

The Lewis Revival by Duncan Campbell

There are two things that I would like to say in speaking about the revival in the Hebrides. First, I would like to make it perfectly clear that I did not bring revival to the Hebrides. It has grieved me beyond words to hear people talk and write about “the man who brought revival to the Hebrides.” My dear people, I didn’t do that. Revival was there before I ever set foot on the island. It began in a gracious awareness of God sweeping through the parish of Barvas.

Then I would like to make it perfectly clear what I understand of revival. When I speak of revival, I am not thinking of high-pressure evangelism. I am not thinking of crusades, or of special efforts convened and organized by man. That is not in my mind at all. Revival is something altogether different from evangelism on its highest level. Revival is a moving of God in the community, and suddenly the community becomes God-conscious, before a word is said by any man representing any special effort.

Now I am sure that you will be interested to know how, in November 1949, this gracious movement began on the island of Lewis. Two old women, one of them 84 years of age and the other 82 (one of them stone blind), were greatly burdened because of the appalling state of their own parish. It was true 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.

A verse gripped them: “For I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground” (Isaiah 44:3a). They were so burdened that both of them decided to spend time in prayer twice a week. On Tuesday they got on their knees at ten o’clock in the evening, and remained on their knees until three or four o’clock in the morning—two old women in a very humble cottage.

One night one of the sisters had a vision. Now remember, in revival God works in wonderful ways. A vision came to one of them, and in the vision she saw the church of her fathers crowded with young people, packed to the doors, and a strange minister standing in the pulpit. She was so impressed by the vision that she sent for the parish minister. And of course, he, knowing the two sisters, knowing that they were two women who knew God in a wonderful way, responded to their invitation and called at the cottage. That morning one of the sisters said to the minister, “You must do something about this. And I would suggest that you call your elders together and that you spend at least two nights with us in prayer a week, Tuesday and Friday. If you gather your elders together, you can meet in a barn or a farming community, and as you pray there, we will pray here.” Well, that was what happened; the minister called his elders together, and seven of them met in a barn to pray on Tuesday and on Friday. And the two old women got on their knees and prayed with them.

That continued for some weeks, in fact, I believe almost a month and a half. Then, one night as they were kneeling there in the barn and pleading this promise, “I will pour water on him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground,” a certain young man, a deacon in the church, got up and read Psalm 24: “Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? Or who shall stand in his holy place? He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart; who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully. He shall receive the blessing [not a blessing, but the blessing] from the Lord”(vv.3-5a). And then that young man closed his Bible. And looking down at the minister and the elders, he spoke these crude words (but perhaps not so crude in our Gaelic language): “It seems to me to be so much humbug to be praying as we are praying, to be waiting as we are waiting, if we ourselves are not rightly related to God.” And then he lifted his two hands and prayed, “God, are my hands clean? Is my heart pure?”

But he got no further. That young man fell to his knees, and then fell into a trance. Now don't ask me to explain this because I can't. He fell into a trance and was now lying on the floor of the barn. And in the words of the minister, at that moment he and the other ministers were gripped by the conviction that a God-sent revival must ever be related to holiness and godliness. Are my hands clean? Is my heart pure? This is the man whom God will trust with revival; that was the conviction.

When that happened in the barn, the power of God swept into the parish. And an awareness of God gripped the community such as hadn't been known for over a hundred years. An awareness of God—that's revival! And on the following day, the looms were silent, and little work was done on the farms as men and women gave themselves to thinking on eternal things, gripped by eternal realities.

Now, I wasn't on the island when that happened. But, again, one of the sisters sent for the minister. And she said to him: "I think you ought to invite someone to the parish. I cannot give a name, but God must have someone in His mind, for I saw a strange man in the pulpit, and that man must be somewhere."

Well, the minister that week was going to one of our great conventions in Scotland. At that convention he met a young man who was a student in college, and knowing that this young man was a God-fearing man, a man with a message, he invited him to the island. "Won't you come for ten days, a ten-day special effort? We have had so many of them over the past couple of years, but we feel that something is happening in the parish, and we would like you to attend."

This minister said, "No, I don't feel that I am the man, but quite recently there has been a very remarkable move in Glasgow under the ministry of a man by the name of Campbell. I would suggest that you send for him." Now at that time I was in a college in Edinburgh. It wasn't very easy for me to leave, but it was decided that I should go for ten days. I was on the island within ten days.

