

It has been another very demanding week for the government. They have had to contend with the Budget, its fallout, and the various forecasts of the ever-increasing number of financial experts. Before I went into my study on Thursday morning, Gordon Brown said something that ‘really struck me’; basically he said that the world is moving faster than at any other time throughout its history. On that issue, I agree with him wholeheartedly. Each of us here has lived a comparatively short time but even during our lifetime changes have taken place that we could never have imagined.

I’m not only referring to men walking on the moon ... but I’m meaning the ordinary day-to-day changes. For example, I remember when my father and mother exchanged the black and white television for the colour. I remember when going on summer holidays meant a day here and a day there to a local beach, - none of my friends ever spoke about going to Florida or Spain or Egypt for their holidays. It was a rare thing too for anyone I knew to go to university and get a degree. ... And computers were made of the stuff of science fiction!

In all the change taking place around us though, have we found the better lifestyle to be producing better people? No, I don’t believe we have. Yes, I know there have always been murderers and rapists and paedophiles and the like ... but crime has greatly increased; criminals flaunt their careers and good people are made to feel as if they are missing out.

Where does the church stand in all this? I read an article in *The Spectator* entitled, *Onward Christian Soldiers, The C of E has forgotten its purpose. Why, exactly, does it exist?* In the article the author appeals to church leaders who, - he says, - “have ditched its traditions and reduced it to a sort of superannuated ad-hoc branch of social services. It has lost all sense of mission and direction. Whatever happened to muscular Christianity?”

Whatever happened to muscular Christianity? ... Maybe that is one of the reasons churches are emptying, - we are not saying to our communities what we ought to be saying, and we have been so long not saying it, they won’t listen to us when we *do* try to speak up! ...

Do you remember the times when churches were full? Do you remember the times when people came to church with the Bible in their hands? Do you remember the times when the Bible was the only authority for God's people? Do you remember the times when parents brought their children along to the Sunday School ... and Sunday Schools before the service and in the afternoons were filled? Do you remember the times when the Gospel was powerfully preached, sinners were being saved and God's people were being blessed? ... *What has happened?!*

Some, - even some believers, - would tell you that we have let the world move on without us, - we haven't kept up, we haven't changed with the times ... and the church has been left away behind. ...

What though is the greatest danger to the church and the greatest danger to the tried and tested message of the Gospel that the Church since the time of Jesus and the apostles have been preaching? ... Is it Islam? ... Let's blame Islam! Is Islam getting such a hold on our society? ... Or maybe it is communism? ... Is it capitalism? Is it secularism? ... *Let's blame everybody else, - it's their fault!* ... No, - for what it is worth, - I believe the greatest danger to the church today is articulated in [Prov. 29:18](#), [Where there is no vision, the people perish](#).

The churches in the Book of Revelation were warned to keep faithful ... and not to lose the vision lest Christ would remove Himself from them. He said, [2:5](#) *repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent.*

Last week, when I was across in Northern Ireland, I went to a little village in County Antrim called Connor. Connor is the kind of place you probably would not find unless you were looking for it, - it is deep in the countryside. It is a quiet, beautiful and very picturesque village, - your closest large town would be Ballymena. Connor has a couple of churches, a few shops ... and roads going in and out of it, - it doesn't have a lot, - I didn't even see a public house (!), - ... it is a beautiful wee place.

However, it wasn't always so. It had been a right den of iniquity ... drunkenness and everything that accompanies it! Over 150 years ago it was far from picturesque. The pubs were full, the crime rate was high ... and many of the people of the village and the surrounding area would have cursed the Name of God.

Someone writing about another town used the perfect description, “a population sufficiently repulsive in station and manners, as well as in general moral character”.

Into this situation God sent a woman from Gateshead in England in the spring of 1856. Her name was Mrs. Colville from Gateshead and she began a door-to-door Gospel work in Ballymena and the surrounding area. Her desire was to see souls saved. Incidentally, she actually went under the auspices of the Baptist Missionary Society, or in those days it was known as *The Particular Baptist Society for the Propagation of the Gospel Amongst the Heathen*. ... and there was no doubt about it, these people were *heathen!* ... and they were also Presbyterian, - *imagine the Lord sending a Baptist in among Presbyterians!!* ☺

One day she was in conversation with a certain Mrs. Brown and two women and a local man called John McQuilken from Connor, - incidentally they were discussing the subjects of predestination and freewill, and they were trying to find out whether or not she was a Calvinist! Anyhow, in the discussion and what she was saying particularly had a profound effect upon the only unsaved member of the group, - McQuilken. For two weeks, - day and night, - he had no peace inside. He was under conviction of sin ... he was realising his need of the Saviour and very shortly afterwards he came to a personal and saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

However, in November 1856 Mrs. Colville returned to England in low spirits because she did not feel her work was achieving much, - she believed it to be unfruitful (... she may not even have found out about McQuilken’s conversion).

