

The Welsh Revival, Evan Roberts, & the Pentecostal Movement

by Candace Malcomson

This sermon delves into the profound impact of the Welsh Revival, highlighting the rich history of revivals in Wales and the pivotal role it played in shaping the Pentecostal movement. It focuses on the life of Evan Roberts, a key figure in the Welsh Revival, and his journey from a coal miner to a powerful preacher who led thousands to God through prayer and spiritual awakening. The sermon explores the intense prayer, fervent expectation, and divine encounters that preceded the outbreak of the Welsh Revival in 1904, detailing the transformative effects it had on individuals, communities, and even nations worldwide.

Scripture: Psalm 85:6, Acts 2:17, Joel 2:28, 2 Chronicles 7:14, Matthew 9:37, Isaiah 57:15, Habakkuk 3:2, Zechariah 4:6, Ephesians 5:14

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Description

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Transcript

Chapter 8 The Welsh Revival Before we look at the Welsh Revival, we should note that the Pentecostal pioneers had a heritage of many revivals. The denominations from which the pioneers came, whether Methodist, Brethren, Presbyterian, Baptist or Anglican, were deeply affected and impacted by revivals in previous centuries. There were those alive in the early 1900s who remember the great revival of 1859 that swept Wales and Northern Ireland, as well as Scotland and England.

All these pioneers were well acquainted with the history of the Methodist Revival, which swept England in the 18th century. The Methodist Revival saved the nation from experiencing a bloody revolution like the one in France. God's way of deliverance was to raise up chosen vessels like George Whitefield, John Wesley and his brother Charles out at the despised Holy Club at Cambridge.

Both Scotland and Wales experienced numbers of small awakenings, as well as large and national revivals over the centuries when the spirit was outpoured. In fact, Scotland and Wales have had more outpourings than any other nation in the world. Far too many to summarise here, but the reason we now single out the Welsh Revival, which broke out in November 1904, is that it preceded the Pentecostal movement by less than two years and was probably one of the greatest moulding influences upon the Pentecostal movement.

In the years preceding the Welsh Revival, there were very definite signs of coming glory, especially in the ten months leading into that November. There were many who were soaked in prayer and who had a living expectation that they were on the verge of a great revival. Many hungry saints had read books, like Andrew Murray's *With Christ in the School of Prayer*, that prepared them for the place of prayer.

God had prepared a people and carefully moulded many vessels to lead vast multitudes of souls back to God. Many were prepared, many were used, but one person, Evan Roberts, was certainly to become the most prominent and the one we shall look at here. Evan Roberts was born into a very godly, devout and hard-working family in 1878.

He was one of 14 children and one of seven sons. Their home, called Island House, was situated on the banks of the River Lochr in Lochor, a small village in Glamorgan in South Wales. Near Lochor was a coal mine where Evan went to work with his father at the young age of 11, which brought an end to his school education.

He was a door boy, which entailed opening and closing the door for the drams, carriages, carrying coal up and down the shafts. The old Welsh preachers often referred to those dark and dangerous mines as a picture of hell or the darkness of men's depraved hearts. Those like Evan who worked underground could very well relate to this picture language.

From his earliest years, Evan was a very serious and solemn boy. He was a constant student of the Bible and was never found without it, either in his hand or in his pocket. Once, in an explosion in the mine, his Bible was scorched but Evan was unharmed.

When manning the mine doors, he would often give the passing miners a written text of Scripture to meditate on and would later ask them what they had learned from it. This boy intended to be a preacher. His separation from all the boyish fun of his friends around him was a true mark of just how serious he was about us.

He had no outstanding gift to speak or expound the Scriptures that anyone could see, but the blamelessness of his life was apparent to all. Evan faithfully attended every meeting at Moriah Chapel, the large Calvinistic Methodist church which his family attended. Moriah was one of several non-conformist chapels in Lough Corr.

One day, an elder challenged young Evan concerning faithfulness in attending God's house. The elder had asked him how he would feel if he were absent when the Spirit of God fell. After that, Evan made it his habit to attend every meeting without fail.

