

“First Century Signs and Wonders in Australia”

By Marcus Thomas

In the April Blog, we featured the Cwmparc Church in the Rhondda Valley. This month we are featuring the story of John H. Hewitt. It was through contact with his son in Australia that I discovered a link with the Cwmparc Church. John Hewitt's son, also called John, tells the story:

“In 1940 while Dad was evangelising, he also cared for the Treorchy District that included Cwmparc, up on the hill behind us. I remember Jacob Purnell coming to that corrugated iron building in Cwmparc in 1940 and I recall making a public confession of faith there. The hand of a six year old wasn't acknowledged, but my Dad saw it. When we got home that night, Dad and I knelt on the cobbled floor of the gas-lit kitchen at 18 Illtyd Street. A precious memory.”
John W. J. Hewitt

First Century Signs and Wonders in Australia

The above headline appeared in Melbourne, Australia in 1933. The man that God was using in the revival was called John H. Hewitt. The headline a month later was, “Melbourne Miraculously Moved – Revival Unabated”, with these subheadings: 700 Decisions for Christ; 2,300 Prayed For; Hundreds Healed; Baptismal Services Conducted; Conclusive Proof the Day of Miracles is Not Yet Passed; Church Established in Bible Fashion.

John Hewitt had come to Melbourne in 1931, which in itself was a miracle. The pioneer for the Apostolic Church in Australia at this particular time was a man called Pastor William Cathcart. He knew John Hewitt from the Apostolic Church in the UK. William Cathcart was on a tram in Adelaide, praying quietly about contacting Hewitt, but with no idea where he was. To his astonishment, he saw him walking along the street. He left the tram and the two men met.

John Hewitt was stopping over in Adelaide en route by ship from the UK to Brisbane, where he was to take over the pastorate of the “Canvas Cathedral” Pentecostal Church (*see note 1*). Leaving his wife and baby daughter on the ship, he had felt impressed to visit the city. William Cathcart and John Hewitt discussed the situation and agreed that if it was God's plan for them to work together in Australia, then God would work things out in His time.

Earlier that same year in the Edinburgh church, while John Hewitt was holding a revival and healing mission, he stood up, (as remembered by the Edinburgh pastor, Joshua McCabe, who would be travelling to Australia himself in November 1931), and said, “I've been in Australia. I went there as a young man... I don't know how it is, but in my bones God has put a desire and a willingness to go to Australia. I don't know how it's going to happen but I feel I'll work with Pastor McCabe and William Cathcart in Australia soon.” (*see note 2*)

The outcome was that, by 1933, John Hewitt was in Melbourne with William Cathcart and Joshua McCabe.

Barry Chant, in his book “The Spirit of Pentecost” (*see note 3*), describes John Hewitt this way: “A huge jovial Welshman, he was full of bounce and energy. His preaching was lively and people responded readily to him.”

John Hewitt was born in Maesteg, South Wales, in 1900 and was saved in 1914 and filled with the Holy Spirit, speaking in new languages the following year.

Of his early life to 1933, Joshua McCabe writes (*see note 4*): “John Hewitt was only 18 years of age when he was sent by prophecy with two others, to visit Pastor D.P. Williams to hear about the Apostolic Church. God had told Pastor Williams that three men would call upon him that morning and the result was that John Hewitt became a member of the Apostolic Church.”

He immigrated to Australia as a young man in his early twenties and, as there was no Apostolic Church in Australia at that time, he united with a lively and consecrated Baptist Church and eventually became a Baptist minister with a difference. He had the baptism of the Holy Spirit. God used him in evangelistic ministry.

In January 1927, John Hewitt's fiancée, Lily Newton from the Apostolic Church in Swansea, travelled to Brisbane. They were married in Silkstone on a Thursday because they had to travel to be in Sydney on Saturday to fulfil the invitation to be pastor of the Pentecostal Church in Petersham, Sydney. They spent their honeymoon conducting healing and revival meetings in Sydney.

From Sydney, John Hewitt moved to Bethel Temple in Wellington, New Zealand and invited the healing evangelist Pastor Stephen Jeffries (see note 5), who he knew from South Wales, to New Zealand. Together they travelled to Adelaide for a mission, then on to South Africa.

