

In Defense of Evan Roberts and the Welsh Revival

by J. Edwin Orr

The speaker defends the Welsh Revival and its leaders, citing evidence of its positive impact on Wales and the world.

Duration: 24:05

Scripture: Psalm 78:2-7, Psalm 85:6, Psalm 90:12, Psalm 119:11, Psalm 126:4, Matthew 6:33, Acts 1:8

Topics: "Welsh Revival"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker begins by expressing his intention to share a story and reveal hidden truths. He emphasizes the importance of passing down the knowledge of God's glorious deeds and wonders to future generations. The speaker then shares a personal testimony of answered prayers and the positive social impact of revival, including reduced alcohol consumption and decreased crime rates. The sermon concludes with the speaker discussing the current spiritual slump in Wales and the need for revival in the country.

Transcript

Before I read the scripture to you, there's a word of personal testimony I ought to give. So many of the students have stopped me on the street and told me they were praying for me over the last six weeks of the old year. As to how the prayers were answered, I feel obligated to tell you that prayers were wonderfully answered.

For about a year and a half, I've been seeing a specialist regarding a problem that involves what medical science says is the most intensely excruciating pain known to medical science. And just before I went to Wales on a special mission, I had one of these terrible attacks of pain, and the specialist said, well, you're getting close to having an operation. I didn't fancy the idea of wandering all over Wales ready to run to a hospital, so I asked my friends here and others to pray that the Lord would postpone the pain for about four weeks, and then I'd be glad to go to hospital for the Christmas vacation when I got back.

However, the Lord answered much better than we prayed for, because when I got to Wales, I found by checking up through an X-ray that not only had the pain been postponed, but I'd been delivered from the problem, and no operation is necessary. So I was able to go right through my assignment in Wales without any trouble or difficulty whatsoever. So I'd like to thank you who did pray for me, and assure you that I

appreciated it very much.

Now let me give you some verses from one of the well-known Psalms. I will open my mouth to tell you a story. I will reveal things obscured by the passage of time, things we've heard and known that our fathers have told us.

We will not hide them from their children, but tell to the coming generation the glorious deeds of the Lord and his might and the wonders that he has wrought, which he commanded our fathers to teach to their children, that the next generation might know them, the children yet unborn, and arise and tell them to their children, so they should set their hope in God and forget not the works of God, but keep his commandments. We pray the Lord, help us to remember the great things that thou hast done, not simply for the sake of knowing the facts, but that we may be encouraged to put our trust in thee, and to obey thee according to thy word. Amen.

The minister of the Fourth Presbyterian Church in Chicago showed me some articles in the leading Welsh newspaper regarding the great revival of 70 years ago. He was indignant. I said, well, apparently they've begun a campaign to denigrate that great work of God.

He gave me copies of these articles. The more I read them, the more indignant I became. Now for those of you who don't know what exactly I'm referring, I should explain that 70 years ago, a great movement began in the Principality of Wales.

It resulted in the conversion of about 100,000 outsiders who joined the churches. Possibly another 100,000 or more nominal Christians in the membership of the churches were converted as well. A book was written five years later to debunk or criticize the revival, and the main point made was that after five years, only 80,000 of the 100,000 converts still stood.

Only 80,000. However, some people don't judge evangelical awakens by church growth, so perhaps I should say something about the social impact. David Lloyd George, who became Prime Minister of Great Britain, said that the total sale of booze in his hometown on Saturday night, the drinking night of the week, was fortnightly, nine cents.

In Swansea, the great industrial center of South Wales, on New Year's Eve, the drinking night of the year, no arrests for drunkenness. In county after county, judges were presented with white gloves, signifying there wasn't a case to try. In some district councils, they had discussions of what to do with the police now that they were unemployed.

There were even stoppages in the coal mines. Not strikes, stoppages, slowdowns. So many Welsh coal miners were converted and stopped using profanity that the horses that drive the trucks in the mines couldn't understand what was being said, and transportation ground to a halt.

