

Sam Storms
Bridgeway Church
March 31, 2019

When the Spirit Comes with Power (The Great Welsh Revival of 1904-06)

On Sunday, Christmas Day, 1904, Dr. G. Campbell Morgan, pastor of Westminster Chapel in downtown London, England, delivered a somewhat unusual sermon. Contrary to his normal practice of expounding a passage of Scripture, he proceeded to tell his people about the remarkable things that the Holy Spirit was doing at that very time in Wales.

G. Campbell Morgan was a perceptive man, a conservative, sane, balanced, and highly respected pastor. Having heard that revival had broken out in Wales, and unwilling to accept anything on hearsay, he personally travelled to Wales to observe firsthand for himself, what, if anything, God was doing. Upon returning, he said this on that Christmas Day in 1904,

“I say to you today, beloved, without any hesitation, that this whole thing is of God, that it is a visitation in which He is making men conscious of Himself, without any human agency” (Shaw, 78).

What was God doing in the tiny country of Wales? What was it that G. Campbell Morgan saw and heard? Simply put, it was revival, genuine, authentic, heaven-sent revival. So, today, like Morgan, I am going to deviate from my normal practice of expounding a text (once every 11 years won't hurt!), and describe for you what God was doing in Wales. Why? Not out of mere historical curiosity, I can assure you. I am doing this because my fervent and daily prayer is that God would do it again, right here in Oklahoma City.

Evan Roberts

The principal human agent used by God in the Welsh revival was Evan Roberts. Roberts was born on June 8, 1878, and died in 1951. He began working in the coal mines when he was 12, but soon felt the call to study for the ministry. He immersed himself in the study of the Bible. Roberts was 26 years old when revival broke out. He had been praying for it every day for 13 years. Let me mention three things about Roberts.

First, he had a remarkable encounter with God that served to prepare him for what God was about to do.

“One Friday night last spring, when praying by my bedside before retiring, I was taken up to a great expanse – without time and space. It was communion with God. ***Before this I had a far-off God.*** I was frightened that night but never since. So great was my shivering that I rocked the bed, and my brother, being awakened, took hold of me, thinking I was ill. After that experience I was awakened every night, a little after one o'clock. This was most strange, for through the years I slept like a rock, and no disturbance in my room would awaken me. From that hour I was taken up into the divine fellowship for about four hours. What it was I cannot tell you, except that it was divine. About five o'clock I was again allowed to sleep on till about nine. At this time I was again taken up into the same experience as in the earlier hours of the morning until about twelve or one o'clock. . . . This went on for three months” (Shaw, 49).

Second, Roberts was not a brilliant speaker or preacher, yet his audiences were captivated by his words. “What is the secret of the spell he wields over that audience? Is it learning or eloquence . . .? Nothing of the kind. The secret of his power is that he is ‘full of faith and love and zeal and the Holy Spirit’” (Shaw, 117).

He was simple, plain, and unimpressive so that God might get all the credit and glory for what happened. Roberts dreaded publicity, newspaper reporters, and shunned praise and adulation. If he ever sensed that the people had come to see or hear him only, he would withdraw and refuse to preach. He refused to be photographed. He was convinced that if people focused on him and not Christ that the Holy Spirit would immediately withdraw his presence.

Third, he was filled with joy! Someone remarked that the most striking feature of the revival “is the joyousness and radiant happiness of the evangelist. It has been remarked that the very essence of his campaign is mirth. To the rank and file of the church ministers this is his most incomprehensible phase. They have always regarded religion as

something iron-bound, severe, even terrible. Evan Roberts (on the other hand) smiles when he prays, laughs when he preaches. 'Ah, it is a grand life,' he cries. 'I am happy, so happy that I could walk on the air'" (Shaw, 11).

