

THE PENTECOST

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Cover photo: Mt. Seymour

Above photo: Mt. Seymour

In 1859, Ireland was impacted by an incredible revival. There is much that we can learn from those who were there. Join with us as we explore the revival of 1859 in our January 2015 issue of *The Pentecost*. God bless you.

Shawn Stevens

If you've ever wondered, what difference does prayer make? This issue will shine some light on that.

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THE 1859 REVIVAL

When the great outpouring came, worldly men were silent with an indefinite fear, and Christians found themselves borne onward in the current, with scarce time for any feelings but the overpowering conviction that a great revival had come at last. Careless men were bowed in unaffected earnestness, and sobbed like children. Drunkards and boasting blasphemers were awed into solemnity and silence. Sabbath-school teachers and scholars became seekers of Christ together. All this came suddenly, and many thought it strange. ¹

How does one tell the story of the 1859 Revival? How do you begin? Where did it start? Everyone involved stands back and points to heaven. When it came, it came like a hurricane. It came like a mighty flood. It came even before people realized that it was here. When it did come, it was known far and wide for what it was, a heaven-sent move of God. If there was ever a year that Ireland saw revival, it was the year of 1859.

In 1859, the small village of Straid, in Northern Ireland, had a population made up of primarily farmers and weavers. In the centre of the town was a Congregational Church pastored by the Rev. James Bain. The church had engaged itself in much prayer and this emphasis was increasing in intensity. They desired to see, and interceded for, an outpouring of God's Spirit upon their land. ²

The answer to their prayers came in greater magnitude than any of them could have expected. In early April of 1859, Bain began hearing reports of "strange things" which were occurring elsewhere in Ireland. What was happening? An unprecedented spiritual hunger was rising in the hearts of many Irish. They began flocking to churches and to open-air meetings. Family worship became common. Religious formality was being replaced with heart-felt passionate Christian expression. Alongside of this, multitudes of onlookers were coming under deep conviction of sin. One writer comments, "On some the conviction of real, present, terrible danger came like a thunderbolt, and they were compelled to shout for mercy in total disregard of place or circumstances." ³ Their regard for God outweighed their regard for men.

One example of this kind of thunderbolt could be seen in the town of Coleraine. A boy was under deep conviction of sin and was seen this way by his schoolmaster. Because of the intensity of the experience, the boy was sent home and told to call upon God in private. Another boy, who was converted the previous day, was sent along with him. On the way to the home, the two saw an empty house and they decided to pray inside it. After a time, the troubled boy experienced a tremendous spiritual release, coupled with a sacred peace. Returning to school, the boy announced to his schoolmaster, "I am so happy! I have the Lord Jesus in my heart!" ⁴ Later that day, the schoolmaster looked out the window at the playground and witnessed a number of students on their knees, bowed in prayer. He was overcome with emotion and he asked if the

newly converted boy would go out and pray with them. The boy did go out and he began calling for his schoolmates to pray that the Lord would forgive their sins, for the sake of Jesus, Who had borne their sins on the cross. The schoolboys began crying bitterly and the sound carried into the school and others inside came under great conviction. The sound of this carried over to a nearby girl's school and many there began weeping and praying as well. Clergymen were called for and they began ministering to the troubled souls. The school was not closed until 11:00 o'clock that evening.⁵

Another significant day in Coleraine was June the 7th, when a large open-air meeting was held. The minister preached on the lost condition of man and on the grace of God found in salvation. The audience was so greatly affected by his message that many began crying out loud, oblivious to their surroundings. Many were seen lying prostrate on the ground. The minister began moving through the crowd trying to help those under conviction. He comments on one young man:

He lay on the ground, his head supported on the knees of an elder of one of our churches. His eyes were closed; his hands were firmly clasped, and occasionally very forcibly pressed upon the chest. He was uttering incessantly a peculiar deep moan, sometimes terminating in a prolonged wailing cry. I felt his pulse, and could discern nothing very particular about it. I said, softly and quietly in his ear, 'Why do you cry so?' ... 'Oh!' He exclaimed, high and loud, in reply to my question, 'my sins! my sins!'

