

Forward

by Robert Ellis

The sermon emphasizes the current decline of Christianity while offering hope for revival through remembrance of God's past works and the emerging commitment of youth.

Scripture: Deuteronomy 8:2, Psalm 77:10, Psalm 85:6, Ecclesiastes 3:1, Isaiah 43:18, Joel 2:25, Malachi 3:6, 1 Corinthians 11:24, Hebrews 13:8, Revelation 21:5

Topics: "Spiritual Renewal", "Faith Revival"

Description

Robert Ellis delivers a sermon reflecting on the decline of Christianity in the country, noting dwindling church attendance and a shift towards secular activities. Despite the bleak outlook, Ellis finds hope in the signs of a coming spiritual renewal, likening it to the arrival of spring after winter. Drawing parallels to past revivals, he emphasizes the cyclical nature of religious seasons and the importance of remembering God's past wonders to uplift the spirits of believers facing challenges.

Transcript

CHRISTIANITY in our country has fallen on evil days, or so compute our statisticians, and so our Church-going members also confess. Our numbers dwindle steadily in every sphere of Church life. The Sunday schools are only shadows of what they used to be. The Prayer meetings are meagrely attended. Other more secular activities are introduced instead, and are gradually ousting the old-fashioned "seiat" and the Bible Class. The number of candidates for the ministry is becoming less and less. The country is given to pleasures and entertainments of every kind. No, religion does not walk these days, as Bunyan said, in its golden slippers. It is wintertime in the Churches.

But is the outlook hopeless? Not at all. "If winter comes can spring be far behind." God has his seasons in religion as He has in nature. Even this morning in the bleak month of January I heard the sweet chirp of a lonely bird. It was not a sustained effort I admit. It was only a preliminary attempt, clearing of the throat as it were, a short rehearsal of a fuller song. But it was prophetic. It had the authentic promise of a spring that is on the way. Even in these days of religious declension we are reminded too that the Church is showing signs of a more propitious season. Young people like snowdrops appear here and there in the Church courts. They call for Bible Classes and Prayer meetings, especially where the right ministers officiate. A young student a few hours ago came to me to say that he wanted to go in for the ministry. Like Pant-y-Celyn our great hymn writer his ambition at first was to become a doctor. But he had come to a junction in his life, and he had decided to change to another train. His Headmaster that morning in the

Grammar School had warned him that he was giving up a two thousand a year job for the pittance of a minister's salary. But it was no good. The young student's mind was fixed. With this instance and others that I could enumerate ringing in my ears, can I doubt that spring be far behind.

Religion has been at a low ebb before. So it was even after the '59 Revival in Wales. When the old Revivalist Dafydd Morgan, who was used to usher in that mighty movement, met Evan Phillips of Newcastle-Emlyn after the tide had subsided almost completely, and things looked as hopeless as ever he looked wistfully into Evan Phillips' eyes, and grasping his hand, said: "Fe ddaw E' eto"--He will come again.

Evan Phillips was another link between the Revivals of 1859 and 1904. Evan Roberts was a newly arrived student in Newcastle-Emlyn Grammar School, whose Headmaster was the son of Evan Phillips. When Roberts, after only six weeks in the school was baptised with the spirit of God in the Blaenannerch meetings in Cardiganshire he felt an urge to go out to save souls and to begin "in Jerusalem"--his home church in Loughor. He consulted the old veteran, who advised him to go, rather than stay on in school though it was the school of his son. Thus in the dramatic neatness of God's Providence a link was forged between Dafydd Morgan of 1859, and Evan Roberts of 1904.

The Psalmist in a despondent mood asked: "Will the Lord cast off for ever? Will He be favourable no more?" "Is His mercy clean gone for ever? Doth His promise fail for evermore. Hath God forgotten to be gracious? Hath He in anger shut up His tender mercies?"

Timely questions you say for the depressed Christians of our age. But listen, the Psalmist suddenly awakes. He pulls himself up, and says: --

"And I said, this is my infirmity. But I will remember the years of the right hand of the Most High. I will remember the works of the Lord: surely I will remember the wonders of old. Thou art the God that doest wonders." Psalm 77.

It is our privilege and our duty to remember God's marvellous works in former days. Indeed we are commanded to do it. Deut. 8.2,; 1 Cor. 11.24. There is no refreshing cordial to a drooping saint like the story of the Church in times past.

On account of this I welcome this book by my friend, the Reverend Robert Ellis, B.A., who himself has been touched by the spirit of 1904 and reared in the district that was drenched by that shower from on high. He has never been ashamed of that blessing, but by his preaching and his life and his popular lectures has consistently borne witness to its efficacy.

He deals here not so much with the Revival itself, but with the great personalities whom God raised to propagate it; and great personalities they were, outstanding in intellectual power, and deep in spiritual experience. There were lesser lights in the movement, but these were the controlling luminaries, who like the sun at creation ruled the day, while the lesser lights like the moon and the stars ruled the night.

I knew these men of God intimately. I was constantly in contact with them. To read these pen pictures of them brings back solemn, hallowed, inspiring memories, as they will, undoubtedly do to many others.

W. NANTLAIS WILLIAMS.

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