



REMEMBERING 1904-05

The Work of God at Cross Hands in the 1950s

Rev. Gareth Davies

I appreciate very much your welcome to me and the invitation to come, although I must say that it has caused me a lot of heart-searching. In a sense there was a time when I regretted having accepted your invitation because I felt how unworthy the work that God did in the district of Cross Hands in the late 1940s and the beginning of the 1950s, how unworthy that work was - in my estimation at one time anyway - when we think of why we are meeting here together to remember what happened a hundred years ago when a great revival swept our land. And then, when I was in my study one morning thinking about these things, God in a wonderful way, really chastised me and, in a sense, told me - not in such terms as words - but He certainly told me in a very firm way that we have no right to describe any work of God as small and insignificant. Everything that God does is great indeed, and the work that happened in Cross Hands, in a sense was a great work and its repercussions are still being felt. Having said that, I also want to say this; I have felt very unhappy sometimes when I hear people say that there hasn't been a revival since 1904-05. That is not true, you know! What they are saying is that unless it covers a large country area or a world area, then it is not a revival. A church can be revived, and there can be a revival, I would say, in your own personal experience. God can come to a Christian whose batteries have run down, or spiritually is in a bad way, and revive him and make his spiritual life alive and throbbing again. So I really feel, and I think that history is on my side, that revival can be a very local thing, and as local as just one church. I know for a fact that Dr. Eryl Davies has done considerable work about the Beddgelert revival, and there you have an example when it happened in just Beddgelert, and with all due respect to Beddgelert, it is not even as big as Cross Hands. But God did a work then, in Beddgelert and in the district, which was a mighty work indeed. And so I say that I felt chastised, that I certainly had no right before God to say that what He did in my home district was insignificant and small - it was a great work indeed.

The General Scene

Now what happened in Cross Hands was a part of what God was doing in this land of Wales during the 1940s and the 1950s. I have no doubt in saying that it was from that work in those years that the Evangelical Movement of Wales [EMW] came into being. Initially that was associated with work in the colleges when many young men, some of whom came back from the army after the War, went into colleges and had an experience of God's mercy and the Gospel was real and wonderful to them. One of the things they began to do, during their time of holiday, was to go round conducting campaigns in various areas in Wales. One of your former pastors in the Heath, Rev. Glyn Owen, was very much involved in that, along with Dr. Gwyn Walters, but I can't begin to name all of them. But certainly in Llanelli, in 1946, there was a work done during that campaign which again had tremendous repercussions even till today. Let me just remind you that some of the great preachers of these past years were converted during that campaign in Llanelli. I want to name two of them; Rev. John Thomas of blessed memory, one to whom I owe a great deal in my own spiritual experience, as I hope to tell you later on, and Rev. Huw Morgan of Newport; they both came to know the Lord during that campaign. Their wives also became Christians during the same campaign. And again, you see, there were many young people in the Llanelli area, who were converted during that time. Elwyn Davies went to Bangor University a religious man, but not a Christian, a devout man in a sense. But it was there, during his college time that Elwyn was converted and, as with many others, God was doing a work in the colleges that was to have repercussions later on in the work of the Gospel in our land. There are some people here tonight who in a sense, if it was a typical Welsh 'seiat' [fellowship meeting] I could ask to speak, but I won't embarrass them!

In 1948 another student campaign was held in Ammanford. My wife and her pastor share two birthdays; they have their natural birthday on the same day - I am referring of course to Rev. J. D. Williams - but they also share their spiritual birthday, because Mr. Williams confesses to the fact that he came to that church an unconverted man. He had been a minister in Bethany Presbyterian Church for two years, but it was during that campaign that he came to a full understanding and a full experience of the wonder of Christ's mercy and love towards him. And again, during that campaign in Ammanford, there were many young people converted, and that is just typical of much of the work that was happening in Wales because of these student campaigns during that time. One of the great things that God did as well in that time was, somehow or other, to bring us together from various areas, and of course again during that time there was the work that was associated with the Eisteddfod in North Wales. I do not intend going into too much detail about that this evening, but again there was a work being done in Wales. There was a great time when Dr. Lloyd Jones agreed to come and preach one night at the Eisteddfod, and the church was full and again the Gospel began to be a power in the land, and people were being converted and, as I said, the EMW developed from that. The first step, of course, was the publishing of the Welsh Evangelical Magazine and I take joy in reminding Welsh people that the work really began in Welsh! The first thing that the EMW did was to produce a Welsh magazine, but I'm not going to dwell, as I said, too much on that.

