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The Need for Revival

Rev. Dafydd Morris

For many Christians today the subject of revival may seem to hold very little appeal and that could be due to the way that ministers have handled the matter. If people, after attending meetings on revival, are left as it were suspended in mid-air, knowing that revival cannot be worked up but not helped any further, then that can lead to a sense of frustration and hopelessness. Therefore speaking on revival carries a responsibility to do so helpfully and constructively. But there is a deeper, more fundamental problem than the failure of speakers to handle the subject properly, and that is that many Christians do not really see the need for revival. Some may have an historical interest in revival, particularly in Wales where they can hardly fail to come across the phenomenon in the past. Also anecdotes about revival abound and they can create perhaps a romanticised fondness for accounts of large crowds, great meetings and great preaching. But all of that might still leave us without any personal, burning desire for revival now. Our interest in revival may not be for the right reason and for the best reason.

Again, we cannot fail to see the need for revival for the sake of unsaved people outside the church - for those masses in a society that is deteriorating in a steep decline. So that, when we gather as Christians and discuss the situation, it is easy to conclude that the *world* desperately needs revival. However when it comes to the church, even amongst evangelicals, there is not a widespread view that it is the church, God's people, who need revival, who need it first and foremost, and indeed who need it more than anyone else - because they bear the Lord's Name!

Realisation of the Need

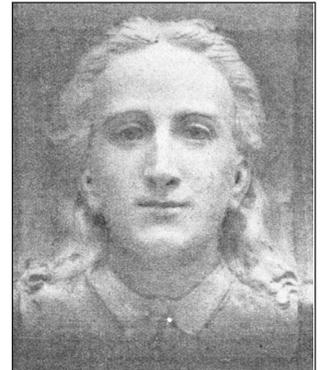
In order to realise the need for revival there must be a revolutionary change of attitude. To take examples from Scripture, surely the state of the church at Laodicea would have been patently obvious to the members there. It was in a lukewarm condition, not completely dead, but neither was it full of spiritual vigour and energy. It was jogging along, but the tragedy was that the church members thought that things were fine. Their attitude was, "*I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing*", but that was a wrong estimate which showed they were completely deluded, and it was directly opposite to Christ's estimate, "*thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked*" [Revelation 3:17]. So there was a double tragedy - to be in a poor state was bad enough to begin with, and then not to know it made it doubly tragic. Now that problem can apply to us as individuals as well as churches - we can be in a poor spiritual state and not know it!

Or consider the example of Ephraim who was told through the prophet Hosea, "*Strangers have devoured his strength, and he knoweth it not; yea, grey hairs are here and there upon him, yet he knoweth it not*" [Hosea 7:9]. It is a pathetic picture of a man grown old and decrepit but not able to recognise it - he thinks he is still twenty-one!

Again, in the time of Esther there was a plot to exterminate the Jews and Mordecai became aware of it. It was a dire situation that was a critical point for their whole nation and Mordecai resolved to persuade Esther to petition the king so that the Jews might be spared. So he put on sackcloth to appear before the queen, but she was grieved to see him dressed like that and sent him finer clothes that were more appropriate for attending the royal court. Esther did not appreciate the seriousness of the danger and she felt rather insulted by Mordecai's sackcloth garments. So he had great difficulty in convincing her of the dire nature of the situation. In the same

way we can feel offended or annoyed when we hear others pray about their low spiritual condition and bewail the poor state of the church. We feel they should be more positive, not recognising the urgency and the scale of the problem facing us.

There is another example in one of the letters of Ann Griffiths (1776-1805) which she wrote to John Hughes who was her spiritual mentor.



Ann Griffiths

Commenting on the state of the 'seiat', the fellowship meeting, at her chapel at Pontrobert, she asked, "*Is this Naomi?*" quoting the words of the inhabitants of Bethlehem who hardly recognised her when she returned from Moab with Ruth. Because of the sorrows and tragedies she had been through, and feeling tired, hungry and bedraggled after her long journey, her appearance was so changed that they asked in astonishment, "*Is this Naomi?*" Ann Griffiths was asking this about the 'seiat' which had declined in spiritual life and power to a point where it was barely recognisable, and if she could ask such a question in her day-a period regarded as the 'golden years' in the religious life of Wales-then what about us in our day? At least Naomi was aware of her condition; she said, "*Call me Mara: for the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me. I went out full, and the Lord hath brought me home again empty*" [Ruth 1:20-21]. That was her experience, a very bitter one, and she knew it only too well. One might think that our spiritual condition is so obviously low that we do not need any revelation of it, but sadly we do. It may seem strange, but in spiritual matters we must have the Holy Spirit to show us where we stand and what we really are.