Now, judge my amazement when I saw the first of three leading articles on the editorial page in the center spread of the best-known newspaper in Wales, when Brimstone flowed across a chosen land. What impression does that give you? A lot of hellfire preaching? But during the Welsh revival, the hymn of the revival was that lovely Welsh hymn, Oh, the deep, deep love of Jesus, De Magariad. I read the rest of this, and I was astounded.

I came across items that really staggered me. They dealt with Evan Roberts, who was one of the evangelists of that revival, perhaps the best known. Was he an Elmer Gantry, they asked.

Was he a mystic or a charlatan? So there were dark whispers of the men and women in his life. They quoted one man as saying, Evan Roberts would work his audiences up to such a pitch, he would get them going so well, they would go stealing out into the graveyards. And later, when the women discovered they were pregnant, they blamed it on nightingales.

He also stated that the illegitimate weight in Wales had gone up during the revival. He also questioned the claim of the revival to have reduced drunkenness, and so on. At our Oxford University conference last summer, I was talking to the principal of the South Wales about Dartmouth College, member of the Faculty of the University of Wales.

He said, well, Edwin, how do you deal with froth? Well, I said, I'm not an expert, but when I was in the Air Force, I noticed the first thing to do with froth was to blow it away. I watched many a man tackle his beer that way. So he invited me over to Wales to deal with this problem and this situation.

Now, of course, it was quite easy to deal with it in some ways. I wrote to the editor of the Western Mail and told him he hadn't heard the last about these articles. But he wrote back, I appealed to his bloody sense of fair play.

He wrote back and said, well, if you care to write three articles, we'll consider publishing them. So I did that. I sent them to him, but I didn't see them published for some time.

In the meantime, I took off for Wales. Just before I left, I got a letter from Professor FF Bruce, whose name is known to some of you. He said, the trouble is, there are so many people who would like to think that spiritual awakens were not all that they were believed to be.

That they were attended by sexual license and so forth. And when people are predisposed in their way, they are not readily moved by the most conclusive statistics. But the good news of the revival must not be allowed to be sullied by default.

And you are the man I want to see tackle this. So I went over and we arranged a series of meetings in the university cities of Wales. Bangor, Aberystwyth, Swansea, and Cardiff.

Now Wales at the present time is suffering like the rest of Great Britain from a spiritual slump. And one of the questions asked was, well, if this revival was all it was supposed to be, why is Wales in such a way today? Well, that's a very simple thing to tackle. After all, if say 100,000 were converted in Wales, or if you count the nominal Christians, say a quarter of a million out of two and a half million population, one tenth of the population in 1904, they're nearly all dead today.

David Duplessis has pointed out that God has no grandchildren, only children. And the children of the revival remain true. When I was in Wales as an evangelist in the 1930s, sometimes I'd take a show of hands and many people here were converted in the Welsh revival.

And nearly everyone over the age of 50 would raise his hand. It had that powerful impact. And those people continued to be the queen of Welsh Christianity.

However, Wales did suffer certain great disasters. One was World War I. You realize that Great Britain lost a million men, and of course Wales lost its quarter. Then Wales was the first to be hit by the Cold Strikes.

And then the Great Depression. And then of course World War II had a bad effect upon church attendance as well. Immigration from Wales was very heavy because when unemployment strikes, the Welsh always emigrated to Pennsylvania or Australia, New Zealand, Canada and the like.

So that numerically the number of course has been declining right along. But one of my friends in London said, yes, but what about the West Wing Revival? It didn't happen that way with the West Wing Revival. I said, look, John Wesley, in 1791 when he died, left 70,000 Methodists.

And they would have died out too if it hadn't been for another Great Awakening. People don't realize that. They know so little about the Great Revival of 1792 and the continued sustained evangelism it provoked.

And that's why the Methodist cause increased, because there were subsequent visitations. But perhaps the most pathetic thing I heard was in the city of Bangor, where the largest downtown church is used by a repertory company. It's been taken over by a theater group.

Lots of churches have been closed in Great Britain like that today. And in this very city, a woman said to my friends, to my hostess actually, I don't know that we'd want another revival. We wouldn't want a lot of outsiders coming into the church.

