Welsh revival – that shook the world

The early twentieth century Evangelical Awakening was a worldwide movement. It started with the springs of little prayer meetings which seemed to arise spontaneously all over the world, combining into streams of expectation which became a river of blessing in which the Welsh Revival became the greatest cataract.

This Welsh revival brought in an extra 100,000 new converts according to the estimates of the time, and a movement that quickly spread to the 4 corners of the World. It affected the whole of the Evangelical cause in India, Korea and China, renewed revival in Japan and South Africa, and sent a wave of awakening over Africa, Latin America, and the South Seas.

The story of the Welsh Revival is astounding. Begun with prayer meetings of less than a score of intercessors, when it burst its bounds the churches of Wales were crowded for more than two years.

Yet that great move of the Spirit had very small beginnings. Beginnings that didn’t always involve the great educated preachers of the day, but instead included ordinary people. A young teenager Florrie Evans in February 1904 declared publicly in a youth meeting that she loved the Lord Jesus with all her heart. With these words the Spirit seemed to fall on the meeting and the fire quickly spread to other young people in the Cardiganshire area.

In September of the same year, an Evangelist Seth Joshua was addressing a Convention which included these young people at Cardigan. Seth himself had been praying for years that God would raise up a young man from the pits to revive the churches—little did he know that on Thursday September 29th 1904 his prayer was to be answered in a life changing experience for one 26 year old student, Evan Roberts.

Touches of revival had stirred New Quay, Cardiganshire, where Joseph Jenkins was minister of a church in which he led teams of revived young people in conducting testimony meetings throughout the area. The Presbyterian evangelist, Seth Joshua, arrived there 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.

19th. 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.

20th .. I cannot leave the building until 12 and even 1 o'clock in the morning. I closed the service several times and yet it would break out again quite beyond control of human power.

21st. Yes, several souls .. they are not drunkards or open sinners, but are members of the visible church not grafted into the true Vine .. the joy is intense.

22nd. We held another remarkable meeting tonight. Group after group came out to the front, seeking the 'full assurance of faith.'

23rd. 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 then held meetings at Newcastle Emlyn at which students from the Methodist Academy attended, including Evan Roberts. There Seth Joshua closed his ministry on the Thursday morning crying out in Welsh, 'Lord .. bend us' Evan Roberts went to the front, kneeling and fervently praying 'Lord, bend me.'

For years Evan had been a faithful member of Methodist church, he was a Sunday School Superintendent, a conscientious reader of the main theological works of his day. This young miner who then became a blacksmith had attended church as a teenager every day. More than that he had been praying for revival for over 11 years. Having been converted as a young teenager, he continued to pray regularly that God would visit again the nation in Revival Power. 'For ten or eleven years I have prayed for revival,' he wrote to a friend. 'I could sit up all night to read or talk about revivals. It was the Spirit that moved me to think about a revival'.

Determined to do his part, he felt compelled to go into the Methodist Ministry. He offered for the ministry in 1903. Before entering the Academy he had a deep encounter with God and had a vision of all Wales being lifted up to heaven. After this he regularly slept lightly till 1 am, woke for hours of communion with God, and then returned to sleep. He was convinced revival would touch all Wales and eventually led a small band all over the country praying and preaching. On September13, 1904 he became a student to prepare for a Theological College. Just 2½ weeks after arriving that he found himself at this meeting at Cardigan and at a crossroads in his spiritual experience.
A spiritual experience which would lead him back to the young people of his own church where he shared his experience and encouraged them to be open to God’s Spirit. Within two weeks the Welsh Revival was national news and before long, Evan Roberts and his brother Dan and his best friend Sidney were travelling the country conducting Revival Meetings and they were meetings with a difference. Meetings which broke the conventional and b-passt the traditional – often the ministers just sat down unable to preach or even to understand what storm had arrived in their usually sedate temples.

In October 1904 in his first year at the Academy, after the impact of the Spirit on him at Seth Joshua’s meetings, he took leave to return home to challenge his friends, especially the young people.

The Spirit of God convicted people as Evan Roberts insisted:

- You must put away any unconfessed sin.
- You must put away any doubtful habit.
- You must obey the Spirit promptly.
- You must confess Christ publicly.

He believed that a baptism in the Spirit was the essence of revival and that the primary condition of revival is that individuals should experience such a baptism in the Spirit.

Evan Roberts travelled the Welsh valleys, often never preaching but sitting head-in-hands earnestly praying. In Neath he spent a week in prayer without leaving his rooms. The revival packed the churches out, but no one saw him all that week. He paid a price in prayer and tears.

This was a Revival with youth on fire – young men and women. After the first stirrings amongst the young women of New Quay, young women continued to play a part in the Revival work – young Florrie went on a team to North Wales with her friend Maud – others used their voices as instruments of God’s message and amongst the most well-known was Annie Davies Maesteg who accompanied Evan Roberts on his missions.

Yes a storm had hit the churches yet for so many it was a storm of love and power which completely transformed their lives.

Churches 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. Police had so little to do they joined the crowds in the churches, sometimes forming singing groups. Cursing and profanity diminished so much it caused slowdowns in the mines because the pit ponies could no longer understand their instructions and stood still, confused.

A hundred thousand outsiders were converted and added to the churches, the vast majority remaining true to the end. Drunkenness was immediately cut in half, and many bars went bankrupt.

Crime was so diminished that judges were presented with white gloves signifying that there were no cases of murder, assault, rape or robbery or the like to consider. The police became ‘unemployed’ in many districts.

News of that revival, and many people who had been involved, soon spread around the world. ‘The Welsh Revival was the farthest-reaching of the movements of the general Awakening, for it affected the whole of the Evangelical cause in India, Korea and China, renewed revival in Japan and South Africa, and sent a wave of awakening over Africa, Latin America, and the South Seas’.