John Hewitt returned to South Wales in 1929 and he continued to lead revival and healing missions in the UK. At the age of 29 he was invited to the Council Meetings of the Apostolic Church, where God called him to be an evangelical apostle in the Body of Christ. In August of that year, while attending the Apostolic Church International Convention in Penygroes, this calling was confirmed prophetically through Pastor D.P. William's brother, Jones Williams. He went to South Africa in 1929-30 before returning to the UK for evangelistic campaigns.

By 1933, pastors Cathcart and McCabe had commenced Apostolic works in the states of West Australia, South Australia and Victoria. Joshua McCabe writes (see note 4), "...the Lord moved by circumstance to make it possible for Pastor Hewitt to link up with us in Melbourne. This united us with Pastor Hewitt and him with the Apostolic Church from then till the day of his death, during which time he never ceased to teach and preach the whole counsel of God.

Melbourne

In May 1933, William Cathcart and John Hewitt began an evangelistic mission in Melbourne. Thirty thousand leaflets were printed and distributed. Over a thousand people attended the first meeting.

Barry Chant writes, "The campaign was characterised by bright singing led by the evangelist's younger brother Isaac, simple, direct preaching and prayer for the sick. On the opening night, 25 people responded to Hewitt's invitation to confess Christ and about 100 sought laying on of hands for healing. Within six weeks there were no empty seats."

The miracles recorded included a woman deaf for eighteen years able to hear; a lame man walking unaided and sight restored to the blind eye of a sixteen year old girl. The outstanding healing of this mission was that of a Salvationist. Barry Chant writes, "Ensign H. Jenkins... for nine years had used a walking stick, crutches or a wheel chair. A week later she gave a public testimony and walked around the platform unaided to enthusiastic applause from the people." This mission finished on 18th June 1933 and Ensign Jenkins gave her testimony at the final meeting. 56 people responded to the call for salvation and Hewitt prayed for 120 people.

Part of the headline quoted about the above mission in Melbourne read, "Church Established in Bible Fashion." At a Breaking of Bread service on Sunday 4th June, 107 people became members of the Apostolic Church in Melbourne and Pastor Joshua McCabe, who had come from Adelaide for the service, prophetically called a number of people into various local church responsibilities. Another 40 people became members in the following two weeks.

Joshua McCabe gave this overview of John Hewitt's early mission work in Australia: "God signally set His seal to the ministry of His servant in three great missions in Melbourne, Adelaide and Perth. Two thousand decisions for Christ were registered in the five months and hundreds were healed in answer to prayer....cripples walked, blind eyes were made to see, the deaf heard and the maimed left their crutches and wheel-chairs to rejoice in health. Other campaigns followed and within 18 months the Apostolic flag was unfurled by pastors Cathcart, Hewitt, McCabe and John's brother, Isaac, in the states of Tasmania, New South Wales, Queensland and in the land of New Zealand."

Between the years 1932 and 1934, 44 Apostolic churches were opened in Australia.

New Zealand

In November 1933, John Hewitt travelled to Wellington, New Zealand, from Melbourne. William Cathcart had arrived in Wellington at the end of October 1933 and had started a series of teaching meetings and, feeling the need for an evangelistic thrust, had invited John to join him.

The revival mission started on Sunday 19th November 1933. There were some 700 at this first meeting and 14 decisions to follow Christ. One particular case of divine healing was of a seventeen year old boy, who having suffered from paralysis for twelve years, regained the use of his limbs after prayer.

On the 7th January 1934, the first Apostolic Church in New Zealand was established in Wellington. Pastor James Worsfold writes (see note 6), "On Sunday the 7th January, 1934, a communion service was held in the Star Theatre, Wellington and after ministry by John H. Hewitt, the right hand of fellowship was extended and one hundred and twelve people responded, these being the first to be received into membership of the Apostolic Church, New Zealand, thus forming the first organised congregation. Later in this meeting, prophetic ministry was given by J. G. McCabe, nominating men for office in the church. Afterwards they were set apart to their particular calling by the laying on of hands by the apostleship as represented by John H. Hewitt."