Could you believe it? We wouldn't want a lot of outsiders coming to the church. Well, one of the points that they made regarding the Welsh Revival was, of course, it was just the Methodists and the Baptists and the Presbyterians and the Congregations that were affected by this revival. No one in the Anglican Church would have supported it.

But I was able to show that this movement was welcomed by the Bishop of Bangor, the Bishop of St. David's, the Bishop of Lambeth, and the Bishop of St. Asaph's. As a matter of fact, the Archbishop of Canterbury called for a day of prayer. They convened 30 bishops to discuss the attitude of the Church in England towards the Welsh Revival.

The first speaker was the Bishop of St. Asaph's. He said, I have just come from a town in Shropshire, that's on the western side of England, where in a single church I confirmed 950 new converts. Fathers and brethren, he said, I want you to understand I support this movement.

Now that spread throughout Great Britain. But the Anglicans did support it. Now this thing about why did it die away, I find people ask me even on this campus questions like that.

I preached in Mount Pleasant Baptist Church in Swansea three or four Sundays ago. And the pastor showed me the records that for 20 years after the revival they were bringing seats into the aisles because of the crowds that were attending. Then they changed ministers and they got a man of a different theological stripe and conditions began to deteriorate.

By the way, the people who criticized the Welsh Revival the most are those who undid it the most by their theology. Now, I told my wife when I left for Wales, this trip is likely to cost me about \$500 but let's put it down as a little gift to the memory of Alvin Roberts. Because when we were married in 1937, the first thing I did was to take my mother, who lived in London, and my wife, who was introduced to my British friends for the first time, down to Wales and introduced them to Alvin Roberts, who remembered him so vividly as such a spiritual and kindly man.

So I said let's put it down for that. How do you deal with attacks on a person's character? Do you know that under our common law, after a person dies, you may slander him? If someone were to accuse Billy Graham of being an Elmer Gantry, Billy could take him to court. But once he's dead, nobody can act on his behalf unless the family says that they are being hurt by it.

Alvin Roberts never married, didn't leave a family, his brothers and sisters are all dead, and yet they were saying these viciously wicked things about him. Well, how do you deal with thought? I simply told the students at the universities, and also the articles that were published in the paper, that the Registrar General's figures on births, deaths, and marriages showed a decrease of 44% in some Welsh counties nine months after the Revival. That's conclusive enough.

Not 44% in every county, but a decline in every county. And they couldn't simply gainsay that. I got the criminal statistics published by the Government of the United Kingdom, and it showed that the cases of drunkenness in all 13 counties of Wales were cut in half within a year.

Arrests for drunkenness. So it was quite easy to deal with these things. But what about Alvin Roberts' own character? Before I left, I went to see a friend of Fuller Theological Seminary, some of you may know him, Dr. Peter Joshua, a Presbyterian minister who's living in Port Wynemy, he's retired there.

I said, Peter, you knew Alvin Roberts intimately, didn't you? He said, oh yes. I said, were there ever any charges made against his moral character? He said, none whatsoever. Oh, he said there was talk.

They always try to pin something on someone. But he said it was investigated. The worst thing they could find was that Maggie Davies, sister of Dr. D.R. Davies, a very famous writer, who was a soloist during the Welsh Revival, that on one occasion she had washed his socks.

That was the worst they could find on Alvin Roberts. In other words, this sick generation we have today cannot believe that a man could be chaste. Alvin Roberts was so dedicated to God that he remained in his single state all his days without being involved in any kind of involvement whatsoever.

So, of course, I testified to my knowledge of Alvin Roberts. They also had articles explaining that he was insane. And they quoted certain British historians pointing out that the Lancet, the British medical journal, had said that he was mentally unbalanced.

Well, now, what do you do with a thing like that? I've got to cover the article. It was written ten days after the outbreak of the Phenomenal Revival. And it suggested that Alvin Roberts was mentally unbalanced.

But how did the man know this? He examined Alvin Roberts by telepathy. I've been examined by x-ray and stethoscope and so forth. I don't think it's fair to pass judgment on a man's state of health by telepathy.

