

Church Members Denounced. -- Missioner Prohibits a Test. -- Congregation Abruptly Dismissed.

by Gwilym Hughes

The sermon highlighted the urgent need for church members to reconcile and actively participate in spiritual work for Jesus Christ, culminating in an abrupt dismissal of the congregation due to perceived hindrances to the Spirit's movement.

Scripture: Matthew 5:23, Hebrews 12:14, James 4:8, 1 Peter 4:17, 1 John 1:9

Topics: "Revival Movement", "Spiritual Transformation"

Description

Gwilym Hughes preaches about a remarkable religious event in Liverpool involving the young Welsh missioner, Evan Roberts, and the intense reactions and responses from the congregation. The congregation experiences fervent prayers, emotional outbursts, and a call for repentance and forgiveness, highlighting the need for genuine spiritual transformation and obedience to God's commands. Despite initial excitement and anticipation, the service takes a serious turn as hindrances within the congregation are addressed, leading to a challenging and abrupt end to the meeting, leaving many bewildered and questioning the significance of the events.

Transcript

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LIVERPOOL, Monday, April 3, 1905.

Liverpool is stirred to its very depth. The scenes witnessed at Shaw-street Chapel on Saturday night are described as unprecedented in the religious history of the city, and since then citizens have been, and still are, discussing the young Welsh missioner, his attractive and magnetic personality, the novelty of his methods, the astounding results of his efforts, and all that pertains to him, with eagerness. Nor is the interest confined to Liverpool. North Wales is said to be seething with excitement, and to-day several "specials" poured hundreds of visitors from the northern counties into the city.

Calling this morning at the office of Councillor Henry Jones, one of the hon. secretaries of the Liverpool Committee, I was shown a pile of hundreds of letters received by that day's post from correspondents from

far and wide, pleading, yea, craving, for admission tickets, while similar requests poured incessantly into the office by telegrams and telephone. "Then," I asked, "why not solve the problem by centralising all the meetings henceforth in the Torrey-Alexander pavilion?" "The committee," replied the Councillor, "would have no objection to do so, but we cannot secure Mr. Evan Roberts's consent."

According to the original arrangements, to-night's principal meeting should have been held at the Park-road Welsh Congregational Chapel, of which the pastor is the Rev. O. R. Owen, late of Glandwr. Park-road is in the south, and within five minutes' ride of the centre of the city. Mr. Owen and his deacons realised this morning that their chapel, with 800 sittings, would prove hopelessly unequal to the occasion. In their difficulty they appealed to their neighbours, the English Baptists, and as a result we are now assembled in the Toxteth Tabernacle.

Two thousand people are inside now at six o'clock. Park Road Congregational Chapel was likewise packed when I passed it half an hour ago, and a message has just arrived stating that Mount Zion (Wesleyan), Princes Road (Calvinistic Methodist), and Chatham Street (Calvinistic Methodist), all in the south end, are already crowded out. Outside Toxteth Tabernacle at the moment of writing is a crowd of at least three or four thousand with keen disappointment depicted on every face. A posse of Welsh constables from the Liverpool police force are having a warm time of it, for there have been threats muttered of storming the railings and forcing admission.

Marshals, standing on the curb inside the railings, try to pacify the crowd, and earnestly entreat them to disperse. "No," replies one, "turn out the ministers to make room for some of us sinners." Had the speaker surveyed the crowd he would have realised that there was less sting in this remark than he doubtless thought, for among the disappointed ones were at least a dozen well-known ministers.

Subsequently inside, the Rev. O. R. Owen urged local ministers to leave the building to conduct overflow meetings outside, and dozen responded. The officials of the committee are loud in their praises of the very substantial and sympathetic help rendered them by the chief constable and his staff. It is recognised that but for their intervention a panic, with disastrous results, might have occurred on more than on occasion recently.

As I sit under the pulpit and scan this magnificent audience, I wonder how many unsaved ones are among it. If heartiness of singing and fervency of prayers count for anything, then a large proportion are church members. Of course, this is an open meeting, and admission was regulated on the principle of first come first served, and we must not overlook the fact that one of the characteristics of the present revival is the conversion of actual church members.

Young people of both sexes are here in great numbers, and scores of them take part in the prayers. Here is a supplicant for a baptism of the Spirit on the young of all lands. Over there is a young lady who mid sobs and tears entreats that she be permitted to take some of the fire from Liverpool back to her Welsh home. An old man in the balcony recites the revival miracles he has witnessed during the last few weeks. There is plenty of spontaneity, and the hwy! is in creasing momentarily.

