

**Articles and Sermons :: William Booth and the Revival on Tyneside****William Booth and the Revival on Tyneside - posted by sermonindex (), on: 2003/11/22 15:44**

Methodism became firmly established in Gateshead through the ministry of John Wesley. His regular visits to the North-East built up a strong and vibrant community of believers. After his death however his work became fragmented, with rival groups of Methodists each opening their own chapels and treating one another like heretics. In Gateshead there were chapels belonging to the Wesleyan Methodists, the Primitive Methodists, the Independent Methodists, the United Methodist Free Church and the Methodist New Connexion.

In 1836 the New Connexion opened its first chapel in Melbourne Street, in the Barn Close area of the town (now underneath the dual carriageway behind the bus station). Bethesda Chapel was built to seat 1300 people, though it rarely got such numbers - by 1843 the regular congregation was between 30 and 60. In 1858 a young new pastor was appointed. William Booth, then aged 29 had already acquired a reputation as a fiery preacher and a fine evangelist. That was part of the problem - he wanted to be an evangelist, travelling the country conducting crusades, but the New Connexion only had evangelists abroad; in Britain they would only sanction pastors working in a local circuit. Booth was heavily influenced by the American evangelist James Caughey who had seen over 30,000 converted in his crusades around Britain in the mid 1840's.

Results began to be seen almost immediately. In January 1859 he began a series of revival meetings at Bethesda Chapel. He preached three times every Sunday, then again on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday evenings. Very quickly the chapel was packed. Instead of the regular congregation of 120, over 2000 people were squeezing through the doors, filling every available space to hear the gospel, and so many were getting saved that the local ironworkers nicknamed the place "The Converting Shop". The meetings continued daily for four months, finally ending with a service held on Easter Monday. The newspaper advert for this read: "Revival demonstration for the North of England ... Christians of all Denominations are invited to join in celebrating the Gracious Revival of Religion with which the Borough of Gateshead has been favored ... The Rev. W. Booth will deliver an Address explanatory and defensive of Revival Movements."

Booth continued the work with camp meetings on the Windmill Hills and open air revival meetings in the town, in spite of the opposition of local publicans (fearing for their business) and their hired troublemakers. Revival had also broken out around this time in Ulster, though it has been claimed it did not spread to England until much later in the year. Booth was well aware of what was happening in the North of Ireland, and indeed in one meeting in July 1859 he compared what was taking place there to his own camp meetings on the Windmill Hills and the services at Bethesda. R.E. Davies in his book on Revival "I Will Pour Out My Spirit" implies that the commencement of the awakening in northern England was due to a series of meetings held in Newcastle in August 1859 by an American couple, Walter and Phoebe Palmer, though it was already well underway by this time. One person who was greatly influenced by the Palmers was Booth's wife Catherine. Until this time she had left the preaching to her husband and busied herself with work amongst the poor of the town. A local minister Arthur Rees had issued a pamphlet denouncing Mrs Palmer on the grounds that it was unscriptural for women to preach. Catherine Booth responded with a 32 page pamphlet of her own defending the right of women to preach - though she had yet to preach herself. At Pentecost 1860 she felt the Holy Spirit come upon her in one of her husband's meetings and she went to the front and confessed that she had wronged her Saviour by refusing to speak in the past. That night she preached her first sermon to a church which was "crowded to the doors, and people sat on the very window-sills".

The pressure of the revival and the regular preaching was affecting William Booth's health, and increasingly his wife began to take on some of the preaching work - indeed a woman preacher was such a novelty that invitations for her to speak came from around the region. With things going so well in the centre of Gateshead, William Booth began to concentrate on taking the revival to the outlying regions of the circuit, preaching in Sherrif Hill, Felling Shore and Mount Pleasant. All the time he was begging the Connexion to allow him to travel as an evangelist, but he was continuously refused. The final straw came with the Annual Conference of the Methodist New Connexion in May 1861 - the most they could offer him was a move from Gateshead to Newcastle. Booth refused, and eight weeks later tendered his resignation. Free of denominational restrictions the Booths left the North-East and led a crusade in Cornwall. After a series of further crusades around the country they settled in the East End of London in 1865 where they started the Christian Mission, later to become the Salvation Army.