The Occasion and Cause of Revival

Some point to the beginning of the revival at New Quay, Cardiganshire, on Sunday morning in February of 1904. It was during a prayer meeting being led by pastor Joseph Jenkins. Jenkins asked for personal testimonies. Some tried to speak on other issues, but Jenkins redirected their focus to the Lord. There was prolonged silence. Then suddenly a young girl named Florrie Evans rose to her feet and spoke softly, with a trembling voice: "***I love the Lord Jesus with all my heart!***" A journalist named W. T. Stead who was present that day wrote this:

"The pathos and the passion of the avowal (of that young girl) acted like an electric shock upon the congregation. One after another rose and made the full surrender, and the news spread like wildfire from place to place that the Revival had broken out, and that souls were being ingathered to the Lord" (RR, 31-32).

Similar incidents, unrelated to each other, suddenly broke out all over the land.

What was the cause of it all? While there are many answers, most believed it was the result of ***earnest, agonizing prayer, couple with heart-broken humility***. Evan Roberts had prayed daily for 13 years. There were numerous prayer groups in Wales that had prayed for the previous 1 ½ years. One observer said:

"If it be asked why the fire of God fell on Wales, the answer is simple: Fire falls where it is likely to catch and spread. As one has said, 'Wales provided the necessary tinder.' Here were thousands of believers unknown to each other, in small towns and villages and great cities, crying to God day after day for the fire of God to fall. ***This was not merely a 'little talk with Jesus,' but daily, agonizing intercession***" (JS, 75).

G. Campbell Morgan put it this way:

"If you and I could stand above Wales, looking at it, you would see fire breaking out here, and there, and yonder, and somewhere else, without any collusion or prearrangement. It is a Divine visitation in which God – let me say this reverently – in which God is saying to us: See what I can do without the things you are depending on; see what I can do in answer to a praying people; see what I can do through the simplest, who are ready to fall in line, and depend wholly and absolutely upon Me" (Shaw, 76).

One thing is clear: the revival was not the product of someone's personality or of another person's preaching or of anyone's planning, but of God's gracious response to the prayers of his people!

8 Characteristics of the Revival: What happened?

(1) The revival broke out and spread without any advertisement or commercials or posters telling of the meetings that were being held. There was no publicity to speak of; no fanfare. What then brought the people to the meetings? The Holy Spirit! One researcher said: "I have scanned newspapers of Wales which came out in 1904-05 and found no paid advertisements there announcing the meetings" (JS, 10-11). Not one dollar was spent promoting the revival.

(2) People were saved! Approximately 70,000 came to faith in Christ in the first two months and over 100,000 during the course of the revival. There are numerous stories of remarkable conversions. Here are a few.

On one particular night the prayers of God's people intensified to such a degree that at midnight a number of men formed themselves into a praying "Get-them-out-of-bed-brigade." Within an hour three men in particular were awakened from sleep "so miserable in bed that they dressed hurriedly and came on to the service and yielded to Christ there and then" (Shaw, 18).

Another story is told of a young man in Cardiff who had walked out on his family. They hadn't seen or heard from him in three years. One night he showed up at the very service where his father and his mother were praying for him. "His father knelt at his side to help him to Jesus, but the son did not recognize him till they both rose to give praise!

They then went together to find the mother, who in another part of the chapel was earnestly praying for her lost boy, and who was totally oblivious of anything and anyone around her” (Shaw, 20). The joy of everyone present was ecstatic.

In one town there was a society of atheists, agnostics, and skeptics who stood opposed to everything Christian. Their leader was a man named Tom Hughes, who could hear the singing of worshipers in the chapel down the street from his house. The Spirit drew him to the meetings on three consecutive nights until on the fourth he laid hold of Jesus by faith. The story continues:

“At 11 p.m. he left the chapel, and went home. His wife saw at a glance that a change had come over him, and that he was in great distress. He went to his little parlor and took down from his shelves one by one the books he had so prized . . . and flung them on the table. Then with great deliberation and with intense emotion he took up one at a time, tore it in pieces and made a bonfire of the whole lot in his own fireplace. As the flames shot up the chimney, and the blaze increased, his wife said: ‘Tom! Tom! What’s the matter! You’ve lost your balance. You’ll put the place on fire!’

‘Nothing of the kind, my dear,’ he said. ‘The Master, who has kept us safe through all these years while these cursed books were under my roof, will certainly take care of us tonight while I am destroying them.’ . . . Afterwards he said: ‘As I was watching them I was under the impression that the angels of God were there blowing the bellows and fanning the flames for me.’ The work of destruction over, he said, ‘Now I am going back to the chapel, to give myself up to Christ.’