Pastor Joshua McCabe wrote this summary of John Hewitt's ministry – "There were times when the anointing of God was so mightily upon God's servant that we often marvelled at the power and inspiration and wisdom with which he ministered the gospel."

United Kingdom

John Hewitt returned to the UK in 1938 and became pastor in Treorchy, where God continued to anoint his evangelistic and apostolic ministry. On one occasion in August 1938 at the Penygroes Convention, he prayed for a Mrs. Evans from Abertridwr, who had cancer. This was her testimony: "I went out and when Pastor Hewitt laid hands on me, I felt the power of God through him that night going through my whole body, and from that time till this day of writing, God in His great mercy had compassion on me, and healed my body. Glory to His Name!" (see *Riches of Grace, February 1940*).

The following year at the annual convention, he prayed for a Mrs. Pritchard, who had been in a terrible accident in 1934. As a result she had lost the use of her right arm. This was Mrs Pritchard's testimony: "Pastor Hewitt was being used of God unto the healing of his children; so I went one afternoon to be healed. God restored the use of my arm, by touching me through the laying on of hands by Pastor Hewitt." (see *Riches of Grace, May 1940*).

There are other unique stories about John Hewitt, not only demonstrating the anointing that he carried across the world, but also revealing the heart that he had for people and for His Lord. One colleague wrote this, "John Hewitt loved His Lord. He loved His service. He loved His life-work, evangelising. He loved the lost and the sinners. He loved the sick and afflicted and the compassion of Christ oozed out of him."

Pastor John Hewitt was a giant for God. There can be no other description. During his ministry he would talk about "wagon-loads of blessing" – blessings that he brought from God to people all across the world. He never wavered in the truths he believed, that Jesus was Saviour, Baptiser, Healer and Coming King. Signs and wonders followed as he preached these truths.

John Hewitt died in 1962 and, at his memorial service, the Lord spoke prophetically through Pastor A. G. Bain: "...My Word comes to you at this time to draw your attention again to the life that I have received unto Myself; for it is true that My servant could have taken it easier if he chose to do so. My servant could have taken a line of labour that would pay handsomely in the natural and many a time My servant could have had leisure hours but rather he chose to use his knowledge in the purposes of God. He would not accept deliverance from the wearisome demands of the everyday experiences in My will but rather with delight he chose to go the way of the Cross, the way in which I have called him in My will; and day after day and year after year took their toll upon his human frame."

The following tribute was given by a colleague who had worked with John Hewitt in Great Britain and Australia: "He will be greatly missed as a bright personality – he always bore a smile and a cheer. As a minister, when the power of God rested on him, there was not a man here or in England, to equal him."

At this memorial service on 15th May 1962 in Melbourne, Pastor John's son, John W. J. Hewitt, who had been ordained by Pastor Joshua McCabe in November 1955, had hands laid on him and his wife Desma as they were being sent forth to the New Guinea mission field. John's father was to have shared in this commissioning.

The writer to the Hebrews says we are surrounded by "a cloud of witnesses" and, as an Apostolic Church, we are privileged to have the witness of a man of God called John Henry Hewitt. The Hebrew Christians, remembering those witnesses, are told to "lay aside every weight" and "run with endurance" the race that is set out before them. Reflecting on the life of John H. Hewitt, let us choose the way of the Cross for our lives. The prophecy at the memorial service continued with these words, "There will be moments when I will give you the right to choose between that which is lesser and that which is best in My will." John Hewitt chose the best. May we learn from his example.

A Son's Tribute

John W.J. Hewitt writes, "I am ever grateful to have been brought up in the home of my parents, John and Lily Hewitt. It would be remiss of me to not comment on my mother's strong faith. Her total commitment to the Lord and His people has always been without question. Also she has been an inspiration to her family as well as being a strength to her husband and his ministry. This involved great sacrifice as he was away so much on campaigns.

Dad was born in 1900 in Nantyffyllon, Maesteg, South Wales. In 1904 his father, also John Henry Hewitt, was a 'drunkard' coal miner when the Welsh Revival broke out. His life was totally transformed, so much so that the pit ponies could not understand his commands without the usual expletives. My Dad left school at a young age to go down the coal mine to assist his father.