Lord Jesus, have mercy upon my poor soul! O Jesus! come! O Lord Jesus, come!' I endeavored to calm him for a moment, asking him to listen to me whilst I set before him some of the promises of God to perishing sinners. At first I thought that I was carrying his attention with me in what I was saying, but I soon discovered that his soul was filled with one idea, – his guilt and his danger; for, in the middle of my repetition of some promise, he would burst forth with the bitter cry, 'O God, my sins! my sins!' At length I said in his ear, 'Will I pray?' He replied in a loud voice, 'Oh, yes!' I engaged in prayer, and yet I doubt whether his mind followed me beyond the first sentence or two. ⁶

The minister stood up and found that people were pressing all around him, calling for him to come and help others. He did so for the next two or three hours, praying “God guide me.”⁷ On the following day, the townspeople sought out the minister on behalf of those who had not yet found spiritual release. A decision was made to hold another evening meeting and, again, the audience was overwhelmingly affected. Persons, who came under deep conviction, became known as “stricken ones.” A building was used to shelter the stricken ones until they found spiritual release.⁸

One group of people who were stricken under strong conviction during the 1859 revival were religious people. One writer describes it this way:

Many whose religion was an outer moral garment, or a mere plausible

sham, have been disturbed in their supposed security, have been brought into deep distress for their sins, and especially for their own loathsome hypocrisy; have been enabled to present to a heart-searching God the sacrifice of a broken and contrite heart, have received grace from on high to cast themselves upon a loving and beloved Saviour and are now advancing rapidly in the divine life. 9

So, the moving of God's Spirit was not only seen in conviction of sin but also in conversion.

Not only did God move in Coleraine, He also brought revival to the town of Ballycarry. A Rev. John Stuart comments:

The first effect of the revival was, that 'fear came upon every soul[:]' Then was our church filled to suffocation, and we were obliged to take to the open fields to declare the message of mercy to a hungry and thirsting population. The hitherto unoccupied pews were ardently sought after. All were engaged. The aisles were filled with forms crowded with anxious hearers, and now preaching became a luxury. I had pastor's work to do. I had living men and living women before me. They came to the sanctuary on the sole errand of obtaining the 'bread of life.' Every Sabbath was a day of 'sweet refreshing.' On every weekday evening '[...] they that feared the LORD spake often one to another: and the LORD harkened [,] and heard [...],[...]' and

there were '[...] added to the church daily such as should be saved.' 10

With occurrences such as this, it was evident that God was blessing Ballycarry.

In addition to moving at Ballycarry, the Lord moved mightily in the district of Balleaston. A Rev. A. Pollock describes:

The joy of converts, the cry of penitents, the wailing of friends, reminded me of the building of the second temple, when some shouted and others wept. Our tokens were soon all given away, which never happened before. About one hundred had to be provided for on the Sabbath morning, and we could not persuade the people to disburse. On Sabbath morning the house was filled to overflowing, and with little preparation, it was no easy task to ascend the pulpit. I addressed them from the words 'Get thee up, eat and drink; for there is a sound of abundance of rain.' The Holy Ghost was there indeed, as a mighty rushing wind. Many were moved; and in the evening the green was filled, and no man can tell the number of souls which were added to the church. The young converts wished to go to the first table, and sit together. We saw their eyes beaming with the light of heaven; their faces shining like angels; their hearts heaving with the love of Jesus, and their hands clapping with joy before the God of Jacob. Such a table! It was a foretaste of heaven. 11

As revival moved from district to district, there would be much more heaven for Ireland to taste.

