

◆*Will You not revive us again, that Your people may rejoice in You?* Psalm 85:6

During a recent mission to Europe, I had the privilege of visiting sites connected with the 1859 Ulster Revival. The local churches were celebrating the 150 th anniversary of this mighty move of God. I purchased a number of books on the Revival and had the privilege of travelling with two of the authors of these books, to key Revival sites and hearing their dynamic testimonies.

Can You Not Do Something More For God?

Rev. J.H. Moore exhorted young men in a Bible class to ◆Do something more for God. Could you not gather at least six of your careless neighbours ◆ and spend one hour with them reading and searching the Word of God?◆

The Prayer Meeting in a School House

In response James McQuilkin, Jeremiah Meneely, Robert Carlisle and John Wallace began a weekly prayer meeting in an old school house near Kells. They met every Friday night from September 1857 through the long and cold winter. As they read and meditated upon the Scripture their hearts began to burn with an unquenchable fire from heaven, which set all Ulster ablaze for God.

Answers to Prayer

They believed in the sovereignty of the Holy Spirit, the sufficiency of the Holy Scripture and the secret of Holy supplication. They studied the Word and prayed for three months before there were any visible results. Two more men joined their group and then on New Year◆s Day, 1858, the first conversion took place as a result of the prayer meeting. By the end of 1858, about 50 young men were taking part in the weekly prayer meeting.

Opposition and Criticism

Many people ridiculed these young men praying for Revival. Others criticized their determination not to allow women in their prayer meeting. The young men responded that they did not believe it advisable to allow women in their prayer meeting, as the world would have said that the meetings were being held only for the purposes of flirtation. As it happened, young women started their own prayer meeting, which was also greatly blessed.

Humble Beginnings

Edwin Orr wrote of these humble beginnings of the 1859 Revival: ◆This Revival which originated in a prayer meeting of four young men in the village school house of Kells made a greater impact spiritually on Ireland, than anything else known since the days of St. Patrick.◆

Spring

Faith grew. Hope brightened. The power of prayer began to be known, felt and seen. A contemporary account describes the Year of Grace in this way; ◆The winter was passed; the time of the singing of birds had come. Humble, grateful, loving, joyous converts multiplied◆ the great concerns of eternity were realised as they had never been before◆ Many walked about in deep anxiety about the one thing needful; while others rejoiced in the experience of a present peace and a complete salvation◆ The community was altogether changed in its outward aspects, and a pervading seriousness prevailed◆ a total transformation has been effected in the hearts and lives of those who were the subjects of the change; and throughout all the neighbourhood was heard thanksgiving and the voice of melody.◆

Conviction of Sin

Church services and prayer meetings began to be attended by ◆an immense audience, filled to capacity, with much earnestness, many appeared to be in deep mental concern.◆

◆Pubs and bars were closed by the conversion of their owners and for want of trade.◆

Prayer meetings began to multiply. ◆Ernest heart searching and prayers of burning fervency pervaded. There was an uncommon thirsting for the Word ◆ Strong men staggered and fell down under the wounds of their conscience ◆ Their frames trembled with wringing hands, streams of tears and a look of unutterable anguish, they confessed their sins in tones of unmistakable sincerity, and appealed to the Lord for mercy with a cry of piercing

earnestness ♦♦ Lord Jesus, have mercy upon my sinful soul; Lord Jesus come to my burning heart; Lord, pardon my sins; O come and lift me from these flames of hell!♦

>At Ballymena, April 1859, on market day, a man about 30 years of age suddenly fell upon his knees and ♦alarmed the entire neighbourhood by loud and desperate cries expressing the most appalling agony. ♦Lord be merciful to me a sinner!♦ ♦ There was an overpowering conviction that a great Revival had come at last. Careless men were bowed in unaffected earnestness and sobbed like children. Churches were crowded. Family worship became almost universal. There was joy unutterable.♦

