thanked Mr. Lewis for his message and he reciprocated the kind feeling. Nantlais told him that time would improve him. Then came the remark-- "No, time does not improve; it will give you opportunity to improve." Meeting a friend one day who said-- "Thank the Lord for health," the answer flashed back-- "And for ill-health too." When he was preaching on Mary breaking the alabaster box and pouring ointment on the head of the Master, he drew attention to the disciples murmuring their agreement with Judas' suggestion of economic loss, and, explained their behaviour thus-- "Every one in the grip of spiritual uncertainty concerning Christ always votes against Him in a crisis." With the authority of the word of God, and a home where the Spirit of God reigned, he counselled young ordinands to live such a life in their homes that the presence of their wives in the house of God on Sunday morning would not hinder their message. Although brought up in the atmosphere of theology and himself a serious student of that branch of knowledge, theology seemed to recede to the back ground after his new experience of the spiritual life. His preaching became more scriptural, or as one who knew him well expressed it: --

"Mr. Lewis' religion is bigger than his theology, the depths of the new creation in Christ is beyond human plumbing, as its height is above imagination, but in Mr. Lewis we catch a glimpse of it "in parvo," in a

combination of strength and modesty in a great simplicity, perfect reliability, transparent honesty, and absence of display and a humble dependence upon God."

Preaching in a Convention on the necessity of solidity and strength in the soul's life, R. B. Jones passed the remark: "He is like a grand oak tree." Yes, and we as saplings revel in remembrance of an occasional hour of blessing under the stately branches. The following outline, based on Matthew 5, 11 may give our generation an idea of his trend of thought, massive intellect and spirituality of message.

The best compliment that the world can give to the Christian is to revile him, persecute him; and whenever the world does according to its nature and acts honestly, that is just what it does to the Christian, it reviles and persecutes him. When it does not revile us there is something wrong with us; or the world, having ceased to become a persecuting world, has become a flattering world, and the world is more dangerous when it flatters than when it persecutes. There is more hope from a persecuting world than from a flattering world.

It is better for us to be persecuted than to be flattered. I always feel in a religious gathering when a speaker is cheered much that there is not much contrition in that meeting, for a contrite heart does not cheer. If the world does not say of us-- 'away with such a fellow from earth; it is not fit that he should live' then we have good reason for doubt that we shall ever hear the blessed Master saying unto us-- 'Come ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you.'

If the Lord smiles upon us, the world by reason of its antagonism to Christ must frown upon us. If the world smiles upon us, there is reason for doubting whether we have the approval of the Lord. Now you observe that Jesus does not pity the men who suffer in consequence of their attachment to Him. He does not say-- "I am exceedingly sorry for you; if I could, I would prevent this suffering." That is not His way. Instead He congratulates them, saying, "Blessed are ye when men shall revile you and persecute you for my sake."

So Christ congratulated His disciples in view of their persecution. Besides they were in good company, "for so persecuted they the prophets." We are in the Apostolic succession in this connection, for all the Apostles were persecuted and we belong to the noble army of martyrs--splendid company-- when we are reviled for Jesus' sake. Our great business is to deny self and assert Christ. When you do that, you may rest assured that you will encounter opposition. Deny self and do not preach self-denial in the usual meaning of denying certain things to self.

There is any amount of self-denial in the world. A man denies something to himself one week in order to gratify himself all the more next week. Many denied themselves certain things in past months in order to get their holiday at Llandrindod. That is not denying self but denying certain things to self. The world has no objection to your denying certain things to self, but to (assert Christ means the crucifixion of self and the manifestation of Christ, and the moment we do that we encounter opposition.

But Jesus says-- "Blessed are ye, it is then that you will begin to understand and to experience what it is to be blessed, what it is to enter into communion and fellowship with Me." Now that is the spirit that is to possess us. "When you come to that relationship to Me," said Christ to His disciples, "and live unto Me and are opposed, reviled, and persecuted, don't pity yourselves. It is a poor Christian who indulges in self-pity in the presence of opposition and difficult circumstances.

Congratulate yourselves. We ought to consider Christ Jesus so precious that we would be willing for all things to go, as long as He is pleased and glorified. Now that is not an impossible thing. I know very well

how people speak. They say that it is all very well to preach a high ideal, but you cannot put it into practice in "a world like this." Well it is to "a world like this" that God revealed Jesus Christ. It is to "a world like this" that Christ came to be a Redeemer and Saviour and if He cannot save "a world like this," He is no Saviour at all.

It is possible to live up to every Christian ideal (or else it is no good for us), for it has been lived. The best proof of that is in the Acts of the Apostles-- "When they had called the Apostles and beaten them, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go." Mark the following verse-- "And they departed from the presence of the council rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name." And said the Apostle: We glorify in tribulations"--not "we have passed with clenched fists," but "we glory in them."

"Blessed are ye when men shall revile you, and persecute you." Look out for difficulties, for they are opportunities for showing the power of divine grace. Now, as intelligent moral beings we all have some end in view, something for which we live, some one thing for the sake of which everything is done. That end determines the quality of our life and determines the plane on which we live. All activities tend towards that end. All of us have some end in view. What then do we live for?

What is our object in life? Can we say--for me, to live is Christ? If it is not Christ it is something else; it is something lower for there is nothing higher. So we fall short of the best whatever it is, if it is not Christ. Everything else tends in that direction. If Christ is the end, then the whole of our activity, or our activity on the whole, tends towards that end. Do we not speak in that way of men? We say of one man--he lives for wealth, his great object is to accumulate fortune, he is a worldly man--still that man may appear to do things which are not quite consistent with worldliness.

He may be influenced to do what apparently is a generous act, but he is a worldly man and the one act which appears to be other than worldly, does not change the character of the man. Another man lives for pleasure. He may deny certain things to himself, certain opportunities to gratify his desires; still he is a pleasure--seeking man. It is so in our relation to Christ--if we have chosen Him, He is the great end for which we are making. We may appear to be inconsistent sometimes.

We ought to appear inconsistent less often than we do. Still the one act of failure does not change the plan of our life. We are still moving towards Christ, living towards him. No motive lower than this can be pleasing to Christ. ("Man's final relation to God will depend not on moral conduct but whether Jesus owned or disowned them as true servants to Him," so wrote Doctor Forsyth). Everything must be done for Christ's sake, or it will not be accepted on the Great Day. It is not accepted now.

In all things the motive must be for Christ's sake. Now, when we go home and find ourselves in the presence of great difficulties and find the flesh protesting against a certain course, remember this, "for My sake," "for Christ's sake," all for His sake. Then His power will enter into your soul and enable us to do everything to the glory of His name and to do it with a joy and a song in our hearts. May that be the case.

The above outline gives us a glimpse into the soul and mind of a consecrated personality who walked in the company of His Master although the world oftentimes frowned on and reviled him. Today we deem it a great honour to have heard him, and his message still proves a source of strength in our day and generation.

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