Revelation of the Need

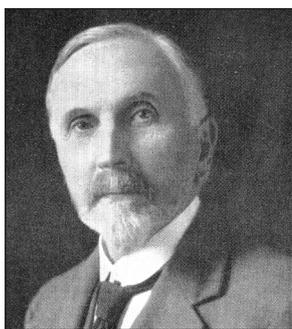
To impress this point still further, consider the text which we may find the most embarrassing in the whole Bible, "*He that believeth on Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living waters*" [John 7:38]. Can any one of us honestly claim that to be true of them? Is the Holy Spirit overflowing out of us in rivers? Does blessing reach far and wide, and fertility, abundance and prosperity follow in our wake wherever we go, whatever we do and say, affecting other people and bringing an abundance of blessing? We happily live with that text in our Bibles and it does not disturb us at all really - until the Holy Spirit says, "What about you?" Is this just theory or is it supposed to happen? It is so obvious when we actually see it, but we can go on for a long time with texts such as "*Ye are my epistles known and read of all men*" [2 Corinthians 3:2] and fail to realise that the writing of our lives has become rather faint and illegible. We are supposed to have the aroma of Christ about us, and the background Paul referred to in 2 Corinthians 2:15-16 was the custom of victorious Roman armies returning home in triumph. As they paraded through the capital with their spoils of war and captured enemies there were great celebrations, and the aroma of burning incense was to the victors the smell of rejoicing, but to the captives it was the smell of defeat and death. So the aroma of Christ in the life of His people is to some the savour of life and it is attractive to them, but to others it is the savour of death and they find it repulsive and they reject it. But we find that people are neither attracted nor repulsed by our lives-we are bland, innocuous, unremarkable and unnoticed.

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Accounts have been written of men who lived in the Machynys district of Llanelli years ago in whose lives there was a marked difference. Men such as Glyn Roberts, a house painter whose every word and deed had the pungent spiritual aroma of Christian witness that was most attractive. Or Eddie John, a tinplate worker whose work-mates warned others not to sit by him in the canteen at mealtimes or they would be converted. But some did and were saved, while others gave him a wide berth and kept away. His speech and whole manner were attractive to some and repulsive to others. He gave all his time and energy to other people - visiting the sick and dying, neglected people and gypsies, gathering up to a hundred children in his small terraced house for a Sunday school because many were too ragged and poor to be seen going to the chapels. Where spreading the Gospel was concerned, he thought nothing of respectability and nothing was too much trouble - he was that kind of shining Christian. Another example was an old sea captain named Lambert Jenkins who reached a great age and lived in a residential home. The other residents complained that he kept them awake at night by praising the Lord and rejoicing so loudly. Despite his age and infirmity he was *"rejoicing with joy unspeakable and full of glory"* [1 Peter 1:8] - another text we find embarrassing.

Why do we need revival? Quite simply because we are not like those men, and although some may protest that we can't all be like that because we can only be ourselves, we can't wriggle out of it with such excuses. Even in comparison with Christians we have known or read about, we don't come out very well, let alone in comparison with the standards we find in Scripture. If we take areas of Christian life such as doctrine, practice and experience we find that we are weak in all departments and, in some respects, woefully ignorant. Take as an example the subject "Manifestations of the Lord Jesus Christ", which causes people to look quizzically as if it was something new to them; but the sense of the coming of the Lord Jesus to a person is not a new experience at all, although it is unfamiliar to many Christians today.

Consider the experience of Keri Evans in 1904. He was professor of philosophy at Bangor University and he recorded that one morning he went to his study for his usual



Keri Evans

time of prayer before breakfast. Feeling moody and dull of spirit, all he hoped was that God would help him to overcome his sluggishness, but he later wrote, "Instead of what I was expecting, I was baptised with streams of life-giving, cleansing, transforming power for about half an hour that made me feel clean and healthy and joyous to the very depths of my being. I had no need of tea or coffee to clear my head. It was an experience so wonderfully delightful and refreshing that I

sought it again on the morrow with the same result - and so it continued for twenty years til my health broke down in 1924. It was sometimes more powerful, sometimes less, sometimes freer, sometimes less free, but as a rule it richly rewarded faith and perseverance. I was sometimes kept on my knees for an hour, occasionally for hours and they were without question the golden hours of the day for me."

We are not familiar with experiences like that are we? When did anyone last ask us, "Why are you so hopeful? Everyone around you is complaining but your faith is shining - why is that? What have you got?" When did anyone ask us that? Has anyone ever asked us that? As believers our deficiencies are endless, but the Lord has got to reveal these things to us before we see our real state before Him.