The Local Scene

Let us come to Cross Hands, which at that time was a mining village, surrounded by coal pits. There were two in Cross Hands itself, that is, one pit and a drift mine. It was very much

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linked with the mining industry, producing the best coal ever seen - anthracite. The anthracite coal in the Gwendraeth Valley is something which is still outstanding, although it is not being mined any more. However, Cross Hands was insignificant in many a sense - just somewhere you pass through between Swansea and Carmarthen. But to me, and to many of us, it is a very precious place indeed. Cross Hands had known the dealings of God in 1904-05. Let me commend to you a book recently printed which gives the life of Rev. Emyln Jenkins, the Welsh Congregational minister of Ebenezer Chapel, Cardiff. His family came greatly under the influence of the 1904 revival. They worshipped in the Welsh Congregational Church in Bethania, in Top Tumble, and the people who knew the blessing of 1904 were literally thrown out - they were cast out of membership of the church - and they were given a piece of land by a local farmer to build their own church - and it's still there - at Bryn Seion. If you leave Cross Hands towards the top of Tumble, about half-way there, on your left, stands a little building called Bryn Seion. And in that church, God did a great work.

You see, when I was a young boy some of these people were still around, and I could see, even though I was young, that there was a marked difference about them compared with everybody else that I knew of, in my own church and in other churches. There was that stamp on them which meant that they had known something that many others had known nothing about. There was one in my church, Bethlehem, Cross Hands. We called him Gwilym 'bach'; he literally was a hunchback, but when that man prayed . . . I'd never heard anything like it. His praying was highly original: I can still remember Gwilym praying for missionaries and the work on the mission field, and this is what came out. "Lord", he said, (only he said it in Welsh), "it doesn't matter to You whether they're red, white or blue." He knew the colours of the Union Jack! But there was a reality there that told me immediately - that man has got something that I knew nothing about and that many who were in the church with me knew nothing about as well.

When the blessing came to the area, on a Saturday night we used to meet in my home village. I don't actually come from Cross Hands, I come from Gorslas, and there was a little church in Gorslas, which is not there any more, where we used to meet on Saturday nights for prayer, mainly young people and one or two of these gems amongst us. One of them was a man called Jacob Jones from Penygroes. Again, Jacob's prayers still ring in my memory. I remember, for instance, during the prayer meeting somebody started singing a hymn, and we sang the hymn and then Jacob stood

and prayed, and this is how he started his prayer. "Thank you, Lord", he said, "for being able to sing in the Spirit. Lord", he said, "singing without the Spirit is like tea without sugar." I think he was saying something very precious, in a wonderful way. Again Jacob, in his prayer, was dealing with the point that when you become a Christian everything is new, and this is what he told the Lord. "Lord", he said, "You know quite well that Peter at one time would never touch pork, he wouldn't eat pork at all. And then you taught him. You said he could eat it, and then he ate it and enjoyed it!" Well, what do you do with a man like that, but stand in utter amazement at the living relationship between him and his God? He could talk to God on a one-to-one level like that, knowing that God who read his heart knew that he himself was addressing his cry to Him.

Later on, when I became a student for the ministry, I used to go and preach in the church where Jacob used to worship. I soon realised that there was one thing you should never do when Jacob was present and that was to ask a rhetorical question in your sermon - Jacob would give the answer every time! But I want to mention these people, because when the blessing came they were there with us, they identified with it. Those who knew the great times of revival were there, they saw something of what had happened in the late 1940s and early 1950s in Cross Hands. They saw something in it that they could identify with.

God Drew Near

Let me now move to the blessing itself. Every blessing is from God. God Himself, in a sense, is the main cause of every blessing, but God has so chosen to do His great work through preachers. He needs, in His own wisdom, means by which He can do His work, and His greatest means are His servants. And I have no doubt in saying that you can trace the beginning of the work in Cross Hands to a man called Rev. H. H. Williams, who was called to our church to be the Pastor. Like many others, he was a man who fitted perfectly what Paul says in 1 Corinthians, that God has chosen the base things to confound the wise.

