

Lloyd-Jones on Revival

By Todd Pruitt

“Before we deal with the position of those who are outside, let us first examine ourselves and make our confession. For every true revival in the world starts as a revival in the church, and revivals come to churches which realize their need and impotence and turn to God in prayer for forgiveness and for new strength.”

- MLJ – 1928

“Thank God, the age of miracles has not ended; the Holy Spirit is still abroad and one never knows when He shall descend upon us here at Aberavon. Let us be prepared!”

“Present-day religion far too often soothes the conscience instead of awakening it; and produces a sense of self-satisfaction and eternal safety rather than a sense of our unworthiness and the likelihood of eternal damnation.”

- MLJ – 1930

David Martyn Lloyd-Jones was one of the greatest preachers and churchmen of the 20th century. Born in 1899 he spent his childhood in rural Wales. From his humble beginnings as a dairyman’s assistant Lloyd-Jones pursued a career in medicine. Eventually he became the Chief Clinical Assistant to the King’s Physician at the age of twenty-three. Extraordinarily, when Lloyd-Jones was 27 he left behind his already spectacular career to follow God’s call to be a pastor.

The young doctor and his wife moved to Aberavon, South Wales to become the pastor of a small struggling church. Far from the glamour of London, Aberavon was known for its industrialization and economic depression. All the churches in Wales were struggling at the time. There had been a well-known revival at the turn of the century, but with the passing of a generation so did the godliness of Wales. The country had once again become a spiritual desert. Into these challenging conditions the young and inexperienced preacher entered his first charge.

The idea that a successful young doctor would leave behind an elite position at St. Bartholomew’s in London to pastor an unknown little church in a backwater town was, to say the least, a curiosity for many. But “the Doctor” as he would affectionately come to be known, never flinched from his calling. Neither did he consider his move a sacrifice. “I gave up nothing. I received everything. I count it the highest honor God can confer on any man to call him to be a herald of the gospel.”

Apart from God’s gracious providence Martyn Lloyd-Jones would have simply been another one of the many pastors at the many small but spiritually dead churches in Wales in the early part of the 20th century. Indeed, had it not been for God’s sovereign purposes the name of the good doctor from Aberavon would probably have been lost to

us. But God had great plans for His church in Wales. It would not be long before word would spread about the powerful preaching coming out of the little working class church in the blue collar town. Not only did the area around Aberavon take notice but so too did the media in London and throughout the United Kingdom.

Dr. Lloyd-Jones viewed revival as a piece of the broader work of the Holy Spirit in redeeming the people of God. In other words, he understood revival to be that same powerful work of the Spirit in bringing an individual to faith spread across a multitude. The Doctor's biographer, Ian Murray explains:

*"So a time of revival does not witness results different in nature from those attending God's more normal work, but the multiplied instances of divine grace present at such a period reveal the glory of Christ to a degree, and upon a scale, which is extraordinary, exceptional and unparalleled. **True zeal for revival is therefore nothing other than zeal for the glory of God in the conversion of many.**"¹*

Many of us grew up with the idea that such moves of God's Spirit could be scheduled every spring and fall. If the music was just right and the preacher knew how to "close the deal" with an emotional invitation then God would be pleased to send revival. But this comes from a profoundly mistaken notion of the workings of God. Revival is a sovereign work of God's grace. We can no more force Almighty God to do our bidding than could Simon the magician buy the Holy Spirit's power from the apostles. The view that somehow revival can be brought about by human effort was seen by Lloyd-Jones as no minor mistake. Indeed, these wrong notions of revival were, in his view, simply a by-product of a poor understanding of conversion. This is manifestly true, for wherever conversion is viewed as some kind of a partnership between God and man rather than the gracious work of God alone, false views of revival abound.

The Doctor, who saw God do extraordinary things both in his church and the whole region, knew that revival was something very special. It is, he said, "made special not by the schemes and devices of men, but by the intervention of God." This does not mean that men and women are inconsequential to the coming of revival. Certainly, God has ordained means through which He works in great power. God's people ought to pray for revival. They ought to abandon their sin and return to the pure milk of Scripture. But let us never confuse means and ends. "Pray for revival? Yes, go on, but do not try to create it, do not attempt to produce it, it is only given by Christ himself. The last church to be visited by a revival is the church trying to make it."

¹ Murray, Iain, D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1982) p. 203.