Response to the Need

While we know we cannot manufacture revival or work it up, we have to respond to the need for revival. When king Solomon prayed at the dedication of the temple he foresaw times when there would be all kinds of departures from the Lord-sins and backslidings which God would consequently judge. Therefore Solomon asked God beforehand to have mercy at such times in the future, and God heard his prayer and answered, *"If my people, which are called by My name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and heal their land"* [2 Chronicles 7:14]. There is good reason to believe that the church at the present time is under God's judgment and therefore the main concern of His people should be to be rightly related to Him once more because we have offended Him. There is a whole package of things we need to do-humbling, repentance, prayer-and they should receive our utmost attention.

If we just focus on the first requirement-humbling ourselves-we have to admit that this is not a familiar exercise amongst Christians in our days, yet it pervades the whole of Scripture. Surely we desire God's felt presence in our midst? But God says, *"I dwell in the high and holy place, with him that is of a contrite and humble spirit"* [Isaiah 57:15]. Or again, *"God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble"* and *"Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time"* [1 Peter 5:5-6] and *"Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He shall lift you up"* [James 4:10].

The first step towards humbling ourselves is to acknowledge our true state, not simply to realise it, but to admit it. Our tendency is to cover it up, to excuse it or to compare ourselves with others who are in a worse condition. That is always a popular thing to do because we can feel quite comfortable by saying the dreadful state of the world is nothing to do with us, it's someone else's problem. But if we read Jeremiah's Lamentations we are given a graphic picture of what it is like to be under God's judgment and, although he speaks about his physical state, it is a reflection of being under God's displeasure spiritually. Jeremiah says, *"He hath also broken my teeth with gravel stones, He hath covered me with ashes,"* and after mentioning his *"affliction and misery, the wormwood and the gall,"* he adds, *"My soul hath then still in remembrance, and is humbled in me"* [Lamentations 3:16-20]. How could anyone in that condition feel proud? Jeremiah had a sight of himself, and he acknowledged it, and it humbled him. The same was true of Nehemiah in captivity in Babylon. When he heard of Jerusalem's ruinous state, with broken walls and burned gates, the effect on him was profound. He sat down and wept, and fasted and mourned and prayed. He acknowledged the situation was desperate and he was deeply humbled.

Another vital ingredient of humbling ourselves is confessing that we don't know what to do. When king Jehoshaphat of Judah was faced with the armies of Moab and Ammon, he prayed to God, *"We have no might against this great company . . . neither know we what to do: but our eyes are upon Thee"* [2 Chronicles 20:12]. That is a remarkable statement because kings are supposed to know what to do, and it runs absolutely counter to the ingenuity of our flesh to confess our helplessness. It is deeply ingrained in our human nature to try and find a way out of our difficulties, to call on our own resources and to devise schemes to solve our problems. But we have to come to God and say we have no tricks that will work and no resources to plug the gap. All the technical equipment and visual aids, all the promotional material and the modern methods available to churches today cannot make up for the lack of true blessing. We can have all these things, together with the most talented minister in the land or from abroad, but they will not make up for the withdrawing of the Lord's presence from us. Even to think in such terms is deeply dishonouring to God and no matter what we are urged to adopt in order to be 'modern' and not to be 'left

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behind', what we really need is God **Himself**. Never have we had so many resources and aids, yet never have we been so spiritually poor! We have to come to God with Jehoshaphat's admission, "We know not what to do: but our eyes are upon Thee." That in itself is humbling.

We also need to remember that during our life as Christians there are so many tokens of God's goodness and faithfulness towards us - and that too should humble us. When Jeremiah acknowledged his dreadful condition in Babylon, he added, "*It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed*", because he knew that he deserved far worse. As far as our sins are concerned we should be in hell if we received our deserts, but we are not, and we can say with Jeremiah, "*because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is Thy faithfulness*" [Lamentations 3:22-23] and that is a humbling thing to realise. Even in a time of judgment, even in a wilderness, there are many tokens of His unfailing goodness to us. God still speaks to us, we still have His Word in our Bibles, we have sweet times of worship and fellowship with Him, and these are 'mercy drops' that should humble us.

Yet there is more to consider - our position in Christ has not altered. When Paul reminded the Christians at Ephesus that they had been chosen in Christ "*before the foundation of the world*" he was looking into past eternity. What an amazing thing! But he also reminded them what they had been chosen for - "*that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love!*" [Ephesians 1:4]. That takes us to the other end of election in one great sweep. We are the most blessed people if we stand in the Lord Jesus Christ because we are caught up in the eternal purposes of God and in the whole matter of the reunification of the universe. When everything is brought again under the headship of the Lord Jesus Christ we will have a part in that. The Lord has prepared an inheritance for us in the future and God has decreed that we shall have it and nothing will keep us out of it. The Holy Spirit has been sent as a seal upon us from time into eternity, and the very thought of all that this means is truly humbling.

