

RAISING OUR EXPECTATIONS

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"The Spirit of God began extraordinarily to set in, and wonderfully work amongst us; and there were, very suddenly, one after another, five or six persons who were to all appearance savingly converted, and some of them wrought upon in a very remarkable manner".

"Presently upon this, a great and earnest concern about the great things of religion and the eternal world became universal in all parts of the town, and among persons of all degrees and all ages . . . All other talk but about spiritual and eternal things was soon thrown by . . . unless so much as was necessary for people carrying on their ordinary secular business".

"The work of conversion was carried on in a most astonishing manner, and increased more and more; souls did as it were come by flocks to Jesus Christ. From day to day, for many months together, might be seen evident instances of sinners brought out of darkness into marvellous light".

"There were many instances of persons that came from abroad on visits or on business, that had not long been here before to all appearance they were savingly wrought upon, and partook of that shower of divine blessing that God rained down here and went home rejoicing".

"This work of God, as it was carried on, and the number of true saints multiplied, soon made a glorious alteration in the town; so that in the spring and summer following, anno 1735, the town seemed to be full of the presence of God: it never was so full of love, nor so full of joy; and yet so full of distress, as it was then. There were remarkable tokens of God's presence in almost every house."

These are some quotes from one of the most famous and influential reports of a revival ever written. Jonathan Edwards' description of events in Northampton Massachusetts in 1734/35 used the word "revival" for almost the first time. He later wrote:

"Ever since the great work of God that was wrought here about nine years ago, there has been a great abiding alteration in this town . . . among the youth of the town, with respect to revelling, frolicking, profane and unclean conversation, and lewd songs; instances of fornication have been very rare; there has also been a great alteration amongst both old and young with respect to tavern-haunting. I suppose the town has been in no measure so free of vice in these respects, for any long time together, for this sixty years, as it has been this nine years past. There has also been an evident alteration with respect to a charitable spirit to the poor".

A wonderful work of God, which changed a whole community! But that was not all. Indeed it was only a small beginning. Edwards named 35 other towns where similar things happened. Far more significant though was what happened when his report reached Britain. It was published in London in 1738 and was soon widely distributed. The timing was perfect, because amongst those who read it were the newly converted John and Charles Wesley, as well as 24 year old George Whitefield who had been converted three years earlier. It amazed them and *raised their expectations* of what could happen in Britain also. Soon afterwards, through their passionate, Holy Spirit empowered open-air preaching they saw thousands converted and the nation changed! As they say, the rest is history . . .

It seems that most Christians in our nation do not know that Australia also has a rich and inspiring history of revivals. Much of this arose out of the Methodist movement begun by the Wesleys, which had reached its full influence in Britain by 1788, when the First Fleet sailed. I believe that if we become aware of these great acts of God in our own land, they can raise our expectations also. What God will do here again can be just as inspiring, as we earnestly seek Him and His blessing through prayer and evangelism.

Attached to each fortnightly prayer letter for the *Jesus. All About Life* project will be my summary of one of these past great outpourings of the Holy Spirit in our own land. Edwards' account of revival, as well as those in the Acts of the Apostles, have triggered countless revivals elsewhere. My hope is that this will happen here also, through knowing our own spiritual history! There is no reason why we should not raise our expectations for this!

Did you know that the second known revival in Australia occurred near Dapto in 1838?! Stay tuned . . .