

Is revival sufficient?

Bryn Jones

The word revival means different things to different people. In North America it could mean an evangelistic crusade, or then again, it could be a visitation of God in a single church in a city, as in recent times in Brownsville, Pensacola or Toronto, Canada. For many Christians it refers to a very widespread visitation of God on a locality or nation, such as the Great Awakening in the 18th century with Jonathan Edwards or in our more recent history, the Welsh Revival and the Hebridean Awakening, when the whole vicinity was marked by the sense of the presence of God.

Unfortunately, many Christians view 'revival' through rose coloured spectacles. They believe it to be a panacea for all that is wrong with the church, and the answer to every crisis in our world. History shows that this is not the case. The purpose of God is hastened and advanced by Spiritual visitation, but the goal of His purpose cannot be achieved simply by revival.

There are other vital factors to consider. My earliest memories as a Christian are those of listening to stirring accounts of the great Welsh Revival of 1904, related by a white-headed, wrinkled-faced, bright-eyed old man. I would sit for hours listening incredulously to stories of pubs being emptied as chapels filled up; how the miners would go down into coal-pits singing the praises of God; homes and families were transformed, and in some towns crime dropped to an almost non-existent level. I seemed to hear singing in the heavens and to see the cloud of God's presence hovering over the hills, so caught up was I in the fervour of his stories. I began reading avidly about the Great Awakening, and decided one day to make a pilgrimage to the places referred to in the various accounts. It was this journey that brought me to a cold, rude awakening.

As we examine the history of those times, we quickly see that it is impossible to divorce that great spiritual awakening in Wales with what the Spirit of God was doing around the world, for at the turn of the 20th century God was pouring His Spirit out in many countries.

Although Evan Roberts was the most prominent of the many revivalists in the Awakening in Wales (there were many others, such as Dan Roberts, Hank and Seth Joshua, Sydney Evans, Mary Davies, Anne Davies and Priscilla Watkins), such was the power released in this sovereign act of God's visitation that thousands of people moved into the Kingdom without any special preacher being present at all.

A Growing Hunger

After the first great wave of spiritual awakening had subsided, euphoria and enthusiasm gave way to a deep hunger in the hearts of God's people. Thousands began meeting in earnest prayer in cottage meetings. Their desire was to know God more intimately and to experience an even deeper life in the Holy Spirit. Young men began calling on God to restore His spiritual authority and leadership in the Church. Through reading the scriptures, they became convinced of the necessity of God's ministries of apostle and prophet being restored. Among such men were Daniel Powell Williams and Thomas Jones, who became early pioneers of what is now known as the Apostolic Church of Wales.

Denominational Reaction

Whereas the initial wave of revival power had been received with joy, the further demonstration of God's presence in the Church that of the spiritual gifts of tongues, prophecy, healings and miracles, was met with widespread resistance. By and large, 'speaking in tongues' was viewed as 'extremism' or an expression of fleshly behaviour. Many denominations spoke out strongly against these things as 'works of the devil'. Thousands of believers were forced into leaving their churches. The subtleties of Satan continued to assault those who were baptised with the Spirit, dividing them over church government, the exercising of spiritual gifts and various different shades of doctrine until within a short time the word 'Pentecostal', which had been associated with this outpouring, covered a very wide spectrum of new denominational and non-denominational independent allegiances.

The Harsh Reality

It was while on pilgrimage to the various places that had figured so prominently in that early move of God at the turn of the century that the harsh reality dawned on me. Those great empty chapels, whose rafters had heard the singing of a thousand hearts, whose floors had been washed by the tears of the repentant, were today merely lifeless monuments to a glorious past like extinct volcanoes dotting the Welsh landscape. In many places of worship I saw a mere handful of people, mainly elderly, totally devoid of fervour or enthusiasm, occupying pews near the back of a hall. Sometimes I would stand in the emptiness, tears rolling down my cheeks, not feeling the overwhelming presence of God but rather the sorrowing heart of my Lord. It was difficult to conceive that these were the same places that, in the first two months of the Awakening, had seen some 70,000 converts swept into the Kingdom of God. 'Ichabod' ('glory is departed') was no longer some obscure Hebrew word but a dreadful reality in the stale and musty air of these chapels. God's absence was more real than His presence. I began to question deeply the reality and significance of what I had heard and of the reports I had read. If revival had happened, what had gone wrong? What was the purpose of such a mighty visitation of God which ended like this? Within one generation almost all trace of spiritual awakening in Wales had disappeared.