‘Tom! Tom! Do be cooler, and act like a reasonable man,’ [cried his wife in protest]. ‘No, no,’ he said. ‘I’ve been a so-called reasonable man long enough, and now I’ve lost my reason entirely, as people will tell you, and it’s time I did’” (Shaw, 129-30).

By this time all six of Tom Hughes’ children were awakened and came to see what was happening. Tom led them in singing praises until 3:00 in the morning. On the next day he showed up for work and everyone could see the change in this former atheist. “In the evening the news spread through the little town like wildfire, ‘Tom Hughes is a captive for Christ!’ And when halfway through the evening service his presence was recognized by the congregation, their jubilation was indescribable, and their [joyful singing] rang through the building again and again” (Shaw, 130-31).

During one meeting a well-known skeptic in the town interrupted Evan Roberts as he preached. “I want to ask a question,” he shouted. Roberts ignored him. “I want to ask a question,” he yelled angrily again. “If you do not answer me, I will come to pulpit to ask my question.” Everyone ignored him, so he began to make his way to the pulpit to confront Roberts. An eyewitness to the event described what happened next:

“As in the case of Saul of Tarsus, on the Damascus Road, the Holy Spirit overpowered this man – he would have collapsed on the stairs had not the people upheld him – constraining him to cry out for mercy and pardon. What a scene followed! When the people realized the full import of what had happened, the shout went up, ‘He has been saved! He has been saved!’”

(3) There was a noticeable absence of preaching during the revival, not because it was devalued but because great preaching had preceded and precipitated the move of the Spirit. As one man said, “These people, all the people in a land like ours, are taught to death, preached to insensibility” (Shaw, 29). The time had come for response!

(4) There was an intense passion for Jesus. On several occasions during a meeting people could be heard crying out: “No more, Lord Jesus, or I die!” The point is that you *want* revival when you pray for more of Christ. You are *in* revival when you’ve got so much of him that you feel compelled to say, “No more, lest I die.”

(5) There was a remarkable, widespread passion for singing. When one man was asked if he thought the revival could spread to other countries, he replied: “Can the people sing? That is the question to be answered before you can decide that. Hitherto the revival has not strayed beyond the track of the singing people. It has followed the line of song, not of preaching” (Shaw, 28).

G. Campbell Morgan was stunned by the energy of their worship. “No books, but, oh my, I nearly wept tonight over the singing of our last hymn. . . . When these Welshmen sing, they sing the words like men who believe them. They abandon themselves to their singing. We sing as though we thought it would not be respectable to be heard by the man next to us. No choir, did I say? It was all choir! And hymns! I stood and listened in wonder and amazement as that congregation on that night sang hymn after hymn, long hymns, sung through without hymn-books” (Shaw, 75).

Another described it this way:

“The fact is, unless heard, it is unimaginable and when heard [it is] indescribable. There was no hymnbook. . . . Just anybody started the singing, and very rarely did it happen that the hymn started – no one knew by whom – was out of harmony with the mood at that moment. Once started, as if moved by a simultaneous impulse, the hymn was caught up by the whole congregation almost as if what was about to be sung had been announced and all were responding to the baton of a visible human leader. I have seen nothing like it. You felt that the thousand or fifteen hundred persons before you had become merged into one myriad-headed, but simple-souled, personality. Such as the perfect blending of the mood and purpose that it bore eloquent testimony to a unity created only by the Spirit of God” (JS, 17).

Another said: “Such marvelous singing, quite extemporaneous, could only be created by a supernatural power, and that power the divine Holy Spirit. No choir, no conductor, no organ – just spontaneous, anointed soul-singing!” (RR, 39).

Often while many were praying, others broke into quiet song: “Oh, send the Holy Spirt, Lord!” “The effect of this soft musical accompaniment to the prayers of several voices cannot be described. It is deeply impressive, and often leads the soul into a quiet ecstasy that is truly of Heaven” (Shaw, 24).