‘As it so happened’, a meeting began to be held in the local school in nearby Kells, - its purpose was to discuss repairing the schoolhouse. There was nothing whatsoever spiritual about the meeting. At the end of the meeting Jeremiah Meneely (the schoolmaster), Robert Carlisle and John Walker were walking home together ... and setting the world to rights ... as men are often prone to do ☺.

* The topic of conversation came round to James McQuilken, in particular how he had got rid of the fighting cocks for which he was notorious in the area.

* However, he worked in a linen factory in Ballymena during the week and returned home each weekend to Connor, and the three men, - Meneely, Carlisle and Walker, - decided that McQuilken's salvation was just a passing fad and he would soon return to his old ways, ... but Jeremiah Meneely *did* remark, "I would give the world to know my sins forgiven", and the others agreed.

* Shortly afterwards Meneely 'happened to meet' McQuilken and after a long conversation became convinced that something genuine and miraculous had truly touched McQuilken's life. McQuilken was relating to Meneely how Christ had saved him.

* Meneely now wanted to get right with God and he went home and started reading his Bible. One day, as he sat in the kitchen of his home, he was reading [John 6:37 All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.](#)

* In an instant, *it hit him* and he jumped up exclaiming: "I see it now". God had spoken and Meneely was wonderfully converted.

* Soon his two friends, - Robert Carlisle and John Wallace, - were also saved. Indeed, this was God's 'raw material' He was using in the 'factory house of the Ulster Revival'.

* This was the beginning of the Revival. Encouraged by Rev. Hamilton Moore, minister of their church, Connor Presbyterian, the four new converts, - James McQuilken, Jeremiah Meneely, Robert Carlisle and John Wallace (all good Scottish names ☺) - began to meet weekly for prayer and Bible study in Sept 1857.

* They met in the old schoolhouse. These meetings were held on Friday evenings and continued from September throughout the winter of 1857 and into 1858. Each man took an armful of peat for the fire and in the other carried his Bible. It was from this little group that the fire was kindled which blazed throughout Ulster and carried the Gospel message to save over 100,000 souls.

* The cornerstone of what they believed was simple and threefold. They believed in the Sovereign work of God, the sufficiency of God's Holy Word and the power in Holy Spirit-inspired prayer!

* No gimmicks, no 'toys' ... just relying on God, in the power of the Holy Spirit to convict and to save lost hell-deserving sinners, ... and they continued in crying out to God before the Throne.

* In the meantime their minister, Rev. Hamilton Moore continued to preach faithfully God's Word, and the full Gospel of Sovereign and Redeeming Grace. ... And then the stirring began.

- * On New Year's Day 1858, the first conversion that could be directly related to the prayer meeting took place, and after that there were conversions every night.
- * The prayer meeting became full, new prayer meetings were started, the people had a hunger for prayer ... and the power of God in prayer changed lives.
- * So many in the district were converted that by spring 1859 there were an average of sixteen prayer meetings every night of the week in the small Connor district alone.
- * Just across from the church you can still see the building where one of these powerful prayer meetings met.
- * Soon the Spirit of God spread through the small surrounding villages and towns.
- * Before long almost the whole of Ulster was caught up in the Holy Ghost fire.
- * One Minister was reputed as saying, "The difficulty used to be to get the people into the church, but the difficulty now is to get them out!"
- * Jeremiah Meneely, - the schoolmaster, - became the great evangelist of the Revival. He preached with enthusiastic zeal and carried the gospel throughout the towns and villages of Ulster, into the whole of Ireland and across to Scotland and England.
- * He was called home on 24th March 1917 and he is buried close to the little schoolhouse in Kells.
- * Because of how the Lord was working, the dead formal ritualism and 'playing at church' was replaced by powerful preaching and God-glorifying praise.
- * Connor Presbyterian Church became too small for the congregation, - only 1,000 could be accommodated and that was not enough! Another church was built in nearby Kells.
- * When I was drawing up to the church I saw a couple of cars in the church car park so I went inside to find someone. The two ladies in the church hall were telling me the church is still packed with a regular eight hundred in attendance every Lord's Day ... and also in the evening.
- * There are still no gimmicks ... just faithful preaching of the Word. They are planning a mission for next month when again the emphasis will be on the Word. Each night the Word will be powerfully preached.
- * The ladies told me that even in today's spiritual climate the church, - built to accommodate 1,000 people, - sometimes needs to put churches up the aisles! ... They weren't boasting ... they were just saying.