There was not a night of the week when he was not at some meeting. In 1902, he left his work in the mine and began an apprenticeship with his uncle as a blacksmith. He went about his business faithfully and almost unnoticed, but his desire to pursue the call of God became increasingly evident.

For years, he held back from applying for ministerial training because he knew very well how such theological schools had killed the spirit of many. Prior to the revival, academic qualifications and learning had become the most emphasised thing in preparing for ministry. Spiritual life and fervency were secondary qualifications and almost ignored.

Eventually, he was recommended for the ministry by Moriah Chapel in 1903, which meant that he had to pass the trial of preaching his first sermon before the presbytery in Moriah to prove his skills and then to preach in other associated chapels to further prove his call. It also meant that his personal experience of Christ and his call to the ministry would be scrutinised by mature, godly men in this church and area. It is of interest to note that George Muller's writings on faith and prayer left a quiet mark upon him in his walk with God.

As he prepared for ministry, he prayed much that God would baptise him with the Holy Spirit and power. Evan was no victim of higher criticism or modernism. He believed in the total depravity of man's heart, the eternal punishment of Christ-rejectors and of the miracle-working power of God to save sinners, to wash them clean in his precious blood.

He preached obedience, holiness and subjection to Christ in all things. But he was deeply depressed over the state of church generally across the nation. It was a sad failure in comparison to what he read in the scriptures.

One night, while trying to prevail with God and prayer, he fell asleep. In the middle of the night, he awoke suddenly with unspeakable joy in the very presence of Almighty God. For four hours, he spoke to the Lord face to face as a friend would speak to a friend.

From that moment, he knew that God was going to work in the land. A similar burden of prayer came to him every night for the next four months. It would be wrong to say that this was the beginning of his prayer for revival, for he had been praying for it throughout the previous 11 years that God would send revival to Wales, and for 13 years he had prayed for a personal filling of the Holy Spirit.

In September 1904, at the age of 26, he moved to Newcastle Grammar School for preliminary studies for the ministry. It was here that he would have a meeting with God that would be as significant as Moses meeting God at the burning bush. Seth Joshua, pioneer evangelist for the Calvinistic Methodist forward movement, had been mightily converted back in 1882 at a Salvation Army meeting when he knelt at an old mourner's bench and cried unto God for forgiveness and salvation.

Those were days when Salvationists had invaded the Welsh Valleys with a spirit of revival. They held open-air meetings and the Salvation Lassies played the tambourines amidst testimonies and shouts of Hallelujah! The CM forward movement, Calvinistic Methodist forward movement, was founded by denominational leaders as an earnest attempt to reach the Welsh communities previously untouched and unmoved by the power of the Gospel. The forward movement certainly carried something of the spirit of those old-fashioned Salvationists and so did Seth Joshua.

Those who knew Joshua called him a man of God, for he was wholly dedicated and consecrated unto God. He was a man that God could use. He was not bound by typical trends of religion or tradition, for some time he'd been greatly concerned about the emphasis on education rather than emphasis on a real spiritual experience and walk with God as the main qualifications for ministry.

He continued with a deep burden and prayer that the Lord would, open quote, take a lad from the coal mine or from the field even as he took Elisha from the plough to revive his work, close quote. When old Joshua came to Newcastle, Emlyn, to hold a campaign, the principal of Evan Roberts' school encouraged all the young men to attend the meetings. At these meetings Evan was much impressed with the fervour and the message of the preacher as he sat night after night intently listening to this messenger from heaven.

The campaign ended without any unusual manifestational sign that God was about to do a great work and Joshua thought that the ground was hard and the people unresponsive. Even Evan found his own heart to be somewhat hard and cold. The evangelist moved on to his next preaching appointment, a small neighbourhood on the coast of the cardigan bay, but there were some very definite workings of God in the hearts of the people of this place.

A group of the students from the grammar school made plans to travel to those meetings and Evan was among them. As they travelled they sang, It is coming, it is coming, the power of the Holy Ghost, I receive it, I receive it, the power of the Holy Ghost. After the first early morning meeting Seth Joshua prayed asking God to bend them.