On the other hand, when Alvin Roberts was working so hard, working a 16-hour to 20-hour day, his friends in Liverpool persuaded him to have a medical check-up. And four men, whose names and qualifications I was able to supply, Barr, Bickerton, Williams, and McAfee, four outstanding doctors from Liverpool, gave him a thorough examination, said he is mentally and physically sound but overworked, and we recommend a month's vacation. But we've recorded that.

You find when it comes to the denigration of awakenings, some of the best of our historians engage in what you call selective documentation. I remember, I'm digressing at this point, when I was visiting D.L.

Moody's home, by the way, not in his lifetime, I'm not that old, but when I was visiting D.L. Moody's home, his granddaughter showed me something very interesting. One certain famous man who's still alive today, his name's well-known, who wrote a book about Moody, describing his attitude to certain social problems.

There were 25 letters on record, 23 supporting him and two criticizing him. And this historian quoted only the two that criticized, never mentioned the other 25. That's what you call selective documentation.

Now what actually happened during this great movement? The revival was not confined to Wales. All throughout the world, at the turn of the 20th century, there were prayer meetings for revival. All nights of prayer at Moody Bible Institute.

Prayer meetings at Keswick Convention. Prayer meetings in the hill stations in India. Prayer meetings in Korea.

It seemed to be certain that all over the world, there was an expectation of an outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and a great concern about studying the personality of the Holy Spirit and his work, and the subject of revival. The Welsh revival was really a cataract in a river of blessing. And it spread very rapidly throughout Wales, and then spread throughout Great Britain.

Bishop Bergdrave, the hero of the Norwegian Resistance, told me in his home on one occasion, that the greatest movement he had ever seen in his life, was the great movement in Oslo in 1905 under Albert Lunde. I knew Albert Lunde as I knew Evan Roberts. He was called the Evan Roberts of Norway, but very unlike Evan Roberts in character.

But that revival was so powerful in Norway, that the Norwegian Parliament passed legislation to permit laymen to administer the sacraments. So many people were wanting spiritual ministrations, that the Norwegian priesthood couldn't keep up with it. The same revival spread to Scandinavia, Sweden, Denmark, and Finland.

As a matter of fact, the Danish Lutheran Home Mission wrote a record that it was the greatest winter since Christianity had come to the Vikings. What about North America? It swept this country from coast to coast. In Atlantic City, the ministers said that only 50 adults left professibly unconverted out of a population of 60,000.

In Portland, Oregon, 200 department stores closed from 11 to 2 each day for prayer. In Paducah, Kentucky, First Baptist Church took in a thousand new members in two months, and the pastor, an old man, died of overwork. A glorious end to a devoted ministry, the Southern Baptist said.

The revival swept the country, swept the whole of the world. Yet 70 years later, we found all this slander of the movement and slander of its leaders being publicized. Well, I'm glad to say, to report back to you, those of you who prayed for me, that not only did we have meetings in the university colleges around Wales, but public rallies, ending up with a big rally in Cardiff in the Tabernacle, admission by ticket only, hundreds turned away, the Lord Mayor was there in his regalia, and the Western Mail, I'm very happy to say, published my three articles in the center spread of the newspaper and entitled the first one, The Plot to Defame the Welsh Revival.

It was a thorough rebuttal of what had gone before. You say, now what good did it do? Well, I think it encouraged the evangelicals in Wales. Next year they're having a great campaign of Wales for Christ, and this has cleared the air and made people realize that now they can pray for another outpouring of the Holy

Spirit, an outpouring of the Holy Spirit throughout that principality.

And those of you who know the great old Welsh hymns, next time you hear one, think of the Welsh revival and think of what we need here in this country today. Let us stand for prayer. Wilt thou not revive us again that thy people may rejoice in thee? Revive thy work amidst these years in wrath, remember mercy.

Lord, as we think of the confusion and uncertainty throughout the world today, we pray thee, intervene again with an outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the generality of believers. For Jesus' sake. Amen.

Audio: <https://sermonindex1.b-cdn.net/12/SID12229.mp3>

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/j-edwin-orr/in-defense-of-evan-roberts-and-the-welsh-revival/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net