How does Scripture speak of the Christian? - in the most valuable terms possible. They are called God's children, the most treasured possession of any parent, not distant relatives, but His children. He calls them His spouse - one who is loved intimately and passionately, His bride whom He is determined at all costs to have for Himself and for whom He paid the ultimate price, His own life-blood. Christians are called God's portion and inheritance, and that also is a wonderful thing. It is remarkable to think that God is our inheritance, but it is more wonderful still to realise that God considers us to be **His** inheritance. An inheritance is something valuable to be looked forward to in the future - and that is how the Lord thinks of us, His church. We are vessels of God, brimful of mercy and He could not have done more for us than to give us His best, His only Son, and that He should die for us on the Cross. Surely a consideration of these things should humble us? Certainly we need to pray and repent as well, but to humble ourselves in His sight is essential.

The Hope of Revival

It is a great encouragement to know that God specialises in hopeless cases. There may be no earthly solution, but God is attracted to weakness not strength, as we see over and over again in Scripture. Take the example of Mephibosheth who was an outcast, lame and under constant fear because he was Saul's grandson, and the usual practice in statecraft was to dispose of any remaining relatives as potential rivals. And so David inquired, "*Is there yet any that is left of the house of Saul?*" and when he learned about Mephibosheth and his crippled condition, still alive in Lo-debar - a place of no bread - he sent for him to be brought to the royal court. Now David could have easily exterminated him but he said, "*that I may show the kindness of God to him*", and Mephibosheth had all his family lands restored to him and he dined at the king's table continually [2 Samuel 9]. It is a picture of mercy and grace towards those who are weak and cannot help themselves.

The same principle is found in the parable of the Good Samaritan, which is ultimately a representation of the Lord Jesus Christ. The poor unfortunate man who had been beaten and robbed wasn't told to pull himself together and get on his way - no, the Samaritan "*came to where he was*" - what a blessed phrase! The man was down, out and helpless, and the Samaritan had to do everything for him - attend to his injuries, lift him on to his own beast, take him to a safe place, pay for his care and treatment, and make sure he would recover fully [Luke 10:30-36].



Christmas Evans

This can be seen repeatedly in church history. When Charles Haddon Spurgeon went to New Park Street chapel in Southwark in 1854 he was only nineteen and, although it had known great times, the congregation had dwindled. Yet later when he reviewed his time there he could say, "When they were at their **worst**, the Lord remembered them." Or think of what God did at Llwynrhwydown, a church teetering on the brink of Arianism; but out of that hopeless situation He called Christmas Evans and David Davies to be mighty preachers of the Gospel. As a young man Christmas Evans started preaching borrowed sermons and praying borrowed prayers and in our judgment we would have advised him to go back to farm labouring because he had mistaken his calling. But God does not act like that; He can bring life from the dead. When Richard Williams of Brynengwan was preaching at Hafod-y-llan

farmhouse on a Sunday evening, the meeting was treated as a social occasion and many young people talked together in and around the building. Williams had no gifts as a preacher but after a quarter of an hour the Holy Spirit came upon him with such power that he felt as if someone else was using his voice, and his listeners said they heard "an angel speaking, not a man".



Hafod-y-llan Farmhouse

Jairus's daughter had only just died, the widow of Nain's son was being taken for burial, and Lazarus had been dead for three days, but none of them was beyond the power of the Lord Jesus Christ. Each was a glorious opportunity to bring life from the dead. That is the central theme of Scripture and that is what revival is. At the centre of the Christian message is the death of the Lord Jesus Christ, but that cannot be separated from His resurrection to life. What is the starting point of Christian experience? "*And you hath He quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins*" [Ephesians 2:1]. That is the first thing that happens - regeneration, life from the dead. What is the Christian hope - "*He that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live*" [John 11:25]. The whole work of salvation is to bring life from the dead - and that is what revival is as well.

Do we see ourselves as people who are prime candidates for God to do this amongst us? And to see it individually and admit that there is too much of death about me as a Christian? And that God should come and do the impossible? God has said, "*Behold, O My people, I will open your graves and cause you to come up out of your graves*" [Ezekiel 37:12] and He will do it for His own Name's sake and for the reputation and honour of His Son, and for the good of the body of Christ. May we live to see it in our day for it is our greatest need.

(Transcribed from an address at Heath Church by Rev. Dafydd Morris of Carmarthen on 1 March, 2004).