

Further Evidences of the Spirit's Mighty Work in Chihli

by Jonathan Goforth

The sermon highlights the importance of humility and surrender in allowing the Holy Spirit to work freely in our lives, overcoming hindrance and leading to revival and transformation.

Scripture: 2 Chronicles 7:14, Psalm 51:17, Proverbs 28:13, Luke 15:7, Acts 3:19, Romans 2:4, James 4:10, 1 John 1:9

Topics: "Holy Spirit", "True Repentance"

Description

Jonathan Goforth preaches about the power of the Holy Spirit to convict hearts and bring about true repentance and confession of sins. He shares stories of individuals who were under the influence of the devil but were led to genuine repentance through the working of the Holy Spirit. Despite initial resistance and hindrances, when individuals humbled themselves and confessed their sins, a powerful movement of the Spirit was experienced, leading to deep transformations and conversions.

Transcript

FOR the first few days at Siochang I was caused considerable annoyance by a certain prominent man in the congregation who had a habit of praying at every meeting as soon as I finished my address. The prayer was always the same; I could discern no prompting of the Holy Spirit in it. I tried to silence the man by issuing a warning at each meeting against any person praying unless definitely directed to do so by the Holy Spirit. I pointed out that it was God's will to glorify His Son through every one getting utterance, and that if a small group took it upon themselves to do all the praying many would necessarily be deprived of the privilege. In spite of such broad hints, this man was always the first to lead off in prayer.

On the sixth day it was quite evident, from the strained, anxious look on many faces as I was speaking, that the Holy Spirit was working powerfully in the people's hearts. I felt that the time of real blessing was at hand. Yet, as soon as the meeting was opened for prayer, this man jumped to his feet and began to pray. He gave utterance to a few ordinary platitudes, and seemed so evidently under Satan's influence that I felt called upon to stop him. "Please sit down, sir," I said, "and give those who are moved by the Holy Spirit a chance to pray." He stopped on the instant and resumed his seat. Whereupon dozens all over the audience broke out into prayer and confession

After the meeting the man came to me, very humble and penitent. "I can only thank God that you stopped me," he said, "because truly the devil had got into me. I have been backsliding badly of late. I have been

taking opium. I am a thief . . . During these meetings I have become more, and more anxious. I felt that I simply had to confess my sins; and yet I knew very well that if I did so my reputation would be lost. So at each meeting the devil would come to my rescue and say, 'Pray.' I would obey, and immediately all sense of conviction would pass away. Today, during your address, I was in an awful state. My sins appeared appalling, and I felt that this time nothing could prevent me from blurting them out. But when you finished speaking the devil almost pushed me forward to pray. I hardly knew what I was saying. Then I heard you tell me to sit down. I knew then that the game was up, and that there was no use holding out any longer. I've told you the story, and tomorrow I want to repeat it before the whole congregation."

On the following morning he rose as usual at the conclusion of my address, but this time there was no question about the nature of the Spirit that was guiding him. His confession, needless to say, made a deep impression upon the people. In fact, the matron of the Girls' School was so broken and in such agony over her sins that it was feared for a time that she would lose her mind. Confession, however, brought relief. She told us that while she was at school in Peking, in 1900, the Boxers wiped out her whole family. She had an idea who the murderers were, and for years had been constantly planning how to take revenge. Now, however, she declared, the Spirit of Love had touched her heart, and she would gladly forgive them.

There was a strong group of evangelists in the church at Siaochang. Day after day these evangelists would get up, apparently under deep feeling, and giving the impression that they were about to bring something terrible to light. Instead, their prayers would be invariably of the tamest variety. They would run something like this: "O Lord, I'm a great sinner. Thou knowest how I have hindered Thy cause. Have mercy on me. Amen." Nothing specific ever came to the surface.

On the seventh evening two of the evangelists came to interview me, having been sent as a deputation by their colleagues. "We evangelists," they said, "have been confessing our sins these days, and somehow we do not seem to get any peace out of it. We have come to ask your opinion about it, and to see if you can help us." "I want to ask you one question," I replied; "have you committed these sins, you speak of, by the bundle or have you deliberately grieved the Holy Spirit and committed them one by one?" "Why, of course," they said, "we've committed them one by one and not by the bundle." "Very well, brethren," I said, "since you are leaders in the church, I believe it is the Spirit's will that you should confess your sins, as you have committed them, one by one."