The School in Coleraine

>In Coleraine, in Antrim County, at the local school, a school teacher seeing one young boy clearly under the conviction of sin, advised him to go home and call upon the Lord in private. He sent with him an older boy who had found peace the day before. After these two boys had travailed in prayer for some time, the young boy was blessed with sacred peace and rejoicing he returned to the school, and with beaming face, reported to his teacher; ♦Oh Sir, I am so happy, I have the Lord Jesus in my heart!♦

>Strange words in cold times, natural words in a time of Revival. But the attention of the whole class was arrested. One boy after another silently slipped out of the classroom and after a while the schoolteacher looked out to see boys on their knees throughout the playground, each one in earnest prayer. He turned to the two boys and asked them; ♦Do you think you can go and pray with these boys?♦ They did so and kneeling down with one after another, they began to implore the Lord to forgive their sins for the sake of Him who had borne them all upon the Cross. Silent grief soon turned into bitter cries.

>As these cries reached the girls school, they too fell upon their knees and wept in grief over their sins. The cries of the boys and girls at school reached passers-by in the adjoining streets and conviction of sin came upon them and they fell on their knees in the streets pleading to the Lord for mercy. It seemed as if every available spot was filled with sinners seeking God. Pastors and men of prayer were sought and they spent the rest of the day in counseling and praying with these mourners. ♦The sweetest of all toils that this earth witnesses, when men labour and intercede for those who are brokenhearted by the sight of their sins ♦ dinner was forgotten, tea was forgotten, and it was not until 11 o♦ clock at night that the school premises were freed from their unexpected guests.♦

The Market Place

>An open-air meeting was held to hear testimonies from those who had been converted. Masses of people from town and country began to pour into the square. It became clear that the multitude could not hear the voices of the speakers on the platform, so it was suggested that the people should separate into different groups and that different ministers should preach to each group. This was immediately done.

>One of the ministers testified afterward; ♦I never saw before, in any audience, the same searching, earnest, riveted look fixed upon my face as they strained up to me from almost every eye in that hushed and awe struck multitude. I remember while I was speaking, asking myself, How is this? Why is this?♦

>♦A very peculiar cry arose at one side of the square and in less than 10 minutes the whole multitude was overcome with conviction of sin.♦ The minister testified of how he spent the rest of the night counseling and praying with individuals under the conviction of sin. ♦When the morning dawned, and the sun rose I was wandering from street to street, and from house to house, on the most marvelous and solemn errand upon which I have ever been sent.♦

>The next day the marketplace was a scene of a dense multitude gathering for the preaching of the Gospel and prayer. Many more than on the previous evening sank upon the ground and with bitter cries besought the Lord Jesus Christ to come in mercy to their souls.

The New Town Hall

The new Town Hall of Coleraine had just been completed and it was suggested that those under conviction of sin might gather there for further counsel. In the Coleraine Town Hall, there is kept a copy of the Word of God, which was purchased to serve as a memorial to this time of Divine visitation. In the Bible is encribed ♦It is meant to be a memorial of the first opening of the new Town Hall of Coleraine, when, upon the night of the 9 June 1859, nearly 100 persons, agonized in mind through conviction of sin, and entirely prostrated in body, were borne into that building to obtain shelter during the night and to receive consolation, instructions and prayer from Christian ministers and Christian people.♦

Fruit of Revival

♦Full sanctuaries, full Sabbath schools, full prayer meetings, brotherly love, increased generosity and additions by the hundreds to the communion of the churches ♦ these are the fruits that remain♦ to the summer Revival of 1859 in Coleraine.

Spiritual Hunger

In a church service in Linenhall Street, Belfast, individuals came under severe conviction of sin. At the end of the Tuesday evening meeting, after the dismissal, the people stayed behind in the hundreds. The service was re-convened, as people yearned for peace with God.

What Must I do to Be Saved?