(6) Another feature was *the overwhelming sense of God’s presence*. One pastor said: “If one were asked to describe in a word the outstanding feature of those days, one would unhesitatingly reply that it was a *universal, inescapable sense of the presence of God*. The Lord had come down! A sense of the Lord’s presence was everywhere. It pervaded, nay, it created the spiritual atmosphere” (COP, 79).

Said another: “Eternal issues were discussed freely and unashamedly, and above all, a sense of the presence and holiness of God pervaded every area of human experience, at home, at work in shops and public houses. *Eternity seemed inescapably near and real*” (RR, 37).

(7) There was great *emotional intensity*. F. B. Meyers describes a typical service:

“They who merely read such descriptions as this may think that the meetings are characterized by emotional excitement. But that is not the case. There are undoubtedly strong excitement and deep emotion, but these are well under control; and beneath all that can be accounted for by the influence of highly exalted moods of soul on other minds, it is undeniable that the power of God is working after the fashion of those wonderful scenes of which our fathers have told us in 1859” (Shaw, 66-7).

Yet another described it this way:

“Let it not be suspected that we are afraid of all stir and excitement. The greatest and best actions have [always] been performed in stages of excited feeling and high personal exaltation. Nothing was ever achieved in the way of great and radical changes in men or communities without some degree of excitement; and if anyone expects to carry on the cause of salvation by a steady rolling on the same dead level, and fears continually lest the axles wax hot and kindle into a flame, he is too [fainthearted] to hold the reins in the Lord’s chariot” (Shaw, 56).

Another pastor describes the emotional impact of the revival:

“I have no more doubt of its being a work of God than I have of my own existence. As to describing the revival and estimating its results, can you put in words those deep and hallowed experiences of life realized

when God meets you almost palpably and sways your whole being cross-ward, heavenward, and the atmosphere trembles with light, life, love, joy, praise, reverence, [and] awe?" (Shaw, 92).

Again:

"No wonder the people could not sleep and could not stay away from the meetings. No wonder the services carried on till two and three o'clock in the morning and then resulted in a march through the streets with the people singing the praises of The Lamb!

Many at the time and since then criticized the emotionalism displayed in the meetings. Yes, when thousands of people are convicted of their sins and are gloriously saved by the grace of God, how can they contain their joy? When believers are elevated to a new heavenly position in Christ and at the same time see the answer to years of agonizing prayer in the salvation of their loved ones, surely there must be shouts of joy and songs of adoration" (JS, 19).

(8) There were *prolonged meetings of prayer and praise*. One newspaper reporter who attended wrote this:

"The scene was almost indescribable. Tier upon tier of men and women filled every inch of space. Those who could not gain admittance stood outside and listened at the doors. Others rushed to the windows, where almost every word was audible. When, at seven o'clock, the service began, quite 2,000 people must have been present. The enthusiasm was unbounded. Women sang and shouted till the perspiration ran down their faces, and men jumped up one after the other to testify. One told in quivering accents the story of a drunken life. A working [man] spoke like a practiced orator: and one can imagine what a note the testimony of a converted gypsy woman struck when, dressed in her best, she told of her reformation and repentance. At ten o'clock the meeting had lost none of its ardor. Prayer after prayer went up from these Welsh hearts with almost dreary persistence. Time and again the four ministers who stood in the pulpit attempted to start a hymn, but it was all in vain. The revival had taken hold of the people, and even Mr. Roberts cannot hold it in check. His latest convert is a policeman, who, after complaining that people had gone mad after religion, so that there was nothing to do, went to see for himself, and bursting into tears, confessed the error of his ways, and repented" (Shaw, 10).

