



SERMONS

by

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My last sermon as the Vice-President of the Methodist Church UK, preached at Wesley Chapel.

“A CALL FOR REVIVAL”

What does revival mean to you? According to Martyn Lloyd Jones, a Welsh Protestant Minister, “Revival, above everything else, is a glorification of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God. It is the restoration of Him to the center of the life of the Church.”

According to the latest Census research, for the first time, fewer than half of the people in England and Wales describe themselves as Christian. The proportion of people who said they were Christians has dropped by 13% since the last census in 2011. That means we have a big job on our hands.

Contrarily, in many parts of the world, the Methodist Church is growing with a strong emphasis on Wesleyan teaching. Donald English, the only President of the Conference to hold office twice, once stated that it was the early Methodists’ holiness that gave them their power: not that they claimed to be holy, but they longed to be holy.

The church has grown in the past in this country and continued to grow across the world because it has been embedded right in the heart of key institutions such as politics and education. The fruits are in places that are still pursuing what we stood for. The fruit of our neglect of the Holy Spirit is the secret of the church decline and society’s moral decadence.

One great characteristic of revival is a powerful sense of the presence of God. A reading from the journal of John Wesley - 1st January 1739:

"Mr. Hall, Kinchin, Ingham, Whitefield, Hutchins, and my brother Charles were present at our love-feast at Fetter Lane, with about sixty of our brethren. About three in the morning, as we were continuing instant in prayer, the power of God came mightily upon us, inasmuch that many cried out for exceeding joy, and many fell to the ground. As soon as we were recovered a little from that awe and amazement at the presence of His majesty, we broke out with one voice: 'We praise Thee, O God; we acknowledge Thee to be the Lord.'"

The waves of revival had come crashing down upon these shores. This renewed sense of the Presence of God and the Power of the Holy Spirit would propel Wesley towards Kingswood in Bristol, where he would famously preach to the miners in the open air, to great effect.

Friends, I want to draw our attention to the Bible reading (Acts 2:4-21) from the book of Acts. This event represents the birth of Christianity. To offer a bit of context, prior to this event, Jesus promised the disciples that they would receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on them.

Fast forward, during the Jewish festival of Pentecost, all of Jesus’ disciples were gathered together. The City of Jerusalem was alive with people from all walks of life, including Jews who had settled there from all over the empire. It was a special day, but Jesus’ followers were separate from the festivities. They wanted to receive the power of the Holy Spirit.

Suddenly, they discovered through the Holy Spirit that God seeks an intimate relationship with us. Notice that on the day of Pentecost, the people in the upper room were of one accord. Boundaries and walls were broken. Friends, I submit to us that we need to come together with one voice. I submit to us that Jesus needs to be at the center of everything.

After the day of Pentecost, the disciples went on to evangelize, and as many as 3,000 became followers of Jesus on a single occasion.

Over the years, I have been praying in my heart, yearning for revival because I know that deep down the survival of our beloved Church depends on it. Now for this to happen, as a Church, we must repent from our sins and wait upon God for His essential outpouring Spirit.

Only then can our churches be lifted out of spiritual indifference and worldliness into earnest desires for more of Christ. As a church and society, we have become overly dependent on the strength of the flesh – overly dependent on our human wisdom – overly dependent on books instead of the Bible. You see any Church that ignores the power of the Holy Spirit will plunge into dissolution.

To Wesley, the main danger of the time was formalism... ‘mere outside religion.’ Wesley was not anti-intellectual but had a concern for people twisting and investing doctrinal orthodoxy into ‘a strategy for avoiding the presence of God.’

We must be a church of sound teaching. We have much to offer the world, but we need the power of the Holy Spirit in everything. You see, mighty works have a voice, and it is very loud especially when it comes to evangelism and discipleship.

We need to develop a more authentic message about the gospel. We need to find ways to revive the things that were the bedrock of Methodism.

In our second Bible reading, like the disciples, John the Baptist was in a waiting period of his faith. He was in a difficult place (in Herod’s dungeon prison) about to get beheaded and was looking for someone to save him from his troubles.

“² When John, who was in prison, heard about the deeds of the Messiah, he sent his disciples ³ to ask him, “Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?”

It is fair to say that John the Baptist was highly regarded. You see, waiting can be difficult for all of us. Sometimes I wonder, what I would have done if I were in his position – feeling defeated and possibly depressed.

“¹¹ Truly I tell you, among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet whoever is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.”

For some, John’s question suggests that he feared he had everything wrong. Surely you can understand what it feels like, right? He came to proclaim that God’s messenger was on his way and

identified Jesus as that messenger after Baptizing Him, and yet he himself is now imprisoned, and feeling helpless – was it all a mistake?

However, in reality, all the evidence was there. While John had been positive about the identity of the Messiah (see 3:14; John 1:29), he was evidently expecting a final judgment, which will take place at the consummation in the Age to come. In truth, John was looking for hope, an extra motivation to wait faithfully for revival in prison. He was seeking reassurance from Jesus. He needed a revival. He was longing to know that quality and depth of spiritual reality – to see the prophecy fulfilled.

In response, Jesus replied: *“⁴Go back and report to John what you hear and see: ⁵The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor. ⁶ Blessed is anyone who does not stumble on account of me.”*

This morning I believe the Lord is asking us: are we prepared to wait faithfully for revival like our forebears did? Friends, we need to revive the Wesleyan fire now more than ever in all areas of our church.

Like John the Baptist, our faith can at times become wobbly. We can begin to doubt God when things are difficult. We can begin to doubt if Jesus is the promised Messiah. And if we focus too much on the challenges, it can make it difficult at times to remain faithful. But that is exactly what is being asked of us today.

In Jesus’ response to John, He’s inviting us to remain faithful while seeking for revival. To look beyond our current suffering and fear to recognize that God is at work as sickness and exclusion are ended and hope offered to those in need. He’s inviting us to work through doubt and learn to trust Him more.

As I draw to the end of my message, dear Forebears, Dear Holy Spirit, I ask that you don’t turn your ears from us. We know you can hear us, help us. We are sorry. Holy Spirit, grant us your power. Move among us again.

Dear John and Charles, Graham and I presidency is slowly coming to an end. Just under five weeks to go. I am glad to report about the very recent Asbury University revival. It gladdens my heart to be here but I cannot hide how much we long to see this Church on fire again. We’re not satisfied with the state of the Church at present. We long for our young people’s hearts to be strangely warmed. Hugh and Williams, we need an abundance outpouring of the Holy Spirit in this country, we long to see again a move of the Holy Spirit as you saw on Mow Cop.

Sovereign God, we are deeply aware that, in seeking the revival and extension of your work, the great thing to be desired is an abundant effusion of the Holy Spirit on ourselves and our families, our Societies, and our Congregations. We solemnly, humbly, and earnestly pray for that blessing; grant us the desire to ‘continue with one accord in prayer and supplication’ ‘until the Spirit be poured upon us from on high, and the wilderness becomes a fruitful field, and the fruitful field be counted for a forest’. This we ask for your glory alone, in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord; **Amen.**