Salutary Lessons of the Time

Although one does not profess to be able to give all the factors involved, some things emerge clearly from a study of that period. Firstly, the revival had been a time of great visitation in saving of souls, sweeping thousands into the Kingdom and filling the churches with a praising people. However, it had not severed the root of self-interest, private agendas, jealousy or denominational and sectarian differences. There are many accounts of ministers of various denominations in the same town burying their differences, shaking hands before the crowds of people and joining together in great services of praise, however, because the axe was not laid to the root, the differences re-emerged as the wave of visitation subsided. Any awakening that does not deal with the root of independence; individualism, sectarianism and denominationalism will be deficient.

Executive bodies, committees and councils began to emerge. The pattern shows all the hallmarks of the subtlety, ingenuity and deception of spiritual forces. Having spoken to many who remember the emergence of these things, I am convinced that it was not the intention of their hearts at that time but a gradual slide which has produced the paralysis of church life existent in much of our country today.
Restoration the Answer

There are prophets of gloom and doom who would say that this is inevitable; that this will always occur. We cannot subscribe to that view. There is, within our hearts, a faith that declares: the Church of God will emerge in unity, in power and in glory at the end time, just as God says it will.

'In the last days the mountain of the Lord's temple will be established as chief among the mountains; it will be raised above the hills, and all nations will stream to it.' (Isaiah 2:2).

The Church will be seen as a bride adorned for His appearing.

'I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.' (Revelation 21:2).

This conviction leads us now to pray with greater understanding concerning the next Awakening. For we now know that a revival that will merely sweep thousands into the Kingdom, filling our chapels and churches is insufficient in itself. Spiritual awakening must restore in the hearts of God's people a unity that is based, not upon common denominational allegiance, but upon our common relationship through Jesus Christ.

It must be a revival that will restore us to being a people whose sole constitution is the Word of God. We will not look to committees, councils and executive bodies to

govern us, nor will democracy be the norm for the churches, but it will be a move of God that will restore apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers to function fully in the Body of Christ. These ministries will, in all humility and godly fear, seek His face corporately in every city to lead the church of God forward as a Kingdom of Priests to today's world. God's people will recognise and joyfully receive those whom God has set over them in the faith. Our cities will be filled, not with competitive churches, but with a united community of God's redeemed people, embracing each other as those whom God has accepted. For many this may prove to be an unachievable dream, but for a growing number of others this is a driving objective to their ministry of Restoration. Anything short of this is short of the heart of God.

'Your people will rebuild the ancient ruins and will raise up the age-old foundations; you will be called Repairer of Broken Walls, Restorer of Streets with Dwellings.' (Isaiah 58:12).

Present Pointers

We can view the last fifty years of charismatic outpouring around the world in the light of some of the salutary lessons above. Today the Holy Spirit has brought an acceptance of spiritual gifts and miracle healings throughout the Body of Christ and there is no denomination that has remained entirely untouched. Revival is not enough if it does not restore to us the purity of sanctified life, the blessing of spiritual anointing and gifts, the humility of heart to acknowledge God's government, and the submission of our lives to those God sets over us in His Church. Revival is not enough if it does not axe through the roots of our denominational differences, independent attitudes or self centred living.

Revival is not enough as far as the heart of God and the needs of our generation are concerned. Revival must give rise to related community life; ecclesiastical appointments must give way to apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers working together. Any spiritual awakening that does not ultimately bring these dimensions into the life of the Church will be shallow experience and will inevitably follow the well-trodden path of decline back into the slough of spiritual paralysis and sectarian strife.

So it is that across the world enlightened people are praying and working for nothing less than a great 'Restoration' that will return the Church of God to its spiritual foundation - God's spiritual government and Heaven's divine power. Revival must lead on to Restoration!

'Awake, awake, O Zion, clothe yourself with strength. Put on your garments of splendour, O Jerusalem, the holy city. The uncircumcised and defiled will not enter you again. Shake off your dust; rise up, sit enthroned, O Jerusalem. Free yourself from the chains on your neck, O captive Daughter of Zion.' (Isaiah 52:1-2).

'Listen! Your watchmen lift up their voices; together they shout for joy. When the Lord returns to Zion, they will see it with their own eyes. Burst into songs of joy together, you ruins of Jerusalem, for the Lord has comforted his people, he has redeemed Jerusalem. The Lord will lay bare his holy arm in the sight of all the nations, and all the ends of the earth will see the salvation of our God.' (Isaiah 52:8-10).

'Your people will rebuild the ancient ruins and will raise up the age-old foundations; you will be called Repairer of Broken Walls, Restorer of Streets with Dwellings.' (Isaiah 58:12).