This prayer became Evan's prayer in a powerful way. Now he prayed, bend me Lord, with all his heart. Soon this would become the prayer of a nation.

In the meeting the next morning young Evan fell upon his knees and then lay prostrate asking God this one thing, bend me, bend me. He was sweating profusely as he travailed in prayer and groaned in spirit. That day he died, he became a new man, another man.

It was a virtual baptism of fire in which God did bend him. These meetings continued for several days with other young friends having similar experiences. Evan was now given over to prayer for a great spiritual awakening in Wales.

It became impossible for him to carry on his studies at the college. He asked God for others who were filled with fire who would stand by him for the task and they were soon given to him. He made initial plans to step out in faith with this little band in evangelistic labors from county to county but it seems the Lord restrained him from this.

One day with great excitement Evan went to see his good friend Sidney Evans to tell Sidney that the Lord had given him a vision of all of Wales being lifted up to heaven and that he'd received the assurance that 100 souls would be saved. Another night while standing in a garden with Sidney looking up at the beautiful full moon they experienced the same vision at the same time. It was a hand reaching down from the moon to the earth to take something unto itself.

They were both convinced that this was a token of the confirmation that the hand of God would be outstretched to work in the nation to bring in a great harvest of souls. Another time he had a vision of hell and the terrible suffering of lost sinners. As he saw this he pleaded with God to close hell's door for one year and give the people an opportunity to repent.

During those weeks of intensity there were those who felt Evan was losing touch with reality and that he was becoming fanatical and extreme. They were very concerned about him. Evan and Sidney would be up frequently in the middle of the night travailing in prayer and one night their hostess came and rebuked

them for the noise at such an unearthly hour.

It was in the Sunday morning meeting as the minister Evan Phillips preached on the subject Father the hour is come that Evan had a vision of the church in Locore with young men sitting in rows and he was preaching to them. The Spirit of God was commissioning him to go and to speak to them and he yielded to God's will. After speaking with the principal of the school he left Newcastle on the 31st of October to return to Locore by train.

All he had was the Holy Spirit and a vision from God. No one was expecting him in Locore and no meetings were arranged. His family were skeptical of his enthusiasm and his minister was slow to arrange a meeting.

Finally he persuaded the various older ministers in the area to allow him to speak at some of the smaller less important meetings that week. The first meeting was a youth meeting held on a Monday night. There were just 17 young people present.

As he testified of what God had been doing in his life and was about to do in the nation he exhorted them to prepare themselves for a baptism of the Holy Ghost. At first the meeting was hard going but suddenly the power of God came down and all who were not saved were converted and others yielded themselves unreservedly to God. The next days news of the deep impact and change in the lives of these young people spread in the community.

Night after night meetings were held with more gatherings as Evan went from church to church. The people prayed, listened, repented and rejoiced. His message to sinners was repent.

His message to the saints was be filled with the Spirit. By the end of the week the community was astir. Meetings went on for five hours with many laying prostrate on the ground under deep conviction of sin and agony of soul until they received salvation.

The following week meetings continued to five in the morning with sleep, food and normal activities forgotten. Then an invitation came from a church in Aberdare 30 miles to the east where the proposed speaker had cancelled his morning engagement. Evan arrived there with three young ladies accompanying him.

The congregation had been trundling along in normalcy but not for much longer. The church elders expected a good service but nothing unusual. The service began with one of the young ladies bursting into song as tears rolled down her cheeks.

The young preacher was bent over in his seat shaking as he wept. Suddenly one of the church's proudest members fell on her knees and confessed her sins publicly in agonizing prayer. People knelt everywhere.

The organ remained silent with the organist on her seat as the service continued all day. By nightfall the community was astir and a great host gathered at the chapel that evening. Some were singing, O the lamb, the bleeding lamb or throw out the lifeline.

Others were praying and travailing. Some were sitting, many were kneeling and others were prostrate. Words of knowledge flowed from the young revivalist.

Meetings continued, the fire spread and homes were changed. The exact same thing happened in every chapel in Aberdare where the people sought God. The services were spontaneous and unorganized.