Revival, such as this, could not be contained in one district. The Lord was moving on a large scale and souls were continually answering His call and streaming into His kingdom. The Rev. William Magill comments on how, one day, a concerned man came to him. The man told him that his daughter was strangely ill after attending an all-night prayer meeting. She was anxious for her own salvation and he feared that she had become mentally unstable. Magill came to the home and describes the scene in these words:

Before reaching the house, I heard her voice in loud and earnest and continuous prayer. When I opened the door and looked in, I saw her mother and two sisters, all on their knees and in tears. In the centre of the group, the picture of woe, was the 'stricken one,' with eyes upturned to heaven, and face covered and seamed with tears. Her arms were now extended to their utmost length, as if to grasp some distant and coveted object, and then brought together with violence as she clasped her hands, as if in mortal agony, whilst from her lips there burst forth words of fire, as living streams from a burning mountain. '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! Oh, create in me a new heart, a clean heart! Oh, take away this hard and stony heart, and give me a heart of

flesh!' Then as her eyes rested on me, as I stood riveted to the spot, witnessing in silence this exciting and wonderful scene, – for I never had heard such prayers before, – she exclaimed, without rising from her kneeling posture, 'Oh, here is my minister! I knew I would have no peace till he came. Oh, come; come pray for my guilty soul!' I knelt beside her and prayed, her voice accompanying mine all the time, while her expressions at intervals were so rich, varied, and scriptural, that I had often to pause, and then to follow instead of lead, as text after text from Old and New Testament, prophet and psalmist, Christ and apostle, were changed into beautiful and impassioned prayer. Such asking, seeking, striving to enter the 'kingdom,' I never saw before. It was, indeed, Mercy knocking her loudest knocks at the door of the heavenly mansion, so that the Lord Himself, startled by the peals which rouse up all the inmates, comes quickly, and with a smile opens the door, and takes her by the hand and brings her in. The struggle is over. She rises up, and begins the song of triumph! What a change – a perfect transformation! The cloud is passed away, and God, like the sun in his glory, is lifting up on her the light of His countenance. Her eye, as she sings, is lighted up with strange and unearthly fire. Her voice is no longer tremulous and plaintive, but now rings like a trumpet; while her whole face is covered with a smile, such as we might suppose an angel to wear. ¹²

Freshly converted, she desired to sing the 51st Psalm and, afterwards, she said to her family that she and the minister would now pray for them. One of her sisters came under the same intense conviction that she had undergone and after similar, heart-wrenching appeals to God, was also saved that same day. ¹³

During the course of this revival, there would be more stirring accounts of others coming to Christ. One woman, after being in the town of Dundrod, experienced a beautiful salvation. She was known for being a good person and was very familiar with the Bible. She was considered to already have a blameless life. After her new experience with Christ, she said, "I thought I was a good girl, but I was all wrong. I never was on the narrow way until now." ¹⁴ She was now converted to a life that was on fire for God.

She traveled throughout the country, warning those who were spiritually careless and comforting mourners. One day, she crossed paths with a wild, reckless man who scorned revival. She gently laid her hand on his shoulder and said to him, "Archie, won't you come? I know you'll come. Come to Jesus. I see it in your eye, you are coming. Pray, Archie, pray for the Spirit." ¹⁵ Under this influence, he melted and together they kneeled and prayed to God. He arose with a newborn freedom and, not long after, was proclaiming salvation to others in an open-air meeting. ¹⁶

The revival spread and in Derry there were more gripping accounts of people coming under intense conviction. In one case, a girl envisioned herself to be in hell for three hours. In this state, she was crying to Jesus for mercy.