I shall never forget the night that I arrived at the piers in the mail steamer. I was standing in the presence of the minister whom I had never seen, and two of his elders that I never knew. The minister turned to me and said: "Mr. Campbell, I know that you are very tired. You have been traveling all day by train to begin with, and then by steamer. And I am sure that you are ready for your supper and ready for your bed. But I wonder if you would be prepared to address a meeting in the parish church at nine o'clock tonight on our way home. It will be a short meeting, and then we will make for the manse, and you will get your supper and your bed, and rest until tomorrow evening." Well, it will interest you to know that I never got that supper.

We got to the church about a quarter to nine to find about three hundred people gathered. I gave an address. Nothing really happened during the service. It was a good meeting. There was a sense of God and a consciousness of His Spirit moving, but nothing beyond that. So I pronounced the benediction, and we were leaving the church around a quarter to eleven.

Just as I was walking down the aisle along with this young deacon who had read the Psalm in the barn, he suddenly stood in the aisle and, looking up to the heavens said: "God, You can't fail us! God, You can't fail us! You promised to pour water on the thirsty and floods upon the dry ground. God, You can't fail us!"

Soon he was on his knees in the aisle praying, and then he fell into a trance once again. Just then, the door opened. It was then eleven o'clock. The door of the church opened, and the local blacksmith came back into the church and said, "Mr. Campbell, something wonderful has happened. Oh, we were praying that God would pour water on the thirsty and floods upon the dry ground, and listen, He's done it! He's done it!"

When I went to the door of the church I saw a congregation of approximately six hundred people. Where had they come from? What had happened? I believe that very night God swept by in Pentecostal power, the power of the Holy Ghost. And what happened in the early days of the Apostles was now happening in the parish of Barvas.

Over a hundred young people were at the dance in the parish hall, and they weren't thinking of God or eternity. God was not in any of their thoughts. They were there to have a good night when suddenly the power of God fell upon the dance. The music ceased, and in a matter of minutes, the hall was empty. They fled from the hall as a man fleeing from a plague, and they made for the church. They were standing outside, and they saw lights in the church, and that it was a house of God, so they went in.

Men and women who had gone to bed rose, dressed, and made for the church. There had been nothing done in the way of publicity, no mention of a special effort, except an announcement from the pulpit on the Sabbath that a certain man was going to be conducting a series of meetings in the parish covering ten days. But God took the situation in hand. Oh, He became His own publicity agent. A hunger and a thirst gripped the people. Six hundred of them were now at the church standing outside.

Then, this dear man, the blacksmith, turned to me and said, "I think that we should sing a psalm." And they sang, and they sang, and they sang, verse after verse. Oh, what singing! What singing! And then the doors were opened and the congregation flocked back into the church.

Now the church was crowded. A church to seat over eight hundred was now packed to capacity. It was now going on towards midnight. I managed to make my way through the crowd along the aisle toward the pulpit. I found a young woman, a teacher in the grammar school, lying prostrate on the floor of the pulpit praying, "Oh, God, is there mercy for me? Oh, God, is there mercy for me?" She was one of those at the dance. But she was now lying on the floor of the pulpit crying to God for mercy.

That meeting continued until four o'clock in the morning. I couldn't tell you how many were saved that night, but of this I am sure and certain, that at least five young men who were saved that night are ministers today in the Church of Scotland.

At four o'clock we decided to make for the manse. Of course, you understand, we made no appeals; you never need to make an appeal or an altar call in revival. Why, the roadside becomes an altar. We just leave men and women to make their way to God themselves; after all, that is the right way. God can look after His own. And when God takes a situation in hand, I tell you, He does a better work!

So we left them there, and just as I was leaving the church, a young man came to me and said, "Mr. Campbell, I would like you to go to the police station."

I said, "The police station? What's wrong?"

"Oh," he said, "There's nothing wrong, but there must be at least four hundred people gathered around there just now."

Now the sergeant there was a God-fearing man. He was in the meeting. And next to the police station was the cottage in which the two old women lived. People knew that this was a home that feared God. I believe that that had something to do with the magnet, the power that drew men. There was a coach-load at that meeting. A coach-load had come over twelve miles to be there. Now, if anyone would ask them today, "Why? How did it happen? Who arranged it?", they couldn't tell you. But they found themselves grouping together, and someone was saying, "What about going to Barvas? I don't know, but I have a

hunger in my heart to go there.” I can’t explain it, they couldn’t explain it, but God had the situation in hand.

