

## Memories of Maghera

### *'Precious Memories, how they linger'*

These words of a well-known song remind us of how precious memories can be to all of us. In researching the history of Maghera many of its memories of bygone days can be found in historic documents. A lot of information has also been recorded in books, diaries and letters. Some of the senior citizens still like to sit at the fireside and talk of some of the most remarkable and memorable events in the history of Maghera. These accounts have been handed down from generation to generation and are very precious to the present inhabitants of the district.

One of the abiding memories of Maghera concerns an event known as 'The Great Awakening'. It was a Spiritual 'Awakening' and consisted of three elements:

- ▶ People were awakened to the fact that they were sinners and needed to be saved from the penalty for sin, which is eternity in Hell.
- ▶ They were awakened to the fact that Church attendance, religious exercises or their own good works could not save them.
- ▶ They were awakened to the fact that their only hope of Salvation lay in the Lord Jesus Christ, who died as a substitute for sinners. On the cross at Calvary He paid in full the penalty for the sins of all who would repent and put their faith in Him, trusting Him as Saviour.

This 'Awakening' began in Kells, Co. Antrim but soon spread to many parts of Ulster. It reached the Maghera district on Thursday 2 June 1859. A man named Thomas Campbell travelled from Co. Antrim to visit relatives and friends in Culnady, a village situated about two miles from Maghera. As he sat at the fireside in his relative's house he began to describe some of the unusual happenings he had witnessed at religious meetings.

The very presence of God seemed to fill the meeting-places and people who had not been to Church for many years seemed to be drawn to the services. During many of the meetings a number of people cried out in agony, publicly confessing that they were sinners. Others fell to the ground as if they had fainted. Some of the congregation shook with terror, gripped with a terrible fear of Hell. Others fell into a trance. The burden of sin weighed heavily upon many hearts and fear of the impending judgement of God caused them to cry to Him for mercy. People who had believed that Church membership or attendance at the Church Ordinances or Sacraments would save their souls suddenly realised that salvation could only be found through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and His finished work on the cross.

As Thomas Campbell related the account of these happenings some of those who listened began to be affected. One of these was the servant-girl of the family. Another was Thomas Campbell's 17-year-old brother George. It soon became very evident to the others in the room that God was dealing with their friends. It seemed to be all the more amazing because of the fact that this was happening in a farmhouse and not in a Church building. The neighbours heard about what was happening and very soon a large crowd had gathered.

One of those who visited the house early the next morning was a woman who had no real interest in religion at all. She came out of curiosity to see what was happening. God began to deal with her and very soon she came under conviction of sin and cried out to God for mercy. God graciously delivered those who sought His mercy and very soon they were rejoicing in the assurance of sins forgiven. The servant-girl said to one who visited her, "Oh, sir, God has been with us this morning." George Campbell remarked, "There was a mountain of sin pressing on my heart, but God in mercy sent the arrows of His love and pierced that mountain through and through, and it is gone."

By this time the whole district of Maghera was buzzing with excitement. The farm labourers left the fields to attend meetings. People flocked to the Churches in the district to hear the message of Calvary proclaimed. Roman Catholics, Protestants and people with no Church affiliation at all were awakened to their need of salvation. Men and women from all walks of life were awakened. The wealthy, the poor, the professionals, the paupers, the educated and the ignorant were awakened to their sinfulness and their need to get right with God. Cries of repentance echoed from mansions and labourers cabins alike.

According to the Scriptures, “Everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved”.<sup>1</sup> This promise was fulfilled as men, women and children called upon the Lord and received pardon for their sins and the free gift of Salvation. Multitudes of People were awakened and converted in the Maghera district.

But these multitudes were made up of individuals. God dealt with each person individually. He awakened each individual to the seriousness of their condition and their urgent need of forgiveness and salvation through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. As they individually responded to God’s call He graciously forgave them and saved their souls. As time went by these people could recall precious memories of these times of great blessing. Many individuals could look back to the time they repented of their sins. They could tell of how they trusted Jesus Christ as Saviour. They knew that ‘without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness’.<sup>2</sup> But they believed that Christ had shed His blood on their behalf, and because of this their sins had been forgiven. These people could speak of a time when they received the assurance that they would go to Heaven when they died. These are precious memories of Maghera.

But what about you, Friend? Do you have precious memories of a time in your life when you were awakened to the fact that you were a sinner? As the Scriptures say, “No one is righteous—not even one.”<sup>3</sup> For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God’s glorious’.<sup>4</sup> Can you remember a time when you realised that Church attendance or your own efforts to lead a good life could not save you from Hell? ‘But—When God our Savior revealed his kindness and love, he saved us, not because of the righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He washed away our sins, giving us a new birth and new life through the Holy Spirit’.<sup>5</sup>

Do you remember a time when you finally understood that you could never be saved unless you repented of your sins and trusted Christ as your Saviour? According to the Scriptures there is no salvation without repentance. The apostle Paul, in his preaching, highlighted ‘The necessity of repenting from sin and turning to God, and of having faith in our Lord Jesus’.<sup>6</sup> Do you have precious memories of the day you received from God the assurance that your sins were forgiven and that you were guaranteed a home in Heaven? Jesus said, “I tell you the truth, those who listen to my message and believe in God who sent me have eternal life. They will never be condemned for their sins, but they have already passed from death into life.”<sup>7</sup>

I sincerely hope you do have these precious memories. But Friend, if you don’t, then let me encourage you to make today the most memorable day of your life. Why not make today a time when you, in years to come, can look back and say, “That was the day I got right with God. That was the day my soul was saved.”

Jesus said, “Look! I stand at the door and knock. If you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in, and we will share a meal together as friends.”<sup>8</sup> Could it be that the Saviour is knocking on the door of your heart right now? How will you respond to His knock? Will you invite Him into your life as Saviour and Lord? Will you come to Him in sincere repentance? Will you ask Him to forgive you and then trust Him to save you? “Come now, let’s settle this,” says the LORD. “Though your sins are like scarlet, I will make them as white as snow. Though they are red like crimson, I will make them as white as wool.”<sup>9</sup>

‘For God says, “At just the right time, I heard you. On the day of salvation, I helped you.” Indeed, the “right time” is now. Today is the day of salvation’.<sup>10</sup>

Friend, may this be the day of YOUR ‘Great Awakening’.

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#### Scripture References

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| 1: Romans 10 v. 13 | 2: Hebrews 9 v. 22       |
| 3: Romans 3 v. 10  | 4: Romans 3 v. 23        |
| 5: Titus 3 v. 4    | 6: Acts 20 v. 21         |
| 7: John 5 v. 24    | 8: Revelation 3 v. 20    |
| 9: Isaiah 1 v. 18  | 10: 2 Corinthians 6 v. 2 |