A look of hopelessness was on her face. However, at the end of three hours, she fell into a trance and underwent a dramatic transformation. The Rev. Richard Smith described it in these words:

Her face resumed its natural appearance; it then became unnatural once more, but in a different manner; the radiance of glory overspread it, and for four hours she seemed to be in the regions of the blest. Of the 'visions' she had during that time she never wished to speak, and I never encouraged her to do so, for I knew her mind to have been strung to an ecstatic pitch; but I rejoice to say that she continues steadfast in the faith of Jesus, and is an example of humility and love, and all the other graces of the Spirit. ¹⁷

More unusual occurrences, such as these, were springing up everywhere. On July 3rd, a Rev. Andrew Long held three meetings, two in Monreagh and one in Drumennon. He comments in these words:

The divine influence came down upon the people at each service throughout that interesting day. There were many physical manifestations. Upwards of one hundred persons lay prostrate in the pews, and agonized in prayer, till three o'clock next morning. Many of the cases were quite unusual. One young female continued to sing a sweet, mournful air, apparently her own, to words that occurred to her at the moment, all about Jesus, and all as beautiful as if arranged by the finest

poet. She seemed unconscious, and sat in her pew all the time with her eyes steadfastly gazing upwards. Never did I, or any of that awe-stricken audience, listen to sounds so unlike those of earth. It was like an angel's song. Her voice seemed to be attuned by some celestial power; and its clear, sweet, symphonious tones, led us all to feel that the place was like the very gate of heaven. ¹⁸

There would be more dramatic conversions. A Rev. J. M. Killen, commenting on God's work in Comber, tells the story of the conversion of a hardened, elderly woman. This woman was known for her carelessness and her cursing. She was adamantly opposed to revival. One day, something happened. She was found rolling on her kitchen floor, writhing in agony. A doctor was brought in but he ran from the home, exclaiming that this was a case for a clergyman, not for a doctor. Killen visited her and, after a while, her screaming subsided and she settled into a calm. She later chose to embrace Christ and was filled with peace and joy. Killen comments that:

... she is now one of the finest specimens of Christian character, and a mother in Israel, I have ever known, – distinguished by her strong faith, her ardent love, and her Christian meekness, her sweetness of temper, and an almost uninterrupted realization of her Redeemer's presence, combined with a very profound reverence for Messiah's character, a strong desire to promote His glory, and an almost

extreme sensitiveness lest she should do anything to forfeit the enjoyment of His love. ¹⁹

These are beautiful testimonies of true conversion.

Another soul who experienced a dramatic conversion was Mr. Haltridge. Although married to a Christian wife he, himself, was not a Christian. One day word came to him that his son had been powerfully affected by the revival. Shaken up by this, Mr. Haltridge went to his home and shut himself up for eight hours. His son was brought to him and laid on the sofa, crying under intense conviction. At times, during the next twenty-four hours, they were not sure if the son was dead or alive. At one point, Mr. Haltridge heard his son exclaim, “God be merciful to my wicked father!” ²⁰ On a subsequent Sunday, as Mr. Haltridge was leaving the house, his wife insisted that he come with her and their daughter to church. During the service, listening to a beautiful hymn, God began dealing powerfully with him. He began trembling and fell over, upon his wife. For the next two hours he lay there and was oblivious to his surroundings. When he awoke, he was told that he had been crying for mercy. He was surrounded by people who were praying for him and they helped him up and took him home. He had difficulty in walking and they laid him on the same sofa that his son had lain on. His son now led family devotions in the home. Mr. Haltridge testified of receiving peace and said, “I now felt such love to my fellow-men, that I thought I could stand on a mountain-top and take the whole world in my arms. And as Christ told his disciples to begin

preaching at Jerusalem, I was called upon to speak at meetings held in that place which has been the scene of my former life.”²¹ Salvation had come to the Haltridge home.

Not only was salvation a fruit of this revival, but also there were some remarkable healings. One woman, who was nearly blind, was healed. For ten years, prior to her healing, she had not been able to read the Bible. After her healing, she was able to read her Bible once more.²²

Not only were people affected in their homes and their churches, but also at their places of work. One mill was actually stopped because its employees were too overwhelmed with God's dealings with them to carry on with their work. Men were smitten even while working their machinery. Strong men and former scoffers found themselves powerless. They could be seen kneeling and praying, some of them with their wives and daughters bent over them. Other workers, from a rock quarry, came out to visit the revival meetings in Comber. Many were impacted and a deep anxiety settled upon them. Killen was invited to the quarry to speak with them. All work was shut down, and the workers listened to Killen for two hours. Many turned to the Lord and, out of ninety-six families represented, ninety established family worship.²³