After they left, Bethesda Chapel was never able to maintain the momentum of the revival days and swiftly saw a drop in membership. By the 1890's, with more of the population moving to the suburbs, the New Connexion opened a new chapel at Whitehall Road in Bensham and Bethesda Chapel was closed becoming a printing works and later a warehouse, eventually being demolished in the 1960's.

In January 1879, following a certain amount of advance publicity using "huge placards", William Booth sent six young women in their twenties, dubbed "Hallelujah Lasses", to Gateshead. They began to hold evangelistic meetings and hired a number of halls for the purpose, including two of the town's music halls. Their target was the poorest section of the working classes, amongst whom the church had failed to make any impact. Within a short time they began to have a significant effect, and also to attract the attention of the press. The meetings were packed and large numbers began to repent and turn to the Lord. In March 1879 the meetings were extended across the river into Newcastle. When William and Catherine Booth finally came to the area in April 1879, it was estimated that around 9000 people (mostly drawn from "the masses") attended the various meetings held by the Hallelujah Lasses in Gateshead and Newcastle. On one Sunday, in Gateshead alone, 140 persons - many of whom were well known to the police - were led to God and repented on that occasion.

A succession of letters began to fill the correspondence columns of the Newcastle Daily Chronicle, much of it highly partisan to one side or the other. The Catholic William Madden was shocked. The meetings were "disgraceful scenes" which "have a contaminating effect". On the contrary S. Glover wrote "Being in the Town Hall, Gateshead, the other night, I saw such a sight that was quite sufficient to make any Christian breathe forth a prayer that God would bless their efforts". Numerous papers began to carry articles (one even had a poem!), particularly on a series of meetings held in May 1879 under the heading "Council of War". William Booth was a pioneer in using the media for to get publicity. His view was that it didn't matter whether the reports were positive or negative - if articles were written, more people would attend the meetings and hear the gospel. A journalist for the Newcastle Daily Chronicle wrote features covering this for four days, and he had great difficulty describing the things he had seen. William Booth had come with what was virtually a circus freak show. All the publicity for the events mentioned the appearance of the One-Eyed Captain, the Hallelujah Giant (a doctor who weighed 33 stones), the Converted Sweep (Elijah Cadman - later a Salvation Army Commissioner), and the Hallelujah Violin (played by Booth's son Ballington). The climax of the Council of War was an all night prayer meeting held in a hall on Gateshead High Street which was covered in three separate newspapers (who appeared to have been there at different stages during the proceedings). The Chronicle writer was shocked - there was hysterical laughter, people bent double, swaying, swooning, twitching - and no-one else there seemed much bothered by what was taking place!

The effect of this campaign was dramatic. In just nine months, eighteen Salvation Army corps had been set up in the North East (three of these in Gateshead) - even the Mayor of Gateshead sent a message of support to the Hallelujah Lasses. He thanked them for lightening the labors of the magistrate; whilst their meetings were crowded to excess, the pubs were comparatively empty, and in consequence there were fewer cases in the courts and inmates in the jails. The Alexandra Music Hall in Gateshead which had been used by the Hallelujah Lasses for meetings never reopened again as a music hall, becoming instead a Salvation Army barracks. The methods used by the Hallelujah Lasses and the Council of War may have been controversial, but in just the first few months they saw spectacular success with many hundreds being saved in Gateshead alone, thousands throughout the North East, mostly from those areas of the community where the established churches had previously seen little fruit.

*by Andy Williamson*

**Re: William Booth and the Revival on Tyneside - posted by kdbutton, on: 2006/10/31 23:02**

This is quite a story, I had no idea what the beginnings of the Salvation Army was like. I think learning history of the church is so important to better assess the movement of the Holy Spirit today.

They were harshly criticized by other Christians, it may be a good lesson in being slow to make judgments on people that actually might be acting in obedience to the unction of the Holy Spirit.

Or am I mistaken that the Salvation Army is now in the good graces of the church at large?