

When the Holy Spirit moves – Part 7

Beginning with thousands of small prayer groups worldwide, the first few years of the twentieth century saw revival break out in unprecedented measure. A prime example in our own country was in 1902 with the evangelistic meetings held by Reuben Torrey with Charles Alexander. In preparation for their visit to Melbourne, 1,700 home prayer groups met to pray for the mission and for revival. The Australian campaign registered over 20,000 enquirers and many Church buildings were filled to capacity early that century.

Torrey reported on the large numbers of Melbourne home 'prayer circles' when he spoke at the Keswick Convention in England in July 1902. All of the 5,000 people who were attending the convention responded with enthusiasm, committing themselves to pray for worldwide revival in ever-increasing 'prayer circles'. Then volunteers gathered names of additional thousands who committed to join in united, constant prayer for revival. So this revival 'down under' spread to the other side of the world over the next few years.

The Welsh Revival of 1904-1905 became the most powerful expression of that revival, and it, in turn, impacted the whole world. As news of the revival spread in print and as missionaries sailed from Great Britain, fervent prayer for revival increased across the world. Powerful revivals touched India, Korea, China, South Africa and Japan, along with fresh awakenings in Africa, Latin America, and the Pacific.

From November 1904 in Wales thousands were converted in a few months and 100,000 within a year. That number did not include nominal members converted in the Anglican and Free Churches. Five years later the vast majority of those converts remained active in the Churches. During the revival, crime dropped dramatically, with some judges left without any cases to try. Convictions for drunkenness fell drastically and a number of the main taverns went bankrupt as men turned away from alcohol in their droves.

At times so many miners were converted that it caused slowdowns in the mines because the pit ponies hauling coal all stopped, confused, not understanding their instructions without profanity. All the ponies needed to be re-trained so they would respond to the more refined language!

Early in 1904 touches of revival stirred New Quay, Cardiganshire, on the west coast of Wales where Joseph Jenkins was minister. At a testimony meeting at Jenkin's Methodist Church, a recent teenage convert, Florrie Evans, announced, *"If no one else will, I must say that I do love my Lord Jesus with all my heart."* The Holy Spirit instantly moved powerfully on the meeting with strong conviction. Many wept. One after another stood and acknowledged their submission to God. Jenkins led teams of revived young people conducting testimony meetings throughout the area.

The evangelist, Seth Joshua, arrived at New Quay in September 1904 to find remarkable moves of the Spirit in his meetings. On Sunday 18th, he reported that he had *"never seen the power of the Holy Spirit so powerfully manifested among the people as at this place just now."* His meetings lasted far into the night.

Some excerpts from his diary read:

“Revival is breaking out here in greater power ... the young people receiving the greatest measure of blessing. They break out into prayer, praise, testimony and exhortation. I cannot leave the building until midnight and even 1am. I closed the service several times and yet it would break out again quite beyond control of human power. . . At tonight’s meeting group after group came out to the front, seeking the full assurance of faith. I am of the opinion that forty conversions took place this week. I also think that those seeking assurance may be fairly counted as converts, for they had never received Jesus as personal Saviour before.”

Seth Joshua, alarmed by the inroads of liberalism in the Churches, had prayed that God would use a zealous young Christian to bring revival to Wales. One such young man, converted through his own ministry was Evan Roberts (1878-1951). Born in Loughor, Evan Roberts was an exemplary school pupil. At twelve he began working in the mine with his father. He founded a Sunday school for the children of miners and decided to become a preacher. Constantly he read the Bible, even in the mine. He published poems in the Cardiff Times under a pseudonym, learned shorthand, and taught himself to be a blacksmith. He describes his encounters with the Holy Spirit as follows:

“For thirteen years I prayed that I might receive the fullness of the Spirit. I had been led to pray by a remark of William Davies, one of the deacons: ‘Be faithful! Supposing the Spirit were to come down and you were not there. Remember Thomas, and how much he lost from not being present on the evening of the Resurrection.’

So I said to myself: ‘I want to receive the Spirit at any price.’ And I continually went to meetings despite all difficulties. Often, as I saw the other boys putting out to sea in their boats, I was tempted to turn round and join them. But no. I said to myself, ‘Remember your resolution to be faithful’, and I would go to the meeting. Prayer meeting on Monday evening at the chapel, prayer meeting for the Sunday school on Tuesday evening, meeting at the Church on Wednesday evening, and Thursday evening. I supported all these faithfully for years. For ten or eleven years I prayed for revival. I spent whole nights reading accounts of revivals or talking about them. It was the Spirit who in this way was driving me to think about revival.

One Friday evening that spring (1904), as I was praying at my bedside before going to bed, I was taken up into a great expanse – without time or space. It was communion with God. Up to that time I had only had a God who was far off. That evening I was afraid, but that fear has never come back. I trembled so violently that the bed shook, and my brother was awakened and took hold of me, thinking I was ill.