People prayed, testified and sang as prompted by the spirit of God. Reports began to appear in newspapers which at first were very disparaging but when reporters also began to get converted the papers carried very positive supportive reports. News of this Welsh revival now spread abroad to many nations.

At times Evan could preach for hours, other times he gave short direct words but always in the Welsh language. Sometimes he cried, sometimes he laughed and other times he rejoiced. He was of course the most prominent in this new revival, a vessel raised up by God to lead but the revival was everywhere.

Many ministers arose to preach and lead their people back to God and into personal revival. National sports events were deserted of their normal large crowds, theatres were empty, pubs were closed and crime dropped immediately. In Cardiff police reported that drunkenness dropped by 60 percent within one month of the revival beginning.

This revival even invaded brothels and gambling dens in the city. Hardened cursing minors were suddenly transformed and these were regarded as the hardest people to reach in the entire land. Agnostics repented and put faith in the blood of the Lamb for forgiveness of their sins.

Children prayed down the power of God. At the centre of every prayer, every song and every message was the finished work of Calvary and the bleeding Lamb. Preachers came from across Britain and the world to see the glory of the Lord fill his temple.

When F.B. Meyer, the famous London preacher and teacher, came to investigate he was urged to preach but he refused and sat silent in the school of the Holy Ghost as he listened to inexperienced untrained minors preach eloquently. The great Bible expositor G. Campbell Morgan, scared of being a hindrance, finished his preaching engagements in Wales as quickly as he could and told Evan he was leaving to return home. When asked his opinion about the revival he said it is Pentecost continued.

William Booth packed his bag and left the revival as quickly as possible. These great preachers and leaders were scared to touch this work of God. They sat idly by while children and old coal miners prayed and testified.

True revival is never organised by man, committees or denominations. The fear of God was dominant amidst manifestations of power and it protected the work. Evan himself strove to keep out of sight so as not to hinder the work of God.

He refused many international invitations to minister. Even politicians had to take note. Mr Lloyd George, a member of Parliament and later Prime Minister of Great Britain said, quote, it is certainly the most remarkable spiritual movement this generation has witnessed.

It seems to be rocking Welsh life like a great earthquake, close quote. This revival especially captured the youth but it never missed or neglected the old. It was a singing revival but the songs were crammed with sound doctrine.

It was a time of blessing for the church. The emphasis was on seeing sinners saved. It was indeed a Welsh revival not a British revival but the fire did spread to Britain, Europe and the world through those

whose tongue was touched by a call from off thy altar.

A desire and love for reading the written scriptures was restored to the church during this revival. Holiness of heart and conduct was wrought mightily deep within lives. Worldly methods of drawing and keeping people in the church were nullified.

This was a heaven-sent revival. One eyewitness said divine movements have their birthplace in the heart of deity, close quote. Evan Roberts had maintained an unparalleled and active schedule without proper break or rest.

It was inevitable that this would take its toll. By January 1906 he had finished a phase of his life. He had ministered in South Wales continually as well as in the North and in Liverpool in England.

A great many praised him as an anointed man of God while others considered him a deceiver and his revival false and erroneous. He passed into a time of terrible mental strain and fatigue and his body was tired. To the surprise of all he seemed to suddenly disappear from the work and disappear from sight.

Then in January 1951 Roberts went to be with the Lord. We do not have the space to continue the story here but there are many great biographies on Evan Roberts and the Welsh revival available to read. At a glance what were the final results of this revival? Within two months of its beginning there had been over 30,000 converts.

Within six months 100,000 converts. By the beginning of 1906 who could know? By 1910 its influence was felt in every corner of the globe. Religious systems in Britain tried to explain it away by claiming it was the product of Welsh emotion but for well over 100 years it has now been regarded as a major part of Christian heritage of genuine revivals and Christians continue to be encouraged and challenged by it.

It has been much speculated and stated that within two years much of the harvest was lost but the evidence in fact shows that the vast majority remained as members of established churches. The proof of this is that all the local churches were full and later membership suffered little. Now what was the influence upon the Pentecostal movement? Without doubt the primary mark and greatest effect of the Welsh revival upon the Pentecostal movement was the converts it produced.

