

JOHN WATSFORD AND THE 1840 REVIVAL AT PARRAMATTA

A model for the people of any local church and their region

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John Watsford's father had been a convict. Later he began the first coach service between Sydney and Parramatta. John was born in 1820 at Parramatta, the third of twelve children. They were a church-going Methodist family. He "was the first outstanding preacher to be born in Australia . . . He saw genuine revivals at several periods during his ministry" (Iain Murray, *Australian Christian Life from 1788*, Edinburgh, Banner of Truth, 1988, page 141). The following are some observations and principles about revival, with relevant Bible verses, drawn from Watsford's description of the 1840 revival at Parramatta.

Their attitudes - wholehearted love for God and people!

- They had a heart-yearning for lost people, longing to see them find salvation
- They overcame any bad attitudes they could have felt against the Pastor or church
- They did not expect the Pastor to "do it all on his own"

Principle: Maintaining right *heart*-motivations and attitudes is our greatest challenge (Proverbs 4:23, 16:2, Psalms 51:6-17, 66:18, 86:11-12, 139:23-24, Mark 12:30-31, 1Corinthians 4:4-5)

They were committed to keep up specific prayer

- They set up a daily personal prayer discipline, with some fasting
- This was private, secret prayer, not for any recognition
- They prayed together as well as alone, similar to a "prayer triplet"
- They prayed for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the "ordinary church services"

Principle: Keep on praying for revival and believe that our prayers can be answered even here and now! (Daniel 6:10, Matthew 6:5-6, Luke 11:9-13, Acts 4:23-31)

When the Holy Spirit came in power

- God used many people, not just one leader or praying person
- This especially included *young* people (John Watsford was 20 at the time)
- Many were converted or recommitted to Christ
- The whole region was impacted!

Principle: God can do amazing things, even through people like us (John 14:12-14)

The 1840 Revival at Parramatta

John Watsford

Some of the local preachers and leaders in Sydney and Parramatta were men of great spiritual power, men who believed in prayer and fasting, and who did not depend upon a stranger coming now and then to hold special services and bring sinners to Christ. They believed in the Holy Ghost, and pleaded for His coming in connection with the ordinary services. As a result, there were "showers of blessing," glorious revivals, wonderful displays of the Holy Spirit's power in convincing and saving men. We used often to see a whole congregation broken down and unable to leave the church; and numbers, night after night, coming to the house of God and finding salvation, and this no matter who was conducting the service. A more particular account of some of the revivals with which I was at this time connected will not be uninteresting to the reader.

The first revival in Parramatta that I know of was in 1840. Religion had been in a low state. The minister of the Circuit was a good man, but old and nearly worn out. He was great opposed to noise, and marked the men who were very much in earnest. It was the custom then to call by name a few persons to pray in the prayer-meetings, and any who were at all noisy were never asked. Two of our excellent and devoted local preachers, who were always seeking to save souls, were placed on the list of persons not allowed to take part in the prayer-meetings. Very soon I was added to the number.

One day the two brethren to whom I have referred said to me, "We are going specially to pray for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and the revival of God's work, and we want you to join us. This is our plan: Every morning and evening and at midday to spend some time in pleading with God to pour out His Spirit; to observe every Friday as a day of fasting and prayer; to sit together in the meetings, and, though not permitted to pray aloud, silently to plead for the coming of the Holy Ghost." I think they were a little afraid of me, as they gave me this caution: "Now mind, you must not say a word against our minister, or have any unkind feeling toward him, because he does not allow us to take part in the meetings. He knows what he is doing, and has his own reasons for it. If we complain, or speak against him, the Lord will not hear our prayer."

We carried out our plan for one, two, three weeks, no one but God and ourselves knowing what we were doing. At the end of the fourth week, on Sunday evening, the Rev. William Walker preached a powerful sermon. After the service the people flocked to the prayer-meeting, till the schoolroom was filled. My two friends were there, one on each side of me, and I knew they had hold of God. We could hear sighs and suppressed sobs all around us. The old minister of the Circuit, who had conducted the meeting, was concluding with the benediction, "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God" – here he stopped, and sobbed aloud. When he could speak he called out, "Brother Watsford, pray." I prayed, and then my two friends prayed, and oh! the power of God that came upon the people, who were overwhelmed by it in every part of the room! And what a cry for mercy! It was heard by the passers-by in the street, some of whom came running in to see what was the matter, and were smitten down at the door in great distress. The clock of a neighbouring church struck twelve before we could leave the meeting. How many were saved I cannot tell. Day after day and week after week the work went on, and many were converted. Among them many young persons.

Watsford, John. *Glorious gospel triumphs, as seen in my life and work in Fiji and Australasia*. London: Charles H. Kelley, 1900. Chapter 1, pages 12-13.

(This book is now reproduced in full on the website www.chr.org.au).