After this experience I woke each night about one o’clock in the morning. It was the more strange, as usually I slept like a log and no noise in my room was enough to wake me. From one o’clock I was taken up into communion with God for about four hours. What it was I cannot tell you, except that it was of God. About five o’clock I was again allowed to sleep until about nine o’clock. I was then taken up again and carried away in the same experience as in the early hours of the morning, until about midday or one o’clock.”

He entered the Calvinistic Methodist Academy in mid September 1904. He was convinced revival would touch all Wales and eventually he led a small band all over the country praying and preaching. Seth Joshua held meetings at Newcastle Emlyn, following his meetings at New Quay. Students from the Methodist Academy attended. Among them was Sidney Evans a room-mate of Evan Roberts. The students, including Evan Roberts, attended the next Seth Joshua meetings in Blaenannerch.

There on Thursday 29th September, Seth Joshua closed the 7 a.m. meeting before breakfast crying out in Welsh, *"Lord ... bend us."* Evan Roberts remembered, *"It was the Spirit that put the emphasis for me on 'Bend us.' 'That is what you need,' said the Spirit to me. And as I went out I prayed, O Lord, bend me."*

During the 9 a.m. meeting, Evan Roberts eventually prayed aloud after others had prayed. He knelt with his arms over the seat in front, bathed in perspiration as he agonized in prayer. He regarded that encounter with the Spirit as crucial in launching him into his revival ministry which began one month later.

A motto of the revival became *"Bend the Church and save the world."* Soon after the impact of the Spirit on him at Seth Joshua's meetings, he took leave from the Academy to return home to challenge his friends, especially the young people.

Arriving home by train at his village of Loughor on the south coast of Wales on Monday, 31st October, Evan Roberts obtained permission to speak at meetings at Moriah Church in Loughor and at Moriah's daughter Church in Gorseinon. Roberts spoke after the usual Monday night prayer meeting at Moriah to 17 young people. The Holy Spirit moved on them all in that two-hour session, and they all publicly confessed Christ as their personal Saviour, including Evan Roberts' three sisters and his brother Dan, all of whom later took a leading part in many revival meetings.

Meetings followed at Gorseinon. He then spoke every night to increasing crowds at the Moriah Church. By the weekend the Church was packed. Roberts spoke to a crowded Church on Saturday night on 'Being filled with the Spirit'. An after-meeting with Roberts followed the Sunday night service at Gorseinon. Evan Roberts described the response on the Sunday evening, 6th November, when by midnight the congregation was overwhelmed with tears.

"Then the people came down from the gallery, and sat close to one another. 'Now,' said I, 'we must believe that the Spirit will come; not think He will come; not hope He will come; but firmly believe that He will come.' Then I read the promises of God, and pointed out how definite they were. (Remember, I am doing all under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and praise be to Him.)

After this, the Spirit said that everyone was to pray. Pray now, not confess, not sing, not give experience, but pray and believe, and wait. And this is the prayer, "Send the Spirit now, for Jesus Christ's sake."

The people were sitting, and only closed their eyes. The prayer began with me. Then it went from seat to seat boys and girls young men and maidens. Some asking in silence, some aloud, some coldly, some with warmth, some formally, some in tears, some with difficulty, some adding to it, boys and girls, strong voices, then tender voices.

Oh, wonderful! I never thought of such an effect. I felt the place beginning to be filled, and before the prayer had gone half way through the chapel, I could hear some brother weeping, sobbing, and crying out before God. On went the prayer, the feeling becoming more intense; the place being filled more and more with the Spirit's presence."

The crowded Monday evening meeting went until 3 a.m. and the meetings continued every night. The Cardiff newspaper and the Western Mail, published this report on Thursday 10th November, the first of many daily reports on the progress of the revival:

GREAT CROWDS OF PEOPLE DRAWN TO LOUGHOR

Congregation Stays till 2.30am in the Morning

A remarkable religious revival is now taking place in Loughor. For some days a young man named Evan Roberts, a native of Loughor, has been causing great surprise at Moriah Chapel. The place has been besieged by dense crowds of people unable to obtain admission. Such excitement has prevailed that the road on which the chapel is situated has been lined with people from end to end. Roberts, who speaks in Welsh, opens his discourse by saying that he does not know what he is going to say but that when he is in communion with the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit will speak, and he will simply be the medium of His wisdom. The preacher soon after launches into a fervent and at times impassioned oration. His statements have had the most stirring effects upon his listeners.

Many who have disbelieved Christianity for years are returning to the fold of their younger days. One night, so great was the enthusiasm invoked by the young revivalist that, after his sermon which lasted two hours, the vast congregation remained praying and singing until two-thirty in the morning. Shopkeepers are closing early in order to get a place in the chapel, and tin and steel workers throng the place in working clothes.

