

# An Outpouring of Divine Blessing Upon Changtehfu

by Jonathan Goforth

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*Jonathan Goforth recounts the powerful revival in Changtehfu, marked by deep confessions and a transformative outpouring of God's Spirit.*

**Scripture:** Isaiah 59:1, Acts 3:19, James 4:8, James 5:16, 1 John 1:9

**Topics:** "Revival Movement", "Spiritual Awakening"

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## Description

Jonathan Goforth recounts his experiences during a revival in Changteh, China, in 1908, where he faced initial resistance and indifference from missionaries and witnessed a spiritual awakening that led to deep confessions, reconciliations, and transformations. The revival brought about a change in the spiritual atmosphere of the station, leading to profound repentance, prayer, and revival fire sweeping through the community, even reaching outsiders who came out of curiosity. The movement resulted in the confession of sins, reconciliation of quarrels, and a focus on neglected duties and spiritual matters, demonstrating the power of God's work in transforming hearts and lives.

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## Transcript

ONE can appreciate how it must have been with a peculiarly keen sense of anticipation that I returned to my own home station after my visit to Korea in the summer of 1907. On the Sunday morning that I told the story of the Revival the Chinese leaders crowded around me after the service insisting that I immediately give them a week of special meetings. The matter was broached to the other missionaries at the station. Yes, we might have the meetings if we wished. But the general routine was to be interfered with as little as possible. Certainly, the schools were not to be closed in order to allow the pupils to attend the meetings. The warm support accorded me by the Chinese leaders, however, more than made up for any indifference in other quarters. I often look back to those wonderful days I had with them.

The meetings ended on a Saturday. Next day I addressed the whole congregation at the usual Sunday morning service. From the very first I felt as though I were talking against a stone wall. About halfway through my address I said: "The Spirit of God is being hindered. It is no use for me to go on speaking. Will several brethren pray?" Several prayers were offered, but they were of a very ordinary nature and clearly without spiritual power. "Stop!" I cried. "Plainly there is some one in this audience who is hindering God." I pronounced the benediction and the meeting broke up.

During the months that followed a marked change took place in the attitude of my brother missionaries. Certainly it was no longer possible to blind one's eyes to the fact that the spiritual condition of the station had reached a very low ebb. The Boys' School, especially, was causing no little anxiety. It was being found almost impossible to maintain any semblance of discipline. Some of the senior students had run away. Others were secretly planning to follow their example. Finally, the missionaries had come to the conclusion that unless something happened to change the temper of the boys, the school had better be closed. It was in the spring of 1908 that the invitation was extended to me to conduct a ten days' series of meetings, full support being promised me.

In Manchuria and elsewhere the question had sometimes been put to me: "Do you believe that you will meet with the same manifestations of the Spirit's power in Honan, where your faults and weaknesses are known, as in these places where you are a comparative stranger?" It was a difficult question. As the time drew near for the start of the Changtehfu meetings I became decidedly uneasy. Early on the morning of the first meeting I was pacing restlessly up and down my room, my mind in a turmoil. I had often heard of people going to the Bible, opening it at random, and finding some text seemingly written for their own immediate need; but this had never been my custom. Yet this morning I felt, as perhaps never before, the need of Divine light to strengthen my wavering faith.

As I took up my Bible it seemed to open of itself. My eye was arrested by these words: "From the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same, my name shall be great among the Gentiles" (Mal. i. 11). It was an answer clearly enough; and my faith was restored. Yet in a little while a doubt began to arise. There was, of course, no question, a voice seemed to say, that the text included Honan. But wasn't it stretching the point a little to take it that it referred even to my own station of Changteh? Once again I took up my Bible. Strangely enough, it opened at the same place. This time my eye caught the words, following immediately after those which I have already quoted -- "And in every place . . ." That means this station, I said to myself. Somehow I knew then that God was going to move Changteh.

The missionaries had been most praiseworthy in the preparations which they had made for the meetings. As for the Chinese leaders they were, if possible, even more wholehearted in their support than they had been before. Feeling that the church, which had a seating capacity of only six hundred, was too small, they had on their own initiative erected in the adjoining yard a large mat pavilion. Christians had come in for the services from all parts of the field. The schools had been closed, and even in the hospital arrangements had been made to allow as many of the staff as possible to attend the meetings. Visiting missionaries and Chinese leaders were there; some having come long distances.