One man stopped a minister on the street and urgently demanded: ♦What must I do to be saved? I have been a hypocrite and a formalist for nearly 40 years; I have been walking through life with a veil over my eyes, and I feel such a burden of sin, that if I do not get relief I must die and be damned!♦

The Belfast Music Hall

A united meeting for prayer was held in the Belfast Music Hall. The Mayor was in the chair, and nearly a hundred ministers of all denominations filled the platform. The building was crowded to excess.

The Botanical Gardens

Soon the Botanical Gardens had to be thrown open for the vast crowd that gathered such as never before had been seen in the North of Ireland.

Resolution

One eye-witness declared: ♦It was the most impressive spectacle I ever witnessed ♦ thousands of sturdy and resolute men were congregated ♦ with a stern purpose ♦ with their Bibles in their hands ♦ pouring on as in an unceasing stream ♦♦

Salvation

In Belfast it appeared that the whole population was attending the prayer meetings and open-air meetings with the deepest seriousness and concern about eternal things. Everyone gave himself to the prayerful reading of the Bible. The city was filled with anxiety about Salvation.

Street People Saved

One humble, devout Christian woman led twenty prostitutes to Salvation and rescued them out of sin and misery. ♦Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit says the Lord.♦

A Foretaste of Heaven

In some cases schools had to be dismissed because of the children being stricken down with conviction of sin. One pastor reported ♦The joy of converts, the cry of penitence, the wailing of friends ♦ The Holy Ghost was there indeed as a mighty rushing wind ♦ We saw their eyes beaming with the light of Heaven, their light shining like angels, their hearts heaving with the love of Jesus and their hand clapping with joy before the God of Jacob♦ A foretaste of Heaven. All was in accordance with order, nothing extravagant ♦ God was there; and all were bowed before Him. To Him be the Glory!♦

Unable to Sing

At one communion service, Rev. J.R. Dill, reported ♦Such a deep influence of the Spirit came down upon their hearts that they were utterly unable to proceed with singing the words, ♦My Body broken thus I give.♦ Nothing was heard but sobbing.♦

The Mill

One poor man who was converted became most anxious for the conversion of his fellow workers in the mill. However, his fellow workmen mocked, swore and sang impure songs to distress him. He resolved to pray for them. Suddenly, one day, the

men in the mill were astonished by cries coming from their homes nearby. The business in the mill was suspended, and the men rushed to their houses to see what was causing these cries.

They found their wives and daughters prostrate under strong conviction of sin, crying out for mercy to the Lord. The men quickly requested the new convert to come and pray with their family members. Soon the weeping penitents became rejoicing converts.

Some days later the mill again had to be stopped, but this time it was because the men, while engaged at their work, became arrested and smitten down with the conviction of sin. Some of the strongest men and greatest scoffers in the country fell powerless in a moment under the mighty influence of the Holy Spirit. Strong men prostrated themselves on the ground and cried out for mercy. This time it was their wives and daughters who came rushing over to the mill to pray with them, with tears of joy, and they returned thanks to God for His mighty works.

Desperation

Rev. W. Magill, wrote of ♦Something strange and wonderful ♦ happening in Dundrod.♦ Then a messenger came to summon him home, as one of his daughters ♦had taken strangely ill.♦ At his house he heard his daughter crying out in a loud voice: ♦O Christ, help me! Lord Jesus, save my guilty soul! O Jesus, come, come soon, and give relief to my guilty soul! O thou quickening Spirit, come! O, create in me a new heart, a clean heart! O take away this hard and stony heart and give me a heart of flesh!♦

♦Such asking, seeking, striving to enter the Kingdom, I never saw before.♦

Walking and Leaping and Praising God

As peace came upon his daughter, she asked: ♦Let us sing the 51 st Psalm. ♦As they began to sing the Lord began His work. The news spread from lip to lip, house to house, over the county. Hundreds of all ranks and ages met outside the pastor♦s home to unite in prayer, looking up to heaven for a blessing. ♦The scene was indescribable; groups came literally walking and leaping and praising God!♦

