

Xiii. Aimless Efforts

by John Sung

The sermon emphasizes the importance of spiritual growth and the need to focus on winning souls rather than getting involved in various programmes and movements.

Scripture: Matthew 7:20, Matthew 28:19, Luke 19:10, John 3:5, 1 Corinthians 9:26

Topics: "Salvation", "Purpose in Ministry"

Description

John Sung reflects on his past three years of aimless efforts in ministry, where he engaged in various programs but failed to lead anyone to salvation. Despite his busy schedule promoting social movements and educational initiatives, he realized that these efforts lacked spiritual depth and did not address the fundamental need for salvation. His journey took him through various cities, where he encountered the emptiness of modernism and the futility of his previous endeavors. Ultimately, it was in Nanchang that he discovered the true purpose of his calling: to win souls for Christ, emphasizing that the need of the hour is to save sinners rather than merely improve livelihoods. Sung's experience serves as a reminder that without a focus on the heart and soul, efforts in ministry can be fruitless.

Transcript

For three years after my return to China I kept myself busy in Hinghwa. But my running here and there were aimless efforts, like one beating the air. I got myself involved in Religious Education, the Literacy Movement, the Family for Christ, Youth Fellowships, Agricultural Improvement and Social Service. I gave much time to the study of better Organisation. I tried to promote these programmes "to get practical experience". These efforts bore flowers but no fruit. These efforts left the fundamental question on salvation by the wayside. No wonder all my efforts ended in nothing. I never led one soul into God's kingdom. I had brought people to Church, but not into God's Kingdom. (John 3:5)

After this I left my home village to go to Huchow. Yet I continued to concentrate on the human effort to promote the Family for Christ Movement. I was welcomed wherever I went.

At that time a lady missionary who knew about my new promotional schemes invited me to Shanghai. She wanted to introduce me to North China for a study tour. The Church, in fact, had hoped I could visit Changli, Paoting, Tinghsien to sight-see. This suited me well. No harm for a go at that!

I first came to Nanking where I took the opportunity to observe Religious Education in the schools. I was given samples of their practical work, and I carefully took down what I saw and heard. I only regretted I

had nothing to offer. How I wished I could establish a newest and most effect "method" and offer it to them --- to win their admiration. Alas! I was like one who lost his way. I was barking up the wrong tree. How precarious a situation!

Under a December sky, I was breathing warmly in hope, yea, even with my body I braved the northern winds. I arrived in Changli and found shelter with my American schoolmate, Missionary Tu. Knowing why I had come, he dissuaded me from bending my energies to a movement that moved the body but not the heart. He told me about the poverty of the local church. Though they had stressed on Agricultural Improvement programmes and even published a magazine for farmers, the result was negligible. The movement looked good outside, but there was nothing to it inside. He brought me also to Shanhaikwan. We saw how few and ignorant the Christians were. "Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them" (Matt. 7:20). It was a hopeless case.

Immediately I pushed on to Peiping (Peking). I arrived at a time when the Methodist Church was holding a training class. Fitting myself into the situation, I gave them a long talk of what I had discovered in three years of rural evangelism. The Presbyterians, hearing of this, also invited me to speak, and even would keep me to work with them for half a year. Here was a training ground for a new enterprise, and I was half-considering the possibility of staying on. Owing to my schedule of travel, however, I had to leave for Paoting. The road to Paoting was rough. Hunger and cold was my lot under the northern blasts, and for whom was I engaged in all this struggle? I nervously knocked on th door of a certain missionary. Not knowing that this uninvited guest was his schoolmate, he gave me a bed with the servants. It was only on the next day when we got to visit with each other that he gave me VIP treatment. He invited me to speak to 500-600 students, but only 50-60 turned up! Religious Education was a subject greatly stressed here. As it was winter and the Church Hall had a heating stove, most of the scholars had gone to study there.

During the Boxer Rebellion, quite a few were martyred for their faith, and I had visited the graves of these martyrs. Today, only a handful would come to Church. What a contrast between now and then!

Tingsien was the modernist stronghold and showpiece. I had planned at first to stay there for one or two months. But after two or three days of looking around, I lost all interest. What was there that I didn't know? Seeing that my purse was fast emptying, I beat a quick retreat from Peiping back to Shanghai. At Shanghai I came in contact with Kagawa who was giving lectures at the Shanghai University. Between 50 and 60 Church leaders went to hear him and I joined them. At the conference I was called the Chinese Kagawa because of my knowledge and spirit of sacrifice.

At a prayer meeting, I spoke on "The Fullness of the Holy Spirit." Did the listeners know what the speaker talked about was something he never knew?! At that time I had realised the empty futility of the Social Gospel. Yet, I wasn't very sure about the fundamental doctrines and the salvation plan.

At the invitation of Rev.Tang I spoke at the Pure Heart Church on some "Mysteries" to tickle the ears of hearers, but had no power to pound their hearts. What's the use? Someone asked me to visit Bethel Church. Out of curiosity to learn something, I went. There I was given the opportunity to speak. When I spoke on the "Five Loaves and Two Fishes", I found a ready audience. This led to my being invited to teach a regular Bible Class. I continued with my "Mysteries" series. Though these got a hearing, there was a lack of power. No one was saved. As I look back, I feel ashamed. I dared not join Bethel despite their kindness giving me a place. I decided to go back to my home in Hingwa.

It was at this juncture that I received an invitation from Nanchang. This was God's way, God's time, God's method, God's will: He gave me all the liberty to go round and round in the desert. He waited until I got tired of "sacrifice", "service", "education" and "movement", until I became hopeless in my efforts before He opened a way for me to Nanchang. Here He showed me the way of winning souls. Here, at Nanchang, I found the way and light to prosperity.

If I had returned to Hingwa, I might have ended in hopelessness. Hitherto my work was haphazard and aimless. I was struggling in the tide of modernism, being knocked about here and there, and did not know how to get out. It was only at Nanchang that my sky cleared up and I saw light before my way. Jesus says, "For the Son of Man is come and to save that which was lost." How sorry that many a co-worker is still involved in "movements". "Movements" for new methods and "improvement", but no movement made to shake the human heart, to save the human soul. They do not know that Jesus is come to save sinners. To save souls is the need of the hour. To change life is fundamentals over the program me of "improving livelihood."

THEME SONG

I will follow where He leadeth,

I will pasture where He feedeth;

I will follow all the way, Lord,

I will follow Jesus everyday.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/john-sung/xiii-aimless-efforts/>

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