From the very first it seemed as if God had marked out Changteh for a special outpouring of Divine blessing. On the morning of the second day a number broke down and confessed their sins. Among these was a Mr. Fan, who was a noted scholar and a teacher in the Girls' School. That evening, at the missionary prayermeeting, two lady missionaries, who for a long time had not been on speaking terms with each other, asked each other's forgiveness and made up their quarrel. At that same meeting the principal of the Girls' School confessed to the sins which she felt were hindering God's work. As we were passing the Girls' School, on our way to the evening service, the sound that reached us made it seem as if all the girls were praying and confessing at the same time.

All through the third and fourth days there was a deepening sense of God's presence. Mr. Hu, one of our leading evangelists, had been asked to lead the general prayermeeting on the evening of the fourth day. On rising to open the meeting he said: "I must confess my own sins before I attempt to lead this meeting.

When the reports of the Manchurian Revival began to reach us, I said to the other evangelists, 'This is not the Holy Spirit's work. It is just Mr. Goforth's way of manipulating an audience by a sort of mesmeric power. I assure you that when he comes to Changteh he will run up against Hu Feng Hua, a man who has a resolution and mind of his own. Hypnotism won't be able to affect him.'

"On the second morning," he continued, "when I saw teacher Fan, a B.A. from my own village, down in the dust, weeping like a little child and confessing his sins, I was more than disgusted. I assured myself that this could not possibly be the Spirit of God. It was just toadying to the foreigner. As the day progressed, I became more and more scornful at the way things were going. What creatures they must be, I thought, to give way as they were doing!

"On the third day, as the movement increased in intensity and the people seemed to be swept along in spite of themselves, I became a little uneasy. Gradually the thought began to take shape in my mind, 'Can it be that I am mistaken? What if it should turn out that I am actually opposing God?' Last night I hardly slept a wink, and this morning I was like a man demented. Instead of going to the meeting, I wandered out through the fields, not knowing where I was going. The torment in my mind became ever more agonizing. I came back and went into the evangelists' room. Evangelist Cheng was there. 'What's wrong with me?' I asked. 'Am I going mad?' 'No,' replied Evangelist Cheng, 'I don't believe you're going mad. Just kneel down there and you will soon find out what the trouble is.' While he was praying my heart was broken and I sobbed like a little child. I knew then that I had been pitting myself against God the Holy Spirit."

I had prayerfully hoped that, after such a confession, great things would result. But, to my keen disappointment, it was an insignificant church member, and one whose life had been anything but straight, who rose to pray. It was not long, however, before it became evident that God had chosen this humble vessel to do His work that evening. (In the afternoon, although I had not believed it at the time, the man had gone through a terrible shakingup and had made a most broken confession). He was weeping now. He seemed to have caught a vision of the Savior. "What, Lord!" he cried, "You standing there outside the door, patiently knocking! That should not be. The temple is Thy purchased possession. You have given Your life to redeem it. If You are outside the door, then there must be one inside who is preferred before You." He went on in that strain for several minutes; and, as he prayed, different ones all over the audience broke down in an agony of conviction. Never have I listened to a prayer that seemed more genuinely inspired.

Suddenly, to my great disappointment, he stopped and sat down. I felt certain that he hadn't finished his work. Ten minutes went by and then he rose again. It was the same vision, but now his whole being seemed enthralled. "What, Lord!" he cried, "You waiting there still? You, who art Lord of all! One word from You would sweep us sinners from the earth. Is it possible that still we defy You and bar You from Your own temple?" At these words the whole audience gave way and melted like wax.

To show how carefully even the most favored must walk in the presence of the Lord, I will mention an incident which occurred on the following evening. Shortly after the meeting had been thrown open for prayer, I heard a peculiar moaning sound. Looking up I saw this man, who had been so wonderfully used the evening before, groaning horribly and going through all manner of rhythmical movements. Suddenly, as I was watching him, he threw himself full length upon the ground. It was clear enough that the devil had got hold of him. Realizing what a powerful effect his prayer had produced the night before, he had probably decided that this time he was going to stage something really extraordinary. Although I disliked intensely to interfere, I was afraid that, if I left him alone, he would soon have imitators. I went down and

gave him a sharp slap on the side, saying, "Get up and pray decently." He stopped on the instant, and shamefacedly slunk into his seat.

On the fifth day so many were moved to prayer and confession that I had barely time to give my addresses. One of the most startling confessions of that day was from the principal of the Boys' School. He was a man whom we had all along thought was almost perfect. Yet before that great audience, including his own pupils, he gave one of the humblest and most heartsearching confessions that I have ever listened to. Before nightfall the revival fire had swept through his school.