Devotion

One minister in Portrush recorded that he had to counsel over 300 persons who were mightily convicted of sin. Everywhere the presence of God was felt. Rev. Charles Spurgeon was invited to come and address the believers in Belfast. Rev. J.M. Killen wrote of a deep work of God ♦Deep, silent, solemn and uninterrupted communion with their own hearts, and with their God ♦ decision of character, devotedness of life, and an elevated tone of holiness which are so conspicuous in many of our converts.♦

Men were heard to pray openly in the streets: ♦Lord be merciful to me, a sinner!♦

In Armagh, a little girl, about 11 years old, entered school, lifted up her hands and declared: ♦O, I have found Jesus, I have found Jesus!♦ Then all the children in the school began to cry out to the Lord for mercy.

Preaching and Hearing

One man remarked to a minister: ♦The ministers are preaching a great deal better than they used to do.♦ The minister responded: ♦Perhaps, the people are listening a great deal better than they used to.♦

Another minister declared: ♦A year ago I was preaching to the dead, but now I♦m preaching to the living.♦

Blasphemer Judged

Some young men planned to mock the Revivalists by pretending to fall down and be stricken with guilt, while the others were to call Christians to come and pray for the pretended cases of conviction. The first young man to foolishly take part in this blasphemous mockery fell dead on the spot. What had begun as a farce ended as a tragedy.

The Fear of God

In Belfast an old grey haired man who had pawned his coat to pay for more whisky, went into a bar and found a young woman there, on her knees, crying out for mercy. He left the pub declaring that he could not take his whisky there. However, he soon returned and fell on his knees, calling out to God for mercy. A

coachman drew up, went in and was similarly affected. Before long there were five people in the whisky shop calling out to God for forgiveness and mercy.

Catholics Converted
Many Roman Catholics were struck with a deep conviction of sin, a longing to read the Scriptures, a delight in prayer and praise, an entire dependence on God, and thoroughly abandoned popery.

The Presence of God
One of the ministers involved in this Ulster Revival of 1859, wrote: **We have now seen the wondrous difference which His presence makes. When He is absent, Christians are cold, ordinances are powerless, sinners immovable and dead, wickedness prevalent.**
When He comes in His love, and grace and power, God's children are lively, tender, loving, fervent, zealous, laborious. The means of Grace prove effectual to the Salvation of multitudes.

Hypocrites are unmasked. The careless alarmed and aroused. The ungodly fly to Jesus. Iniquity, abashed hides its head. May the experience of the past stir us up to desire a continued outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

A Revival Prayer
One of the prayers used multiple times in the 1859 Revival was later printed up as a Decision Card for those who wanted to wholeheartedly surrender to the Lordship of Jesus Christ:

My Decision
I take God the Father to be my God (1Thess 1:19)
I take God the Son to be my Saviour (Acts 5:31)
I take God the Holy Spirit to be my sanctifier (1 Peter 1:2)
I take the Word of God to be my rule (2 Timothy 3:16-17)
I take the people of God to be my people (Ruth 1:16-17)
I likewise dedicate myself wholly to the Lord (Romans 14:7-8)
And I do this prayerfully (Psalm 119:94)
Deliberately (Joshua 24:15)
Sincerely (2 Corinthians 1:12)
Freely (Psalm 110:3)
And forever (Romans 8:35-39)
Signed:

Date:
Seek the Lord while He may be found, call upon Him while He is near. Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the Lord and He will have mercy upon him; and to our God for He will abundantly pardon.

Isaiah 55:6-7
Sources:
The 1859 Revival in Ireland edited by William E. Allen
A Pictorial History of the 1859 Revival and related Awakenings in Ulster by Stanley Barnes
The 1859 Revival by Dr. Ian Paisley