You know how people who produce television programmes want to project somebody to the viewers, but I don't know what they would make of H. H. Williams! He was a short man, he had a marked limp in his walking, he had a lump growing out of the back of his neck, he had no hair - there was nothing physical, in any way, by which he could project himself. In fact, I think God hid him, in that sense. But, when he came, things certainly changed. He was a North Walian, coming to the Gwendraeth Valley, and we certainly had some problems understanding his Welsh, but we got over that. He was from Talsarn, and if you know anything about Wales, you know that Talsarn has given to Wales probably one of the greatest preachers of the nineteenth century, John Jones, Talsarn. Owen Thomas of Liverpool wrote the biography of John Jones, Talsarn, and it is more than a biography because in it he has included tremendous chapters dealing with the theological arguments in Wales during the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries. By the way, the Banner of Truth has published a translation that John Aaron has made of a section of that book dealing with the atonement. That just shows how important John Jones, Talsarn and that biography is, in terms of understanding some of the great theological arguments of our land.

So H. H. Williams came from Talsarn, and I certainly soon realised that here was a man who loved his Lord and Master



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and who preached Him with tremendous power. I can still remember one of his sermons. He preached on *"He is altogether lovely"* [Song of Solomon 5:15] and, even though I was still struggling with my own personal faith, I suddenly realised, under that sermon, that there was a beauty and a loveliness in Christ that I had yet to see and to know. It was tremendous! His preaching was Christ-centred, Christ uplifting. To him it was all the purpose of his ministry, to reveal Christ in His glory. I remember another of his sermons when he was preaching on *"Behold, I stand at the door and knock"* [Revelation 3:10]. He reminded us as a congregation of Holman Hunt's picture of 'Christ, the Light of the World'. You may remember it; Christ is there, with a crown on His head, with a lamp in His hand, and He is knocking at a door. And then H. H. Williams asked us to imagine somebody coming to open the door, and Christ says "I want to come in". And the man says, and I can still remember H. H. Williams saying it in Welsh, "You can come in, certainly, but it's my house and would you please take off your crown?" And I can hear him now, challenging us as a congregation: "Do you think He'll come on your conditions, do you think He'll come and abandon His kingship, He'll take off His crown?" I still thank God for every memory of that man and his preaching.

But you see, apart from the ministry of H. H. Williams, there were other things happening. One of them was the coming of a young man from our church to Cardiff to study pharmacy. He is now Dr. Eifion Evans. In God's sovereignty (God is sovereign in all these things, isn't he?) Eifion was given lodgings with a family who worshipped in the City Temple, and, naturally, he started going to the City Temple with them and he was converted under the ministry of Pastor Brewster. You see, God does things in His own way; you must always know this and realise it. I remember Eifion coming home during his holidays and suddenly realising that there was something different about him. I am slightly older than he is, but we were still big friends. I am choosing my words quite deliberately when I say that not every revival is theologically tidy.

Not always neat and tidy

Now what do you make of that? Listen to this! My wife and I visited Ephesus recently and it reminded me that when Paul came to Ephesus he found that *"A certain Jew, named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man, mighty in the scriptures, came to Ephesus. This man was instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in the spirit, he spake and taught diligently the things of the Lord, knowing only the baptism of John"* [Acts 18:24-25]. That's not theologically neat and tidy, is it? There was something that Apollos didn't know, and so you mustn't be surprised when we come to the following chapter, and this is what we read: *"And it came to pass, that, while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul having passed through the upper coasts came to Ephesus: and finding certain disciples, he said unto them 'Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed?' And they said unto him, 'We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost'"* [Acts 19:1-2]. Well, Apollos had preached to them, so he couldn't tell them about the Holy Ghost. The point I am making is this; God was working, but there were gaps in the theology. I find comfort in that, you know. I was certainly thinking about the things of God, but there were great gaps in my understanding of the Gospel at that time.

