

## **Thou drewest near in the day that I called upon Thee** **Lam. 3:48-57**

It has been a very demanding week. It seems as if there has been nothing else going on in the world except the US Presidential elections.

Out of all the many interviews I heard (and I must confess I listened to quite a few), one interview impressed me the most. An elderly man from Tampa in Florida was asked about the present state of his nation. He gave an answer the interviewer could not have been expecting for he said that what the United States needs is to get back to God, and the teachings of God upon which their nation was founded.

Wouldn't you love to hear something like that said on our news reports? King Solomon wrote, **Prov. 14:34** *Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people.*

The result in the US was the second 'spanner in the works' this year for politicians at home here in the UK and across Europe, - it has been quite a bad year for some of them!

A few years ago Gordon Brown said something I agreed with him on ... Basically he said that the world is moving faster than at any other time throughout its history. 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 firmly believe we are limbering up to the time when the quest for a successful world leader is inevitable.

In all the change taking place around us though, have we found any overwhelming evidence people, - to use the language of the world, - are *evolving* into better specimens of the human race? Are we improving? ... Are we improving in our relations one to the other? Are we happier and more content? Is right holding up against wrong?

In this 'progression', where's the Church, and how is it doing? ... You and I can remember the times when churches were full ... and when people came along to the meetings with the Bible in their hands, - they weren't ashamed. We remember the times when the Bible was the only authority for God's people. We remember the times when parents brought their children to the Sunday School ... and Sunday Schools before the service and in the afternoon were filled ... and children knew how to

behave. We remember the times when preachers did not hold back from powerfully preaching the Gospel ... and sinners were being saved and God's people were being blessed ... *What has happened?!*

Some, - even some believers, - would tell you the reason is we have let the world move on without us, - we haven't kept up, we haven't changed with the times ... and that is why 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 secularism? ... Is it because people are more prepared to question these issues? ... And we get ourselves into a fluster trying to figure out where the blame lies ... *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.](#)

Since we have been bombarded with all the buildup to the US Presidential elections ... and previously, the Brexit, let's remember a few things that as Christians we ought never to forget ... *God is still on the throne!*

In an instant, He could take the breath from even the most powerful person in the world. The prophet Daniel's words are as true today as when he first spoke them to the powerful King Nebuchadnezzar, [Dan. 2:20 Blessed be the name of God for ever and ever: for wisdom and might are his: 21 And he changeth the times and the seasons: he removeth kings, and setteth up kings ... He is on the Heavenly throne, and no earthly President or Prime Minister is anything remotely \*close\* to His equal!](#)

Surely then, that is how God's people must stand back and look at all this ... for that is what Habakkuk did, [Hab. 2:1 I will stand upon my watch, and set me upon the tower, and will watch to see what \[God\] will say unto me, and what I shall answer when I am reprov'd. ... And it is what Jeremiah also believed and depended upon, Lam. 3:21 This I recall to my mind, therefore have I hope. 22 It is of the LORD'S mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. 23 They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness.](#)

John and Linda were recently across in a church in Northern Ireland, close to an region which was greatly affected by 1859 Ulster Revival. ... It was a long time ago, and yet many of the churches in that area continue to reap its harvest.

There's 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 don't even know if it has 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. They were infamous for their wicked lifestyle. In fact, 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 the spring of 1856. Her name was Mrs. Colville and she began a door-to-door Gospel work in Ballymena and the surrounding areas. Her desire was to see souls saved. Incidentally, she 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 as *heathen* as you would have found anywhere in darkest Africa! ... 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 contentious subjects of predestination and freewill, and they were trying to find out whether or not Mrs. Colville 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, - John McQuilken. For two weeks, - day and night, - he had no peace inside because he came under conviction of his sin ...

He was being awakened to his need of the Saviour and very shortly afterwards he came to a personal and saving faith in the Lord Jesus.

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 (i.e. this included gambling). However, McQuilken 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 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, - ... and 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 spiritual fire God was setting alight was kindled and started to blaze 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 Almighty 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 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 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.

A few years ago I visited the church, and was drawing up into the car park ... A few cars were sitting outside, so I went to the hall to see if I could find someone. I found two ladies and they 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 no gimmicks ... just faithful preaching of God's Word.

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.

I believe we never should have parted from the old-fashioned ways which upheld the holiness of God and the sacredness of His presence and the uniqueness of His Word and the power of salvation to save the vilest sinner ... And I also believe the way that God will once again demonstrate His power to revive His Church and save souls is through the faithful adherence to the 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 21<sup>st</sup> 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.

There was the Welsh Revival in 1904-05, and in the early 1920's God used Jock Troop and Douglas Brown in the Revival along the North East coast and the Moray Firth ... even as far down as Great Yarmouth, in England.

Duncan Campbell was used by God in 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.](#) ... Jeremiah tells us not to give up!

Did not God say the same thing to Elijah who was so despondent that he wanted to die, [1 Kings 19:4 It is enough; now, O LORD, take away my life.](#) He ran from where he was needed, and the Lord found him hiding in a cave. Prior to that, the Lord found him under a tree in the desert, and He told him to go and lie down and sleep. On the next morning Elijah awoke ([1 Kgs. 19:6](#)) and, behold, there was a cake baked on the coals, and a cruse of water at his head. The Lord was taking care of his earthly needs, and He was showing Elijah how He would take care of his spiritual needs also ... And when Elijah was making himself more miserable by thinking he was the only one left faithful to the Lord, 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 He is satisfied. Satan and the enemies cannot stop God's work, for ultimately they have to do His bidding. ... 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? ... Before you answer, if we believed He has we might as well shut the doors, throw away the key 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 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.

*Ordinary people* ... Christ chose *ordinary people* to be disciples ... and God has chosen *ordinary people* throughout the history of the Church to exalt His Name. ... We don't know what He has in store ... and that was the case for those men in Co. Antrim and for those old women in Lewis.

Behind it lies the fact we must not try to be anything else except that which God, - by His grace, - is shaping us into. Basically, we have to be faithful to His ways. The world might not think much of us ... but it is what God is making out of us that matters ... and what He is making out of us is for His own honour, pleasure, and 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 is *ordinary people* He uses.

May we put nothing up against Him in these days to hinder His work ... and we trust 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. Amen.*