As the meetings went on many of those who had received a blessing hastened back to their villages, and urged their relatives and friends to return with them at once to Changteh, saying that "the Spirit of God has come." Others, who would not get away, hired messengers to go to their home places and bring back their families. On the seventh day the movement became so powerful that I did not have a chance to give either a forenoon or an afternoon address. In fact, from then on till the end of the meetings there were so many anxious to confess, that it was usually found impossible to limit a meeting to less than three hours.

On the seventh evening, Dr. L-- came up on the platform and asked for an opportunity to say a few words. Addressing the congregation, he said: "From the beginning of this movement, with which Mr. Goforth has been connected, I have refused to believe that it originated with, or was guided by, the Holy Spirit. The conclusion that I arrived at was that it was due to some hypnotic power which Mr. Goforth was able to exercise over his audiences. But what I have seen here these past few days has convinced me, even against my will, that I was wrong. I was attributing to a man what only God could bring about. I want to say now that I believe, with all my heart, that this movement is truly of the Spirit of God." Whereupon he turned to me, before everyone, and asked me to forgive him. Then, addressing the people again, he said: "I also want to ask your forgiveness. I have done you an injury in imagining that you could be moved, as you have been these days, by any other agency but the Divine."

Word of what was happening at Changteh having gone around the country, fresh bands of Christians from all parts of the field were constantly arriving. Many of the newcomers were brought under conviction before they had scarcely entered the compound. Sometimes people would be praying in their rooms, hours before a meeting opened. Then, when the time came, they would go and pour out their confessions.

Again, on the eighth day, I found it impossible to give an address. At the morning meeting even the schoolboys were getting up on their benches, and in tears confessing to all manner of sin. This was too much for Dr. M-. At the conclusion of the meeting, he declared: "After what I have heard this morning it is impossible for me to take any further part in the meetings. It couldn't have been anything else than the devil which got into those boys. How could they know anything about the things of which they professed themselves guilty? They had listened to the confessions of the grownups and they were simply playing the parrot." "Better be careful Doctor," I said, "about judging too hastily. After all, how are we to determine the depth of a schoolboy's heart?"

Dr. M- had been appointed to take charge of the afternoon meeting. It was only after much persuasion that we induced him to fill the position. That afternoon one after another of his own and other evangelists told how their hearts had been cut to the quick at the schoolboys' confessions. "Well, this has certainly been a great revelation to me," said Dr. M- after the meeting. "Never again will I make out what I know what is the moving of the Spirit of God."

The original plan had been that the meetings should last for eight days; but when the eighth day came every one was agreed that we should go on for several days longer. During these last days a number, who had held out up till then, felt that things were becoming too hot for them and tried to run away. But they found out what a difficult thing it is to escape from a seeking God. Some only got part way home, when the pressure became so unbearable that they had to turn around and come back. Others got all the way home, but, finding no relief, they returned to Changteh.

One wealthy man, to whom the idea of public confession was particularly distasteful, had got a few miles from the city when he realised that it was useless for him to go any farther. He came back, and standing up in the rear of the tent, with the tears coursing down his cheeks, he cried out to me: "Pastor, do I have to wait until all those up there at the front have got through?" I replied that since they had got there first it was only fair that we should hear them first. "But, Pastor," he said, "I can't wait. I'll burst if I'm not given a chance to confess my sin right away." "Well, if that's the case," I said, "I think we had better hear you now; and the others will have to be patient." Then followed the confession -- coming like a torrent, bursting through the dam which had tried to hold it in check.

Often, during the meetings, great waves of prayer would sweep the congregation. Some one would cry, "Oh, do pray for my outstation; we're so cold and dead out there." Or another would tell of how his father and mother were unconverted, and plead with the people to join him in prayer for them. Instantly scores all over the audience would respond. It seemed that nothing could resist such importunity. A number of our most influential Chinese leaders had been opposed to the meetings and had declared beforehand that they had not the slightest intention of attending them. Special intercession was offered up on behalf of these men; and as I remember, some of the most broken confessions of the whole movement were from them.

All kinds of quarrels were made up and innumerable wrongs righted during those days. Though many confessed to the grosser sins, yet the burden of perhaps the majority ran along the line of neglected duty. The Sabbath question, tithing, testimony to others, right example, neglect of the Bible, believing prayer for their loved ones and friends -- these were the matters concerning which many in great brokenness confessed their failure.

It was remarkable, too, how even the outsiders, who came into the compound merely out of curiosity, were often brought under conviction. With many it seemed that an irresistible pressure drew them to the tent to confess their sins and acknowledge Christ as Savior. There was one young man in the hospital who had had both his legs cut off by a train. From his room in the ward it was quite impossible for the man to hear my voice. Yet during one of the meetings, when the movement in the tent was at its height, he came under conviction of sin and was converted.