I recall my grandmother, Hannah Hewitt, telling the story of how my Dad would go into his bedroom with his candle and Bible at night as he studied the Word of God. In the morning she would go into the room to wake him up for work only to find him still on his knees, Bible still open and candle totally melted down. This obviously had great influence on his future ministry, for I remember the revelation from the Word just flowed as he preached.

I have always known the unconditional love of my father. Though he was away so much, when he was home he would show great interest in my education, spiritual development and sporting activities. His example in relating to the wider Body of Christ impacted me as I grew up and the affect of this continues today in my ministry across the nations and denominations. This has been passed on to my family in their service for the Lord. At the present time there are three of our children and four grandchildren ordained in ministry across Australia. So Dad's legacy continues. On that point it is interesting to note that I was Superintendent in Papua New Guinea for six years; in Australia, General Secretary for 4 years; President for 14 years; my son Dale, National Leader for 8 years and my daughter Ruth's husband, Wayne Swift, is the current National Leader.

In 1938 our family returned to the UK where my Dad would be used in campaigns across the land and also Denmark. This was planned to be a visit of two-year duration, but when we were living in Treorchy in 1939, WW2 broke out. We could not get a passage back to Australia until 1945 after VE Day. During this time Dad also pastored districts in Llanelli, Pontypridd and Kennington, London at the height of the blitz. On my many subsequent visits to preach across England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales, also Denmark, South Africa, Jamaica, USA and Canada, I have heard so many testimonies of lives transformed and healed during Dad's campaigns.

Dad was a man of great compassion with a hunger to see people come to Christ and be healed. I remember clearly the times he would lean on the pulpit weeping as he saw people walking down the aisle to meet their Saviour. Also he often wept as he prayed for the sick.

So much more could be said, but I am working on a book that will cover much more of my Dad's ministry and the history of the Apostolic Church in Australia."

Finally

In conclusion, I firstly want to thank Pastor John's son, for his help with this article. It has been really appreciated and we look forward to his book being published.

Secondly, I leave you with a question, "Does God still make men like John H. Hewitt?" I believe he does, because "His methods" are still people. What is required of us? At Pastor John Hewitt's memorial service, the prophetic word also said this: "Oh, My people, will you come near unto Me at this time that I will put My hand upon you and will put My seal of approval upon you. I have wanted to put the seal of My approval upon many but they have been too far from My Hand... you must be humble before the Lord before I can put My seal of approval upon you.... Come and let Me anoint you, My people, and I will cause the evangelical to arise in your midst; I will cause....you...to be anointed with fresh oil..."

Notes –

1. The "Canvas Cathedral" Pentecostal Church, Brisbane – this church was started in a tent by William Booth-Clibborn, grandson of General William Booth, founder of the Salvation Army. When William Booth-Clibborn and family decided to travel to the USA, it was John Hewitt who was invited to take over this church in Brisbane (see book above pages 210-211). On being asked, John wrote in reply "I am delighted to know I am still remembered." John had previously been in Queensland but was now back in the UK. Barry Chant writes this about John's ministry at the "Canvas Cathedral" – "Another evangelist, he was well able to sustain the momentum of the Canvass Cathedral – in his first six months there were 66 baptisms – and to see the laying of the foundation stone for Glad Tidings Tabernacle on 13th August 1932. The new building was opened on 10th December." This building had seating for 1000 and Pastor Tom Rees, "the prince of preachers", from the Apostolic Church in the UK, was the guest speaker at the opening.
2. Barry Chant – Interview with Pastor Joshua McCabe September 1990.
3. Barry Chant "The Spirit of Pentecost" – a book that traces the origins and development of the Pentecostal Movement in Australia between the years 1870-1939.
4. Joshua McCabe quoted from "Herald of Grace: John H. Hewitt Memorial Number: July August 1962"
5. Stephen Jeffries – born in the 1870's, he was converted in November 1904 at the age of 28. He was from the same valley that John Hewitt was from, the Maesteg valley. After being filled with the Holy Spirit and speaking in other languages, he was mightily used by God in Wales and beyond "with signs following the preaching of the Word." He and his brother were the founders of the Elim Foursquare Movement in the UK.
6. James E. Worsfold – "A History of the Charismatic Movements in New Zealand".