Welshmen like Stephen and George Jeffreys, Dan and Joan Williams and Tom Mercy were converted and deeply impacted at this time. These men all played significant roles in the three Pentecostal denominations that later arose in Britain and Ireland. An indelible mark was left upon these men of the reality, power and purpose of God in bringing a nation to its knees.

There can be no doubt that these men were the main pioneers of Elam, the assemblies of God and the apostolic churches across the land. Later their ministries were to have a profound effect in many other nations of the world. After the Welsh revival began to wane there were those across the land who were not willing to return to dead denominationalism or the formalism of former years.

Very often these children of the revival were pushed out of their old churches and left with no option but to start their own mission halls and assemblies. Many of these new assemblies later received the message of the Pentecostal baptism. Donald G was converted in London through preaching of Seth Joshua in October 1905 who came red-hot from the revival.

Others who were already mature in ministry were profoundly stirred. For example, Alexander Boddy came to see the revival personally and talked with Evan Roberts asking him to come to Sunderland. Boddy's church hall was that one used in the first Sunderland Wits and Tithe convention in 1905 for Welsh revival meetings.

In Boddy's mind these two revivals were inseparably linked. Smith Wigglesworth visited the revival in 1905. Cecil Paulhill visited in 1906.

T.B. Barrett of Norway published reports of the Welsh revival in his paper called By Poshton and also carried the story of Evan Roberts's baptism in the Holy Ghost. This had a wide readership in Norway. In January 1905 Barrett wrote to Evan Roberts in Wales asking for earnest prayer that Norway might have a similar revival and that he, Barrett, might experience a baptism of fire.

When Barrett later received his baptism in the Holy Spirit followed by the revival in Oslo in December 1906, he believed that this was the answer to prayer by the Welsh saints. Pandita Ramabai, who was the daughter of a Brahmin in the west of India, was highly educated and very active in social reform in the nation. While staying in England in the 1880s she was converted and baptized in water.

In 1895 she opened a home in India called Mukti, meaning salvation, which gave refuge to young women. By 1905 Pandita Ramabai had two thousand girls who'd taken refuge with her. Her work was very well known and respected in many nations.

After hearing of the Welsh revival in 1904 she started special early morning prayer meetings in January 1905 during which they sought God for a genuine revival for themselves and the world. In July that year revival came and when it did it carried all the marks of a Pentecostal revival. These ladies were filled with the Holy Ghost, spoke in tongues, prophesied and went forth by hundreds to witness and preach the gospel in their region.

As they did many turned to the Lord and sick bodies were healed. Whilst this predated the Pentecostal revival which later came to America and Britain, Pandita Ramabai later had close ties with the Pentecostal pioneers. Joseph Smale, an Englishman trained at CH Spurgeon's College, was a pastor in Los Angeles.

At a time when he needed a vacation he returned to England and took a tour of the Middle East. Before returning to LA he heard of and then encountered the Welsh revival. When he returned to LA in June 1905 he entered his pulpit on fire.

His first message was the great Welsh revival. He wholeheartedly believed that a similar revival would come to LA and just before his return in 1905 F.B. Meyer had spoken in LA about the Welsh revival which many of Smale's congregation had attended. Frank Barthelmen corresponded with Evan Roberts informing him about the work in LA and asking for prayer.

He received three responses from him between June and November 1905 assuring him of prayer. Barthelmen also distributed accounts of the revival right across the city's churches and leaders. These men were later central in Los Angeles outpouring or as it became known the Azusa Street revival.

In 1910 Barthelmen visited Britain for the first time to minister at a Pentecostal assembly. In between visiting and ministering with Smith Wigglesworth in Bradford in the north of England and for Cecil Paulhill in London he stopped with Evan Roberts in Leicester for an afternoon. The evidence is in the fruit.

We can see that the Welsh revival was a significant if not major influence in the bringing forth of a Pentecostal revival in India, America, Britain, Norway, Europe and in Britain it is utterly impossible to separate the two. Interestingly in later years when someone asked Evan Roberts where the fruit of the Welsh revival was he pointed to the Pentecostal evangelist Stephen Jeffreys.

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