There was a man called Edward Wilkins, again from the little church I referred to where people were thrown out

because of the revival; he became a missionary in South Africa for a time. When I was a young boy, my Saturday night was spent in Cross Hands picture-house, and then, with other boys, walking the streets of Cross Hands on what we used to call the 'monkey parade' - looking out for pretty girls. One evening Edward Wilkins was giving out tracts and I took one, and quite unthinkingly put it in my pocket. I happened to have the same clothes on on Sunday night, because mother could only afford one tidy suit for us, and on that Sunday I went into my pocket and I found it and, when I read it, it literally shook me because the title was "God has no Grandchildren". It told me in no uncertain terms that because my mother was a Christian, and she was, it didn't make me a Christian, and that certainly shook me. I went regularly to church, three times on a Sunday. I went to the fellowship meeting, I went to the prayer meeting, I actually prayed there. But I didn't understand what the Gospel really meant, and I had a great shock one evening. Rev. H. H. Williams came to me and asked me: "Gareth, have you ever thought of going into the ministry?" And I said, "No, I've never thought about it." And then he asked me, "Gareth, will you pray about it?" And I said, "I will." And I did. Now my own minister now, Rev. Gwynn Williams, when I told this to him said, "Well, well, I'd never do anything like that." But, as I said, at that time we weren't theologically neat and tidy. Again, I believe that God's sovereignty is in these things, and in the end I decided that I would offer myself as a candidate for the ministry. And, as a result of that, I found myself in Trefeca; and I say that I have at least one thing in common with Hywel Harris - that we were converted somewhere near the same place.

I am glad that Mrs. Eluned Thomas is here, because the one who brought me ultimately to understand the Gospel, and to cry out that God would in mercy because of Christ's death forgive me my sins, was none other than Rev. John Thomas. I am looking forward to seeing John one day. He knew before going to glory that I owed him a great debt. Now the point I am making is this; it might not have been theologically tidy to ask me to consider the ministry but, on the other hand, in God's over-ruling sovereignty, He brought me there to Trefeca, and ultimately brought me to Christ. I am only mentioning Eifion and myself, but I could include others who, with the coming of H. H. Williams, God also brought to a living experience of Christ as Saviour and Lord.

At that time there was great evangelical outreach. There were regular open-air meetings at Cross Hands Square and H. H. Williams had a tremendous voice for preaching in the open air. Let me describe one occasion. There was a lady in our church named Annetta Evans who was married to Gerry Evans. Gerry was suffering from TB after working in the coal mine, and in one meeting when H. H. Williams had preached, Gerry was in the gathering. Suddenly we saw Gerry stepping out and he made a public witness to the fact that he had accepted Christ then, in an open-air meeting, with lots of people around, and I can remember the sense of amazement that filled people when they saw this man standing out for the first time, declaring himself to be a converted man who had received Christ into his life. That is just one example of the evangelical work going on.

I still have a poster of a campaign that was held on 2 April 1952, over 50 years ago, in a little village called Foel Castell, near Cefneithin. Probably Cefneithin is more famous for Carwyn James and the rugby players it produced. By the way, Carwyn James came to some of the meetings and he actually

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spoke for a long time with Dr. Eifion Evans, but never really came to a point, although he was under great conviction during this time. However, we had arranged this campaign, and sometimes I blush to think of what we did at that time! We decided that we'd try and take a loudspeaker system round through Cefneithin, Gorslas and the surrounding area. Eifion Evans had a sister who was much younger than him, and his Mum and Dad had her pram left over, and they very graciously gave it to us. We took the pram away and just kept the chassis of it and put some boarding as the floor of it, and then somebody gave us a battery of a car and we linked up to the system and we went around on the Saturday, just telling people about these meetings. I say that I blush, and I will tell you why. We came to Cefneithin, and outside Tabernacle Congregational Church there was a wedding. It so happened to be the daughter of a cousin of mine - I hadn't been invited - and they were outside having their photographs taken, and we decided, "This is a good place to have an open-air". And we did! Eifion spoke on our Lord's parable of the invitation to the wedding feast and it was tremendous. They didn't object! But I blush to think we ever did such things. But the Lord knew that we did it from a great love towards Him and towards the people as well. We were inviting people to come under the Gospel and to hear the way of salvation, and they came in large numbers.