One lady reported on the meetings:

"There was no opening of the meeting; the hearts were full, and burst with prayer and praise to a God felt to be in our midst. One gentleman who had come from Oxford to see the work, said: 'These men are not praying to be heard of man; it doesn't matter to them what people think of them; they are thinking about the answer, not about the hearers.' At times a wave of power, without any human instrumentality, or anything external to cause it, would sweep over the mass of the people, and spontaneously almost the whole company would pray aloud, no one heeding the other, and without the slightest confusion. **Everyone was absorbed with God;** but in the midst of it, no one dealing with them, a man here, a woman there, would yield to God, and in a few minutes stand up and give praise that they had found the Lord. Sometimes singing and prayer would go on together, but there was no real confusion – the praying was not to man, and the singing was not to man. But such singing is rarely to be heard. It was perfect time and perfect harmony; often the same hymn (never given out, but started spontaneously), sung in English and in Welsh at the same time, and **sung over and over, until it penetrated**" (Shaw, 12-13).

Yet another described the meetings this way:

"**An indefinable influence pervades the country**, and awakes to action in the services through the mere reading of a passage, or the singing of a well-known hymn, or the inelegant prayer of a [coal miner] or a country maiden. The ministers, even when in sympathy, take little part; . . . the meetings, often prolonged through the whole night, seem to conduct themselves. . . . **From all accounts it is clear that there is a controlling spiritual power that dominates and directs in all.** Everywhere stress is laid upon the personality and operation of the Holy Ghost – 'the Pure Spirit,' as the name reads in Welsh" (Shaw, 52).

And another:

“Three-fourths of the meeting consists of singing. No one uses a hymn book. No one gives out a hymn. The last person to control the meetings is in any way Mr. Evan Roberts. People pray and sing, give testimony, [and] exhort as the Spirit moves them” (Shaw, 53).

Once again, G. Campbell Morgan describes his experience in a meeting he attended:

“I can tell you no more, save that I personally stood for three solid hours wedged so that I could not lift my hands at all. . . If you could but once have seen the men, evidently [coal miners], with the blue seam that told of their work on their faces, clean and beautiful. Beautiful, did I say? Many of them lit with heaven’s own light, radiant with the light that never was on sea and land. . . Today it is awakened, and I look on many a face, and I knew that men did not see men, did not see Evan Roberts, but they saw the face of God and the eternities. I left that evening, after having been in the meeting three hours, at 10:30, and it swept on, packed as it was, until an early hour next morning, song and prayer and testimony and conversion and confession of sin by leading church members publicly, and the putting of it away, and all the while no human leader, no one indicating the next thing to do, no one checking the spontaneous movement” (Shaw, 73).

Again:

“The spirit of intercession is once again poured out. Almost a hundred persons are on their feet engaged in prayer at one time and yet everything seems to be in perfect harmony. All are gloriously conscious of the wonderful presence of Jehovah in their midst” (JS, 69).

Results?

During the time of revival the police were left with virtually nothing to do and the courts were empty. Saloons and bars shut down for lack of business. Public drunkenness was almost non-existent. Old debts, many long forgotten, were paid off in full. Traveling theatrical agencies canceled their engagements, as everyone was in church! Profanity disappeared. It was said that horses everywhere were in complete confusion. They had become accustomed to responding to their master’s profane shouts and kicks and cursing, virtually of all of which had disappeared.

At one rugby match, a pastor said he heard only one man cursing, who thereupon repented. Of the 40,000 present, 10,000 began singing hymns. Relationships were healed and marriages restored. This last description of the revival perhaps sums it up best:

“It was plainly evident now to everybody that God had answered the agonizing prayers of His people and had sent a mighty spiritual upheaval. ***A sense of the Lord’s presence was everywhere.*** His presence was felt in the homes, on the streets, in the mines, factories and schools and even in the drinking saloons. So great was His Presence felt that even the places of amusement and carousal became places of holy awe. Many were the instances of men entering taverns, ordering drinks and then turning on their heels and leaving them untouched. Wales up to this time was in the grip of football fever when tens of thousands of working-class men thought and talked only of one thing. They gambled also on the result of the games. Now the famous football players themselves got converted and joined the open-air street meetings to testify what glorious things the Lord had done for them. Many of the teams were disbanded as the players got converted and the stadiums were empty” (JS, 43).

On that Christmas Sunday in 1904, G. Campbell Morgan closed his sermon by saying this. Let no man hear of what happened in Wales and try to start it in his own land. Why? Because no man started it in Wales! We cannot produce revival. We can only pray that God would be gracious to us and send it in abundance!