Here come the missioner and his party. It is 10 minutes past 7. With him in the pulpit are Miss Annie Davies and Miss Mary Roberts, the Rev. John Williams, the Rev. O. R. Owen, the Rev. Dr. Phillips, Tylorstown, the Rev. William Jones (Crosshall Street), and the Rev. T. Charles Williams, Menai Bridge.

What is this extraordinary influence? Evan Roberts has scarcely arrived ere we are conscious of an appreciable increase in the fervour of the meeting. A deeper spiritual note is struck in all the prayers. A woman who is now on her feet is uttering a prayer of overwhelming intensity and eloquence, and the "Amenau" are deafening. She pleads for many blessings "for the sake of Jesus Christ."

What is the missionary's mood to-night? He sits with closed eyes in the pulpit chair. He has not been well this afternoon, so we learn. He looks sombre, and not a single smile has yet lit his face.

"Er mwyn Iesu Grist" A woman in prayer utters the words, and the missionary, facing the audience, slowly and solemnly repeats the phrase, "Er mwyn Iesu Grist" (for Jesus Christ's sake). He seizes upon this as his text, and founds upon it a short address of remarkable power. Oh that we could have seen the full depth of those four words, "for Jesus Christ's sake." Many present, he continues, had already refused to do anything for Jesus Christ's sake, and it would have been better for such had they not sung some of the hymns rendered that evening. It was very easy to cry out "Amen" and to sing. Nothing more simple, but what was needed was work, work, work -- for Jesus Christ's sake. They could enjoy seeing others having a hwyl, but they could not have the hwyl themselves because they had refused to work. Let them beware lest they crowded into the house of God merely to enjoy themselves. Some who had disobeyed the promptings of the Spirit that evening were members of Christian churches. They were not at one with the Christ Whose name they professed to bear. Many present were not at one with one another. They prayed for a downpour, but the Spirit would never come to a heart that harboured rancour and enmity. Others prayed for the fire from heaven before they had even erected an altar and prepared a sacrifice. What was this but a mocking of God? When the fire came it would come to destroy some things; it would burn and consume some things; it would purify other things. Were they ready to receive such fire?

At this moment an exciting scene was witnessed. At the far end of the gallery opposite the pulpit a middle-aged man sprang to his feet, and in a prayer pitched at the top of his voice made pointed reference to the controversy that led to the secession in Liverpool from the Calvinistic Methodists of those who now form the Free Church of the Welsh. "There is," he exclaimed, "an old quarrel in Liverpool. Ministers of the Lord Jesus have declined to forgive. O Lord, bend the Liverpool ministers and compel them to forgive."

Loud-voiced and violent as was the prayer, it was almost drowned by another man, who also in a prayer made similar references to the same feud, and added, "They have refused tickets to our young people to the Sun Hall, but, thank God, the road is free to heaven." For a minute or two the missionary cast scrutinising looks at both men, and then in a peremptory tone ordered both to sit down.

The command had several times to be repeated before it was complied with. "There is no need to name anything to Gods" was the missionary's subsequent comment. "He knows everything. The brother there thought possibly that in my remarks I was alluding to something or other. I know all about it, but I had nothing in my mind at the moment, save a knowledge of the hindrances that exist at this meeting." After a deep hush of some moments' duration Mr. Evan Roberts added in a low voice, "Don't think, friends, that the service is stopped; it is going on splendidly now. It is easy for each one of you to find out whether it is clear or not between you and God, or clear between you and a fellow-man. If everything is not clear between you and your enemy, it will never, never become clear between you and God."

For the next ten minutes we had a succession of prayers, and in every one there was an earnest plea for peace and forgiveness. "Maddeu er mwyn y Gwaed" (forgive us for the sake of the Blood) cried one, and another asked that they be taught to look above the ministers to Christ Himself. A little later the painful

incident became quite forgotten. Miss Annie Davies gave a beautiful rendering of "Nearer my God to Thee," and then the great audience abandoned itself to a veritable feast of hymn singing.

If incidents were not numerous for the next hour, the proceedings certainly did not lack in interest. The wildness, not to say the frenzy, that marked some previous gatherings was entirely absent. We enjoyed rather an atmosphere of pure devotion. Only once was a jarring note struck. That was when a man in prayer asked forgiveness for "the brother who had tried to raise a disturbance here an hour ago, and who may have been the means of hardening hundreds of hearts." The voice was promptly drowned by a hymn.