The most joyful things resulting from the 1859 revival were, of course, the dramatic testimonies of changed lives. A Mr. Gibson comments that “All classes and all ages caught the heavenly fire. Within the church, a cold formality, an apathetic and unimpressionable decorum, were exchanged for a living and vigorous piety; ...”²⁴ Gibson further describes

the spiritual relief and release that many experienced:

*It is that of sensible relief, a lightsome and liberated feeling, of which the chief ingredient is the assurance of forgiveness prompting the outburst of rapturous praise. The fountains of the soul seem to be opened, and forth flows, in unrestrained exuberance, the gushing fullness of its joy. The bodily sensations correspond with the inward ecstasy, and even the plainest features glow as with an unearthly beauty. The heavy load, the incubus that weighed down all the spirit's energies, is lifted off, and there is a buoyancy and elasticity proportionate to the depressing burden. The new-born happiness seeks audible expression. The language of the lips is all in unison with the serenity that reigns within.*²⁵

How do you tell the story of the 1859 Revival? You start by telling of the salvation which came to multitudes of Irish men and women. Salvation which came, in many cases, after intense conviction of sin and intense realization of a person's need for God. It was a conviction which made schoolboys kneel in the playground. It made the religious loathe their hypocrisy. It made souls stretch their hands to heaven and cry, “Oh, Christ. Help me.” That help came as an outpouring of love and deliverance. An outpouring which revived and quickened the human heart to life and spiritual freedom, and the testimony of it, has rung loud in Ireland. May God do a work as deep and beautiful in us today.

Shawn Stevens

END NOTES

1. Anonymous quote, found in William Gibson, *The Great Revival in Ireland in 1859* (Goshen: Pioneer Books), 9.

2. Tom Shaw, “The 1859 Revival in Northern Ireland” *Christians Unite*. 2006.
<http://articles.christiansunite.com>.

3. Anonymous quote, found in William Gibson, *The Great Revival in Ireland in 1859*, 10.

4. Ibid., 12.

5. Mr. Arthur, quoted in William Gibson, *The Great Revival in Ireland in 1859*, 12-13.

6. Ibid., 15.

7. Ibid., 15.

8. Ibid., 15-16.

9. William Gibson, *The Year of Grace : A History of The Revival in Ireland, A. D. 1859* (Boston: Gould and Lincoln, 1860), 244.

10. John Stuart, quoted in William Gibson, *The Great Revival in Ireland in 1859*, 17.

I have corrected his misquotations of Scripture.

11. A. Pollock, quoted in William Gibson, *The Great Revival in Ireland in 1859*, 17-18.

12. William Magill, quoted in William Gibson, *The Great Revival in Ireland in 1859*, 19-20.

13. Ibid., 20.

14. Anonymous quote, found in William Gibson, *The Great Revival in Ireland in 1859*, 24.

15. Ibid., 24.

16. William Gibson, *The Great Revival in Ireland in 1859*, 24-25.

17. Richard Smith, quoted in William Gibson, *The Great Revival in Ireland in 1859*, 32.

18. Andrew Long, quoted in William Gibson, *The Great Revival in Ireland in 1859*, 36.

19. J. M. Killen, quoted in William Gibson, *The Great Revival in Ireland in 1859*, 38,39.

20. William Gibson, *The Year of Grace : A History of The Revival in Ireland, A. D. 1859* (Boston: Gould and Lincoln, 1860), 102.

21. Mr. Haltridge, quoted in William Gibson, *The Year of Grace : A History of The Revival in Ireland, A. D. 1859*, 103.

22. William Gibson, *The Year of Grace : A History of The Revival in Ireland, A. D. 1859*, 204.

23. William Gibson, *The Great Revival in Ireland in 1859*, 40-41.

24. Ibid., 41.

25. Ibid., 11-12.

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