* I went into the church sanctuary ... and I don't know the proper word to describe the feeling as you look up at the pulpit and visualise Rev. Hamilton Moore, Jeremiah Meneely and others preaching powerfully the unadulterated Gospel.

* Thousands upon thousands of souls were saved out of a wee backwater place when God used men and women whose names are now only remembered by Him.

* There is much more we could say about the Ulster Revival, but if you want to read about it you can click the link ... [the Revival](#).

* As you know, I hold to the old-fashioned ways ... not because I was brought up to be old-fashioned, or I'm too frightened to branch out and try something new ... No, I hold to the old-fashioned ways because I sincerely believe the way that God will once again demonstrate His power to revive His Church and save souls is through the faithful preaching of His own inspired and infallible Word.

* Here in Scotland you can look back to the days when God moved in Revival ... in Shotts when the Rev. John Livingstone, after Communion on 21st June 1630 preached a sermon on the Monday in the churchyard that kindled the flame of revival throughout the country, and in Cambuslang through George Whitefield in the eighteenth century, and through Robert Murray McCheyne and William Burns in Dundee in the nineteenth century.

* In the early 1920's God used Jock Troop and Douglas Brown in the Revival along the North East coast and the Moray Firth.

* [Duncan Campbell](#) writes about the revival that took place on the Island of Lewis between 1949 and 1952. Prior to the moving of God's Spirit, there were two elderly ladies - one of them eighty-four years of age, and the other eighty-two ... and one of them was 'stone blind'!

* Campbell records that "not a single young person attended public worship. Not a single young man or young woman went to the church. They spent their day perhaps reading or walking, but the church was left out of the picture. And those two women were greatly concerned, and they made it a special matter of prayer."

* ... All these times of revival ... and I don't believe God has finished with us yet! We are still in the day of grace ... and God will honour the faithful preaching of His Word and the faithful prayers of His children.

* Jeremiah, - the weeping prophet, - declared, [Lam. 3:57 Thou drewest near in the day that I called upon thee: thou saidst, Fear not. ... Don't give up Jeremiah!](#)

* Did not God say the same thing to Elijah who was so despondent in the Lord's work that he wanted to die, [I Kings 19:4](#) It is enough; now, O LORD, take away my life. But the Lord spoke to him and told him to go and lie down and sleep. On the next morning Elijah awoke ([I Kgs. 19:6](#)) and, behold, there was a cake baked on the coals, and a cruse of water at his head. He was thinking he was the only left who was faithful to the Lord, but the Lord put him right, [v.18](#) Yet I have left me seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal, and every mouth which hath not kissed him.

* God's work can never be finished until all His purposes are completed ... and, - in the midst of his weeping, - Jeremiah remembered the promise of God, [Jer. 33:3](#) Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and show thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not.

* ... Has God finished with His people in Scotland? ... Oh, if we believed *that* we might as well shut the doors and go home!

* What kind of people does God use? ... He has proved that in the history of revivals He uses *ordinary people* like you and me. *He* sets the agenda. He sets the 'wheels in motion'. ... He brings upon His people a fresh love and devotion to His holy Name, and a humbleness to affirm Him as Lord and Master ... and then they fall before Him, praying and seeking His face, and they turn from that which is displeasing to Him.

* *Ordinary people* ... Christ chose *ordinary people* to be disciples ... and God has chosen *ordinary people* down through the history of the Church to exalt His Name.

* Don't try to be anything else except that which God, - by His grace, - is shaping you into. The world might not think much of you ... but it is what God is making out of you that matters ... and what He is making out of you, - as you are obedient to Him, - is for His honour and His glory.

* The verse that brought me to this subject is [Lam. 3:57](#) Thou drewest near in the day that I called upon thee: thou saidst, Fear not ... It reminds us that God has *not* finished yet ... and, - yes, we are just *ordinary people*, ... but it has been *ordinary people* He has used in the past.

* May we put nothing up against Him as He would seek to use us today ... and we trust that He would even use us as He has used His servants in the past to bring about great times of refreshing.

* Perhaps, in conclusion, another very appropriate verse would be ... [Zech. 4:10](#) who hath despised the day of small things? for they shall rejoice.