Revival meetings began to multiply rapidly, the early ones in South Wales being led by Evan Roberts, Sydney Evans, Seth Joshua and Joseph Jenkins with teams of young people. Rev. R. B. Jones began a ten-day mission on Tuesday, 8th November in Rhos in North Wales during which revival broke out and rapidly spread through the north as well as the south. Many of the 800 attending the Moriah meeting on Friday, 11th November were on their knees repenting for a long time. This Western Mail report of that meeting circulated widely in Wales and throughout the rest of Britain:

Instead of the set order of proceedings ... everything was left to the spontaneous impulse of the moment. At 4.25 am, the gathering dispersed. But even at that hour, the people did not make their way home. When I left to walk back to Llanelly, I left dozens of them about the road discussing what was happening in their communities. I felt that this was no ordinary gathering.

Newspaper reports generated intense interest in the meetings. Crowds arrived in Loughor on Saturday 12th November filling the streets with wagons and carts. Shops emptied of food supplies. Roberts' college roommate preached at one chapel and Roberts at the other on Saturday, both meetings lasting till after dawn Sunday. Hundreds of coalminers and tin plate workers were converted, filled with the Spirit, and radically transformed. Swearing, drunkenness, immorality and crime began to diminish.

From Sunday 13th November Evan Roberts and his teams conducted meetings by invitation, first at Aberdare and then throughout the towns and hamlets of Wales. He usually took a small team with him to pray, witness and sing. November 1904 saw revival spread throughout Wales. Newspapers described the crowded meetings. Churches and chapels sent statistics of conversions to the papers. By the end of January 1905 the papers had reported 70,000 people converted in three months.

As with other evangelists and ministers, Evan Roberts travelled the Welsh valleys, often never preaching but earnestly praying. In Neath he spent a week in prayer without leaving his rooms while the revival continued to pack the churches.

Characteristics of the meetings were singing Welsh hymns in harmony for over an hour, the decline of the sermon, emphasis on submitting to the guidance of the Holy Spirit, public repentance and the *hywl* (pronounced 'hoo-ill') which was a half-sung, half spoken harmony ending in a hymn, or a cry of thanksgiving or repentance.

Church buildings filled. The revival spread. Meetings continued all day as well as each night, often late into the night or through to morning. Crowds were getting right with God and with one another in confession, repentance and restitution of wrongs done. People prayed fervently and worshipped God with great joy. Crime disappeared and the police had so little to do they joined the crowds in the Churches, sometimes forming singing groups. The impact of the Spirit across the Churches produced new levels of unity, joy, boldness, power to witness, changed lives, and enthusiasm explained as being "fervent in spirit" (Romans 12:11).

Roberts, prophetically gifted, was unusually sensitive to the responses in the congregation. Public criticism of Evan Roberts and some revival phenomena included the usual objections to all the enthusiasm, emotionalism and even confusion. At age 27 he lacked maturity and theological balance and fell too easily into nervous exhaustion, as did other young leaders in the revival. More experienced ministers avoided these errors and contributed significantly to revival leadership. Defenders of revival phenomena pointed to thousands of changed lives and the spiritual zeal generated.

Roberts believed his unusual prophetic and intuitive abilities all came from the empowerment of the Holy Spirit and encouraged everyone to seek the Spirit. Revival historians trace a direct link from the Welsh revival to increased worldwide fervent prayer, increased expectation of revival, increased evangelism and the emergence of Pentecostalism, even though many evangelicals back then regarded Pentecostalism as an aberration of revival.

On Sunday, 20th November 1904, the brothers Stephen and George Jeffreys were converted in Siloh Chapel in Maesteg, their home church in the Welsh Independent (Congregational) Church. Both became powerful evangelists in Great Britain and abroad, preaching to huge crowds and seeing hundreds healed and thousands converted. They often travelled and ministered together and established many Churches. George Jeffreys' campaigns included a crusade in Birmingham with 10,000 converted and powerful ministry in Europe such as 14,000 converted in Switzerland in 1934-1936, and he became the founder and leader of the Elim Foursquare Alliance. Stephen Jeffreys also pioneered many Churches and worked actively with the newly formed Assemblies of God of Britain and Ireland as an independent evangelist.

The Welsh Revival emphasized the importance of being filled with and led by the Holy Spirit. Reports of the 'influx' of the Spirit and the testimony of thousands involved, generated new interest in revival. The impact of the Welsh Revival on the whole world is beyond measure. In fact, every major movement of the Holy Spirit across the world over the following 30 years can be traced back to what happened in Wales in 1904-1905. Individuals who had been converted or revived in that revival responded to the call of God to places across the world and a local revival became a world-wide revival.

But let's not forget, all of that began after the Holy Spirit moved powerfully in Australia in 1902-1903. Most people know about the Welsh Revival which followed, but very few know where it began. So our great nation has seen mighty moves of the Holy Spirit in the past. But do we have the faith to believe God can do it again here in our homeland? Are we prepared to pray for and expect revival again in our great nation? I hope the answer is yes!