The first meeting was held after the church service on Sunday night when some of those organising the campaign gave their testimonies. Then on Monday evening Elwyn Davies preached, and a young boy named Alun Treharne was converted. On Tuesday mornings we used to meet for prayer and these times were often remarkable. For example, on one occasion the wife of an elder of our church was reduced to tears, and when another lady tried to console her, she said, "I have been familiar with the things of God all my life - but I have never known Him." But before she left that meeting she knew her God, knew His love, knew the joy of forgiveness and knew the wonder of new life.

I. D. Thomas preached on Tuesday evening and then Eifion Evans followed on Wednesday. He had qualified in pharmacy by this time, but this was the first time he had preached in public, and he based his message on the words, "I know" and "we know". He just chose texts from Scripture which contained these words and spoke on them and, although that might seem like an example of how not to preach a sermon, there was such an unction on his message that the effect was overwhelming. God was certainly there that night and at the end of the meeting hardly anyone left the packed church. One of those converted was a young boy preparing to go to Bangor University - Sulwyn Jones - who later went on to proclaim the Gospel at Hebron in Dowlais. He wrote a letter to a friend of his named Edmund Owen and as a result of

CYNHELIR
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MHENIEL M.C. FOELGASTELL,
MAWRTH 30 HYD EBRILL 2, 1952

Nos Saboth Mawrth 30ain am 8 o'r gloch ar ol yr Oedfa arferol
Annerchir gan nifer o Ieuenctid Testun:
"BETH A DYBYGWCH CHWI AM GRIST."
Nos Lun Mawrth 31ain am 7 o'r gloch. Gwasanaethir gan y
Parch. J. Elwyn Davies, B.A.
Blanaau Ffestiniog.
Nos Fawrth Ebrill 1af am 7 o'r gloch. Gwasanaethir gan y
I. D. E. Thomas, B.A., B.D.,
Glanaman.
Nos Fercher Ebrill 2, am 7 o'r gloch. Gwasanaethir gan
Mr. Eifion Evans, B.Pharm.
Darlithydd mewn Odeleg yn Glasgow.

Cynhelir Oedfa Weddi bob bore am 10.30.
Bob Prynghawn bydd Gwasanaethau yn yr Awyr Agored.
Dowch yn Llu i'r Ymgyrch Hon!

Trwyddi M. Mawrth, Prifysgol, Pen-y-bont

A campaign poster from 1952.

he came to faith also. What happened in those years was to have great repercussions for the work of the gospel in many other places.

One other example happened on the Sunday after the campaign ended. I was due to preach at three churches in Carmarthenshire that day and I had been invited to tea at a farmhouse. While there two young girls at the farmhouse were constantly asking questions about what happened at Foel Castell in the campaign and I told them as much as I could about the campaign. Afterwards, at the evening service, the elders also were most anxious to hear about the campaign and, as I was speaking to them, I was told that one of the girls, Betty Owen, was asking to see me most urgently. After speaking with her, I asked the elders to kneel around her and pray for her in the 'big seat' of the chapel. She was converted that night and accepted Christ as her Saviour and Lord - and soon afterwards her sister

Margaret also came to faith. Clear evidence could be seen of God's power at work in that area and the saints of 1904 who still lived there rejoiced with us in seeing once more something that only God could do.

Constrained to Pray

The reason I share these memories with you is because, as God's people, we need to believe and to look to God, that in His mercy He will do it again - and He will do it again. On our recent visit to Asia Minor it weighed heavily on my heart what John wrote to the seven churches, telling them that unless they repented, God would remove them. And today there is very little evidence that the Gospel had had any power there at all. Those lands that knew great blessing in the book of the Acts of the Apostles are now in great need again. So it is with this land of ours that has seen times of much blessing in the past, but is now in great need. O that God again would come! Come and do what only He can do! May our prayer be that of Habakkuk, "O Lord, revive Thy work . . . in wrath remember mercy" [Habakkuk 3:1]. Let us go on asking God to do what He delights to do, as one of the Puritans wrote, "God's wrath and judgment are His strange activities", but He delights to show mercy to undeserving sinners. We should not ask Him to do it because of us, but because of the sanctity of His Name and the covenant He has made with Christ to give Him a people for Himself. We should pray that there are still many in Wales to be given to Christ, to be His and His alone - so that He shall see the travail of His soul and be satisfied. What God did in a measure in Cross Hands in those days, may He do yet again, and more, to His own glory.

[Transcribed from an address at Heath Church on 1 November 2004.]