This is revival, dear people! This is a sovereign act of God! This is the moving of God’s Spirit, I believe, in answer to the prevailing prayer of men and women who believed that God was a covenant-keeping God and must be true to His covenant engagement.

I went along to that meeting. As I was walking along that country road (we had to walk about a mile), I heard someone praying by the roadside. I could hear this man crying to God for mercy. I went over, and there were four young men on their knees. Yes, they had been at the dance, but they were now there crying to God for mercy. One of them was under the influence of drink, a young man who wasn’t twenty years of age. But that night God saved him, and today he is the parish minister and a man of God. He was converted in the revival with eleven other men who were to serve in his presbytery, a wonderful congregation.

Now when I got to the police station, I saw something that will live with me as long as I live. I didn’t preach; there was no need of preaching. We didn’t even sing. The people were crying to God for mercy. Oh, the confessions that were made! There was one old man crying out, “Oh, God, Hell is too good for me! Hell is too good for me!”

This is Holy Ghost conviction! Now mind you, that was on the very first night of a mighty demonstration that shook the island. Oh, let me restate, that was not the beginning of revival; revival began in a prayer meeting. Revival began in an awareness of God. Revival began when the Holy Ghost began to grip men, and that was how it began.

And, of course, after that we were at it night and day; churches were crowded. A messenger would come. I remember one night it was after three o’clock in the morning, and a messenger came to say that the churches were crowded in another parish fifteen miles away—crowded at that hour in the morning! I went to join this parish minister along with several other ministers. Oh, how I thank God for the ministers of Lewis, how they responded to the call of God, how they threw themselves into the effort. And God blessed them for it. Well, we went, and I found myself preaching in a large church, a church that would seat a thousand, and the Spirit of God was moving in a mighty way! I could see them falling on their knees. I could hear them crying to God for mercy. I could hear those outside praying. And that continued for at least two hours, I’m sure.

And then, as we were leaving the church, someone came to me to tell me that a very large number of people had gathered on a field because they could not get into the church. They couldn’t get into any of the churches so they had gathered in a field. Along with the other ministers, I decided to go to the field. And here I saw this enormous crowd standing there as though gripped by a power that they could not explain

The interesting thing about that meeting was the sight that I saw. The headmaster of a secondary school in the parish was lying with his face to the ground, crying to God for mercy. Oh, deeply convicted of his desperate need. And on either side of him were four young girls, two at each side. I would say they were about sixteen years of age. And they kept saying to the headmaster, “Master, Jesus that saved us last night in Barvas can save you tonight.” It is true that when a man comes into a vital relationship with Jesus Christ, his supreme desire is to win others. Those young girls were there that night to win their Master, and they won him. Oh, God swept into his life, I believe in answer to the prayer of the four young girls who had a burden.

Now that was how the revival began, and that is how it continued for five weeks. Then there was a lull of perhaps one week. Oh, the churches were still crowded, people were still seeking after God, and prayer meetings were being held all over the parishes. It was still the custom there that those who found the Saviour at night would be at prayer meeting the next noonday. A prayer meeting met every day at noonday. At that time all work stopped for two hours; looms were silent. For two hours, work stopped in the fields, and men gathered for prayer. And it was then that you got to know those who had found the Saviour on the previous night. You didn't need to make an appeal. They made their way to the prayer meeting to praise God for His salvation.

That continued for almost three years, until the whole of the island was swept by the mighty power of God. I couldn't tell you how many; I never checked the number. I was afraid to do that, always remembering what David did. I left the records with God. But this I know, that at least three quarters of those who were born again during the revival, were born again before they came near a church, before they had any word from me or any of the other ministers.

Now perhaps I should go into some of the features that characterized this remarkable movement. I have already mentioned to you that men were found in trances. Perhaps I should mention that in the Lewis revival we never saw anybody healed. That wasn't a feature of it. We never heard anybody speaking in tongues. Personally, I never heard anybody speak in tongues until a year or two ago, and that was in England. We knew nothing whatsoever about such manifestations. Don't misunderstand me. I believe in every gift mentioned in the Word of God, but it wasn't God's plan or purpose that we should be visited in that way, and we weren't. But we saw strange manifestations.