After an hour's silence Mr. Evan Roberts is again on his feet. He gently remonstrates with the congregation for its unreadiness to respond to the promptings of the Spirit. "I have been quiet; don't think I have come here to create a fire; it is God that gives the fire; listen to His promise -- "Lo, I am with you alway, even to the end of the world. Place all reliance upon that promise. God reveals Himself fullest to the congregation that yields itself absolutely to worship. What are the hindrances to-night? How many of you have prayed before coming to the service? Not one half of you. Hundreds of you are being moved by the Spirit this moment. Will you still disobey?"

Suddenly, as by magic, the whole character of the meeting changed. No sooner had the query been put than scores of voices were heard in prayer. The painful scene witnessed at Shaw-street was now repeated in all its intensity. Women screamed, cried, fainted. The Rev. Dr. Phillips, of Tylorstown, sought to end the scene by putting the meeting to the usual test, but the revivalist abruptly stopped him. An attempt to start a hymn was similarly treated, Mr. Evan Roberts remarking, "There is to be no testimony, no singing, until these hindrances are removed. Are you going to permit Jesus thus to be robbed of His glory? Pray, hundreds of you, that the hindrance be removed," and the injunction is literally obeyed.

Meanwhile, the revivalist throws 'himself into a chair as if in a paroxysm of pain. The attack is of short duration to-night, for presently he is again on his feet, exclaiming, "Praise heaven, because your prayers have been answered." The statement is received with joy, and the congregation bursts into a fervid rendering of "Marchog Iesu yn Llwyddiannus."

The Rev. O. R. Owen's attempt to test the meeting is, however, unceremoniously cut short. "No, no," cries the revivalist, who is now pale and shivering, "there is to be no testing just yet. Some of those who hindered are gone out, but some still remain. God has been very long-suffering with these hindrances, but He will soon sweep them away like chaff before the wind. He will not permit the Gospel to be thus obstructed. It has cost Him too much, it has cost Him the blood of His only begotten Son." The storm has subsided; agonising prayers give way to testimonies; and simultaneously a confusing number are on their feet reciting various portions of Scripture.

It is now 10. 15. People are getting uncomfortable and many have left the building, but their places are speedily filled by others. The revivalist, with closed eyes, is resting his head on his hand, with his elbow on the pulpit desk, facing the audience. The Rev. John Williams announces that at the Park-road meeting there have been several converts, and we receive the statement with "Diolch Iddo." So far, however, every attempt to test this congregation for converts has been stopped, and the revivalist shows no sign of relenting. Ald. Snape, one of the leading men of Liverpool, is seated in the pulpit, and apparently regards the proceedings with amazement. Prominent ministers in the pulpit whisper to the revivalist as if persuading 'him to close the meeting, but he waves them impatiently away.

Fifteen minutes more elapse, and then comes relief. "We shall now test the meeting," declares the missionary. "We were not permitted to do so before, but there are persons here who still stubbornly remain hindrances. Here is a command to them from God. 'Take care not to sing in a service any more, and take care not to take any public part.' It is not I that say this. It is God's command. These people are conscious that they are hindrances. Now do as you like with the command. But you will feel the hand of God upon you. A hand of love. Perhaps you think this service a singular one. But God is wonderful. You would have gone on singing, singing. It is not singing; it is purifying that we need. Don't be surprised if you see God showing some very great wonders in the immediate future. Now before we test the meeting let us all breathe a prayer for salvation."

There is a deep hush. Apparently all bow and pray. But the missionary is again displeased, and presently exclaims, "There is to be no testing to-night. There are church members here who have disobeyed. They refuse to pray for the salvation of souls in this meeting."

A startling statement this, and the audience appears mystified. Three times is the command given to pray, and three times the congregation is bent in an attitude of prayer. Surely all is now clear? "No," at last, exclaims the revivalist, in a tone of pity mingled with scorn. We are not going to have any testing to-night. There are church members here who still decline to pray. We shall have no testing, no singing, no praying. The service is at an end. You can now go home. This is not the first time that a service has thus ended." He closed the Bible and resumed his seat.

It is within a few minutes to 11 o'clock. Slowly the huge congregation files out of the building more mystified than ever. The question is on hundreds of lips, "What meaneth all this?"

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