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Evan Roberts and the Welsh Revival



Evan Roberts was born June 8, 1878 in Loughor, Wales. He was the ninth child of Henry and Hannah Roberts who had 14 children (7 boys and 7 girls). He lived in the same town for the first 27 years of his life, influenced by the Anglican parish church and its three chapels, one of which was the Calvinistic Methodist church that would prepare him for the revival that lay ahead.

When the topic of revival is studied in the Bible as well as the patterns it takes in history, it becomes clear that the theology and practice of the church often steer the expression (worldview) of the river of God's Spirit. It is the same God that brings revival in any age, but the condition of the church and its worldview will determine its effect upon the culture as well as the legacy to future generations.

Wales had a long history of revival that prepared it for the one to come. Galatian believers probably took the book of Galatians to the British Isles by 100 AD. Then, when St. Patrick came to Ireland, it was obvious that Christianity had already taken root with wooden churches and schools with crosses dotting the landscape. Patrick's *Liber Ex Lege Moisi* which made the Ten Commandments the basis of the "common law" was re-published by King Alfred around 900 A.D. for the British Isles. At the time of the Spanish Armada (1588) the Bible was first translated into the Welsh tongue. Then, in 1735, the Great Awakening in America influenced Wales through the ministry of Howell Harris, Daniel Rowland and William Williams (the hymnwriter). By the end of the 19th century, revivals had once again quickened the churches so that Wales was called a "Christian nation".

We in America can understand clearly what it is like to have such a Christian history, yet have our churches and believers fall into form without power. Wales had experienced a revival in 1859 and Christianity had erected a godly form in the nation. The preaching of the churches was good, but lacked an anointing to convict people of sin – the Bible was preached, but with little result. The hymns and songs were good and the people had fond memories of their heritage, but the slide continued. This was their hope, however for *the believers in Wales knew their condition and hungered for revival, and began prayer meetings crying out to God for help*. Simply put, they knew that without God's personal work in the heart of the individual even sound Biblical doctrine would be ineffective.

J. Edwin Orr, the famous researcher on awakenings, comments that the amazing part of the 1904 revivals was that they occurred almost simultaneously around the world with no communication between the people. South Africa, Japan, Australia, New Zealand, India, Burma, Korea, China, Indonesia, Brazil, Chile and the United States all experienced major revival "like tidal waves" bringing in thousands of converts. How did it begin? Small prayer meetings sprung up and people were moved to pray all around the world "at the same time"!





So what about Evan Roberts and Wales? What can this teach us about our need here in America? Could it be that God is stirring prayer meetings all over the world “at the same time” again? Evan was converted at 12 in the Moriah Calvinist Methodist Chapel. By age 16 he was seen praying on his knees in the dust of the mine where he worked seeking God for the souls of his fellow workers. Once he missed service because he went playing with his friends, but a fellow deacon reminded him, “*Should the Spirit descend while you are absent, think what you would lose?*” He was faithful in attendance after that! As a teen he prayed out loud, read the Bible and digested books on the theology of Calvinism. His mind was being prepared for the river of God’s Spirit that would flow through him in the days ahead. Are there such teens right now in our churches that are being prepared to lead a revival in a few years?

At a youth meeting on Valentine’s Day, February 14, 1904 in New Quay, 20 year old Florrie Evans cried out, “*I love your Lord with all my heart!*” It was like a match was lit in the midst of dry wood! God arrived. This is what Evan had prayed for months! He wrote, “*For a long time I was much troubled in my soul and my heart by thinking over the failure of Christianity – oh! It seemed such a failure – such a failure and I prayed and prayed, but nothing seemed to give me any relief. But one Friday night (March-April of 1904), I found myself with unspeakable joy and awe in the very presence of the Almighty God.... After that experience I was awakened every night a little after one o’clock. This was stranger, for through the years I slept like a rock... from that hour I was taken up into divine fellowship for about four hours.*” It was a service in New Quay where Evan prayed out, “*bend me! Bend me! Bend us!*” It was the love of God that bent him, and soon it bent Wales and the world.

Evan Roberts message was simple – *confess your sin*. Then, *remove anything doubtful* that should not be a part of your life. *Totally surrender to the Spirit of God* and obey Him. Finally, *publicly confess Christ*. The combination of reformed theology and the spiritual power of the gifts was the merging of two streams that would mark the next century and continues to impact us today. In any revival, there are extremes to avoid. Evan wanted to be led by the Spirit in daily habits that were already clearly given in God’s Word. This caused inconsistency and by the fall of 1906 he went into a retreat for counseling. However, the river continued to flow. Here were some of the results in Wales alone:

Personally: 70,000 converts in 1904 and by 1906 it was 100,000 (youth and adults together)

- Sports teams would rather pray than play, theaters were closed – rather pray than act.
- Drunkenness was cut in half in the nation; and pledges to abstain completely were common.
- Restitution for crimes, relationships restored, prayer everywhere, doctors had few patients!

In the Church: (spontaneous worship, intense fellowship, all night prayer, new members added)

- Underground churches sprang up in the mines – with testimonies and worship.
- Pit ponies could not understand the redeemed language of these “parishioners”!
- 92 converts were baptized in freezing water on January 5, 1905 and the village was changed.

In Society – (pages and pages of converts listed in the newspaper)

- Policemen went unemployed, for there were no crimes.
- Magistrates and judges wore white gloves, no issues to judge in court.
- Political meetings were postponed – no laws were needed.

Oh that God would rend the heavens in America and bring spiritual rain! Let us prepare now with the right kind of theology so that the greatest legacy and impact would come from such a revival!