Now, there were times on this island that I felt the going fearfully hard. Oh, it was difficult to preach. You felt your very words coming back and hitting you. And I was a bit distressed. One night I turned to one of the other ministers, and I said, "Do you think that we should send for the praying men of Barvas?" Let me say in passing that the praying men of Barvas were praying for us just now. There were at least five of them in this part of God's vineyard who promised to do that, and I believe they were keeping to their promise.

And these were some of the remarkable movings of God. That very night, a captain in the Clan Line was saved whilst sailing at that very hour. The Spirit of God laid hold of him in his cabin. The Spirit of God moved upon lobster fishermen in the sound, and they had to leave their boats and their creels, and make for the island. By the morning, they were saved. Oh, wouldn't it be wonderful if we saw God move in that way in this community? God could do it.

I think one of the most outstanding things that happened, that I believe will go down in history as long as revival is mentioned, was in the parish of Arnol. Now, I regret to say that here I was bitterly opposed by a certain section of the Christian church, opposed by ministers who were born-again without question. They were God-fearing men, but for some reason or other, they came to believe that I wasn't sound in my doctrine because I preached the Baptism of the Holy Ghost. I proclaimed a Saviour who could deliver from sin—glorious emancipation! And they got it into their minds that I was teaching absolute perfection or sinless perfection, a thing that I never did, nor could I ever believe in. Of course, I believe in conditional perfection: "If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin" (1 John 1:7). That is scriptural perfection! That is based on obedience. But the dear men somehow believed this of me. And, of course, not one of them ever listened to me; they listened to stories brought to them. It was arranged that there would be a special effort made to oppose me. And several ministers were brought from the mainland to this particular parish to conduct mission meetings opposing "Campbell and his revival."

Well, they came, and they were so successful in their opposition that very few people from this particular community came near any of my meetings. It is true that the church was crowded. It is true that people were standing outside that couldn't get in. But these were people who came from neighboring parishes. They were brought by coaches and by cars and what have you, but there were very few from this particular village.

So one night one of the elders came to me and said: "Mr. Campbell, there is only one thing that we can do. We must give ourselves to prayer. Prayer changes things."

I told him, "Well, you know I am very willing for that." I asked, "Where will we meet?"

"Oh," he said, "there is a farmer, and he is very willing to place his farmhouse at our disposal." It was winter, and the church was cold. There was no heating in it. The people believed a crowded church would provide its own heat. But we wanted a warmer spot, and the farmer was approached. Now the farmer wasn't a Christian, nor was his wife, but they were God-fearing.

Now let me explain that you can be God-fearing and know nothing of salvation. There are thousands of people in upper Scotland who are God-fearing. They have family worship, morning and evening. They would never dream of going out to work in the morning without reading a chapter of the Bible and getting down on their knees to ask God to have mercy upon them and the family. The man may have been under the influence the night before. He may not darken the door of the church, but he would not dream of going out to work without reading the Bible. That is why I believe that the average unsaved person in the Hebrides has a far greater knowledge of the Word of God than the average Christian anywhere else. I think I can say that. It is because of this custom: family worship.

This man had that. He wasn't a Christian, but he was a God-fearing man, so we gathered at his house. I would say there were about thirty of us including five ministers of the Church of Scotland. These men had burdens, longings to see God move in revival. And we were praying, and oh, the going was hard. At least I felt it was hard. It came to between midnight and one o'clock in the morning when I turned again to this blacksmith whom I have already referred to. Oh, he was a prince in the parish. And I said to him, "John, I feel that God would have me to call upon you to pray."

Up until then he was silent. And that dear man began; he must have prayed for about half an hour. He paused for a second or so, and then looking up towards the heavens he cried, "God, do You know that Your honor is at stake? You promised to pour water on the thirsty and floods on the dry ground and, God, You are not doing it."

Now, my dear people, could we pray like that? Ah, but here was a man who could. He then went on to say, "There are five ministers in this meeting, and I don't know where a one of them stands in Your presence, not even Mr. Campbell, but if I know anything at all about my own poor heart, I think I can say, and I think that You know, that I'm thirsty! I'm thirsty to see the devil defeated in this parish. I'm thirsty to see this community gripped as you gripped Barvas. I'm longing for revival, and God, You are not doing it! I am thirsty, and you promised to pour water on me." Then, after a pause, he cried, "God, I now take it upon myself to challenge you to fulfill Your covenant engagement!" Now it was nearing two o'clock in the morning.