But any account of the movement at Changteh would be incomplete if it did not contain the story of how God dealt with my old friend, Wang Ee, of Takwanchwang, a village some twentyfive li southeast of our station. Wang Ee was one of our strongest converts. My home had no more frequent nor more welcome visitor than he. For a number of years after his conversion the Lord's cause prospered greatly in his village. Some notorious sinners were saved, and by 1900 there were altogether nineteen families in the village professing Christ. In Wang Ee's own household, out of twentyeight members, all save two had become Christians.

In 1900 the Boxer trouble broke out. The Chinese leaders immediately urged us to flee, while there was time. They assured us that, if we stayed, probably all, missionaries and Chinese Christians alike, would be massacred. If, on the other hand, we managed to get to a place of safety, we could remain there until the storm had blown over and then return. This is not the place to tell of the harrowing experiences through which we passed before we finally reached the safety of the coast. The Christians in Honan, and among them my friends at Takwanchwang, went through great persecution and were stripped of practically everything.

On my return to Changteh, in the spring of 1902, I immediately hurried out to Takwanchwang. What a meeting that was! We all gathered in Wang Ee's home, and they showed me their scars and I showed them mine. Then we all knelt down and praised God for His mercy to us. Destitute as they were, not one of the little band had been killed. I felt that surely, since God had brought His people safely through such trials, He must have great things in store for them.

Shortly after this visit, I entered upon the evangelisation of the northern portion of the field, and another missionary took over the southern section in which Takwanchwang was situated. Thus, for a number of years, I was not able to visit the station again. Wang Ee, however, often came to call on me. When I would ask him how the work was prospering in Takwanchwang his face would fall and he would reply: "Not very well, I am afraid. But, Pastor, you mustn't blame me. God's time hasn't come yet. When His time comes He will save the people of my village." Somehow I felt that the hindrance must be with my friend, but where or how I had no means of determining.

In the fall of 1908 I wrote a letter to Wang Ee asking him, as a special favor to myself, to come and attend the meetings which were to be held at Changteh. But at the opening meeting I looked in vain for the familiar face of my old friend. His son, however, had come. I said to the young man: "I sent especially for your father. Why didn't he come?" He replied: "My father sent me in his stead. He says that he is old and will soon pass on, and that he wants me to learn all I can so as to be able to take his place in the church after he has gone." On the third day the young fellow appeared to be greatly moved. "You go home," I said to him, "and tell your father that he simply must come; and that if he doesn't he will offend his best friend."

Next morning Wang Ee turned up. His greeting was cold. "Why did you send my son home?" he asked resentfully; "he would have got far more out of these meetings than I could. There is really no particular reason why I should come. I haven't any sin." "Wang Ee," I said, "I just want to ask one thing of you; and that is that you should stay here several days and just see if God has anything to say to you."

On the sixth morning, before breakfast, Evangelist Ho came to my home in great excitement. "Wang Ee is in a terrible state," he said. "Late last night, as he was talking with some of us evangelists, he suddenly fell down on the floor as if he had been shot. Ever since he has been weeping and crying out about his sin. He has sent me to ask you to start the meeting as soon as possible so that he can have a chance to make his confession."

As soon as breakfast was over, I hurried out to the yard. Just outside the door of the tent I met Wang Ee. The tears were streaming down his checks. He was so overcome that he could not say a word. He just grasped my arm. This was too much for me, and I found I couldn't keep the tears back myself. Arm in arm we entered the tent. Wang Ee knelt down on the platform. For a few minutes the great sobs that shook his frame rendered him speechless. But at last, finding his voice, he cried: "I told Pastor Goforth that the people of Tagwanchwang had not been saved because God's time was not up. I lied to him. It was

because Wang Ee's time was not up. I have sinned and grieved the Holy Spirit. After 1900, when the official was compelled to indemnify me for the property which had been stolen or destroyed by the Boxers, I grossly exaggerated my losses. Where I had only lost three mules I made out a claim for six and got paid for six. Where I had been robbed of three hundred bushels of wheat I declared that I had been robbed of six hundred, and I was paid for six hundred. By lying in this way I have been made rich out of adversity and quenched the Holy Spirit in my heart."

Wang Ee concluded with the declaration that he would use every cent, which he had got dishonestly from the Boxer Indemnity, in the construction of a church in his native village. And he kept his word.

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