What happened? The house shook. A jug on a sideboard fell onto the floor and broke. A minister beside me said, "An earth tremor." And I said, "Yes." But I had my own thoughts. My mind went back to Acts chapter four: when they prayed, the place was shaken.

When John Smith stopped praying at twenty minutes past two, I pronounced the benediction and left the house. What did I see? I saw the whole community alive. Men carrying chairs, women carrying stools and asking, “Is there room for us in the churches?” And the Arnol revival broke out. And, oh, what a sweeping revival! I don’t believe there was a single house in the village that wasn’t shaken by God. I went into another farmhouse. I was thirsty, I was tired, and I needed something to drink. And I went in to ask for a drink of milk, and I found nine women in the kitchen crying to God for mercy—nine of them!

Now people, that’s revival. That is God at work. Miracles and supernatural happenings beyond human explanation—it’s God! And I am fully persuaded, dear people, that unless we see something like this happening, the average man will stagger back from our efforts, our conferences, our conventions and our crusades; they will stagger back disappointed, disillusioned and despairing. But oh, if something happens that demonstrates God....

Oh, my dear people, that is God at work! I should also mention the minister saw two young men on their knees in the field crying to God, and he recognized them as two pipers that were to have played at a dance under the auspices of a nursing association of the island in his parish. He turned to his wife and said: “Isn’t that wonderful? There are the two pipers who were advertised to play in the parish hall tonight. There they are crying to God for mercy. Come on, we’ll go home, and we will go to the dance, and we will tell them what has happened.”

So off he went. Oh, this was a man of God. Off he went with his wife. It was about fifteen miles. He went to the dance, and they were not at all pleased with his appearing. He was there to disturb them; they knew that he wasn’t there to dance for they knew the man. However, he went in, and when a lull came in the dancing, he stepped onto the floor and he said, “Kinfolk, something very wonderful has happened tonight! The Smith Pipers were to be here, the two brothers were to be here, but they are crying to God for mercy in Barvas!”

Suddenly, there was stillness, not a word. And then he spoke again, “Young folk, will you sing a Psalm with me?”

“Yes,” said one young man, “if you lead the singing yourself.” And he gave out Psalm 50, “For God is depicted as a flame of fire. . .” and while singing that Psalm, the power of God fell upon the dance. And I understand that only three who were there that night remained unsaved. And the first young man to cry to God for mercy was really only a boy. Just last year he had been inducted into one of the largest parishes in Scotland. He found the Saviour that night with many others. Oh, dear people, this is the doing of God.

You ask me, “What is the fruit of this type of movement?” Some little time ago the parish minister was asked to give a report in the record of the Church of Scotland. He was asked to give a report on the fruit of the revival. Did they stand? Was there any backsliding? This is what he wrote: “I will confine my remarks to my own parish. I will allow the other ministers to give their own reports. But let me speak of my own parish. In a certain village, 122 young people found the faith—and I’m not talking about the middle-aged or the old. They were wonderful. But I’m referring to the young people, 122 of them, all over the age of seventeen. They found the Saviour during the first day of the revival. Today, I can say that they are growing like flowers in the garden of God. There is not a single backslider among them.”

Now, dear people, that’s true. But, oh, if you knew the young people that have gone forth who are now missionaries today in this, that, and the other part of the world, who came into saving relationships, growing, as he said, like flowers in the garden of God. Oh, how we thank God for the stream of young people who have gone into the ministry. What we are seeing today is a movement again among teenagers. We asked a minister recently: “How can you explain it? Can you explain this movement in any way?”

He said, "Yes, I can. I believe this has broken out because of the steadfastness of the young people who found the Saviour during the big revival years ago." It has been the steadfastness of those young people. I can say without fear of contradiction that I can count on my ten fingers all who dropped off from the prayer meetings. Of course, they are scattered all over the world. They are in the mission fields and different places today, but according to the ministers, they are standing true to the God of the Covenant, true to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, my dear people, that's the story. And I tell it because I fear that another man has been going about telling stories about the revival and writing books about it, and I regret to say that statements have been made by him and written in his books that are not true to fact. But that is the story of the revival that can bear the light of examination. God did it. And we bless Him for it.