"But that would never do!" they cried in dismay. "Why, there's murder, there's robbery, there's adultery -- to be confessed. It would wreck the church if we were to do as you say." "I'm sorry," I said, "but I can take no responsibility for that. I'm simply telling you what I believe to be the will of God in present circumstances."

They went away. Next day the evangelists continued to pray in the same vague fashion. The price of victory was too great to pay. Two years later, owing to a deficit in the home treasury, the usual grant failed to come, and ten of the evangelists were sent home to seek other employment.

The services at Peking (American Presbyterian) were hindered, as they had been at Siaochang, by a certain individual insisting upon leading off each time a meeting was thrown open for prayer. The offender in this instance was a prominent evangelist. At every meeting I would warn the people to beware lest it was the devil and not the Holy Spirit that was prompting them to pray. I would point out that in a large audience only a limited number could be heard; so that a man, after he had prayed once or twice, should be patient and give others a chance. But my warnings went unheeded. The evangelist was invariably the

first on his feet. He seemed to realize that his was no ordinary eloquence. His prayers, indeed, were given with real oratorical effect. But it was quite evident that the Holy Spirit had nothing to do with them, and not till the end of time could any one be moved by them.

At last, in despair, I said to one of the missionaries, "Won't you speak to that evangelist quietly and ask him to be patient for a few meetings and give other people a chance to pray?" "What!" he cried. "You surely don't expect me to go and rebuke that man of all people? Why, he has the most frightful temper. It is so bad, in fact, that in his church not a single convert has been added since he took charge. No, I really wouldn't have the nerve to go and say anything to him. I'm afraid the only thing to do is just to leave him alone."

What might be termed the climax of the meetings was reached on the sixth day. None but the coldest and most unresponsive could help but feel aware of God's presence that day. Most moving of all, perhaps, was the heart-broken confession of an evangelist who for days had been under deep conviction. "During the Boxer year," he said, "I was out preaching in a certain district some distance from my home. In my absence a band of Boxers came and killed my mother and father and wife and children, and burnt my home. When I returned all that was left to me was ashes. I discovered who had led the band, and a friend of mine waylaid him at night and hacked him to bits. The man had two sons, and my friend was for killing them as well and making a clean sweep of it. But the neighbours managed to hide them from us.

"For his crime my friend was forced to flee outside the borders of China. Before he left, it was agreed that I should search for the children, and that as soon as I found them I would write to him and he would come back secretly and do away with them. We would then be able to say that our revenge was complete. Two years passed before I finally located the hidingplace of the boys. As soon as I knew definitely where to lay hold of them I went to Dr. Sheffield and told him about it. I supposed that he would suggest that we should hand them right over to the official and have them executed. But, to my utter amazement, he said, 'Good! I am glad that you have found them. You will now be able to care for them and send them to school.' I could scarcely believe my ears. What could be more horrible, I thought, than that I should be the means of educating the children of the man who killed my mother and father and my wife and my children? I left Dr. Sheffield in a towering rage.

"The next day a letter came from my friend, who was living in Siberia. 'Here I have to remain in exile all my life,' he wrote, 'because I undertook to avenge your wrongs. You agreed with me that you would find those two boys and have me come back secretly and kill them. But two years have gone by, and you haven't found them yet. You haven't done your part. There's no filial piety about you. I refuse to consider you as my friend any longer.'

"On receiving this letter," went on the evangelist, "I resolved that I would have my friend come back and murder the two boys. But since then the very root of prayer has been taken out of my life. During these meetings I have become more and more troubled and anxious. God has shown me plainly that if I won't forgive my enemies, then He can't forgive me. I'm in an awful state. I can't eat or sleep. Won't some of you people pray for me?"

It was a most moving confession. When he finished, there were people sobbing here and there, all over the audience. I found my own voice breaking when I said, "Now will some one who is truly led of the Spirit of God pray for this brother?" Immediately up jumped the eloquent evangelist. For a minute or two I allowed him to go on; hoping against hope that the Spirit of God had moved him at last. But no, it was the

same old oratorical prayer. "Brother!" I cried, "sit down! and give somebody who is moved by the Holy Spirit a chance to pray." He took his seat, and there followed many intense, heartfelt prayers for the one in distress.

At the close of the meeting I was told that there was a gentleman in one of the rooms who wished to speak to me. On being led to the room I found the eloquent evangelist awaiting me. He was literally boiling over with rage. Shaking his fist in my face, he cried, "I've found you out at last, Pastor Goforth. You were led by the devil in your meetings in Manchuria, and you're being led by the devil here, too." Without saying a word in reply I turned and left him. The last I heard of him he was begging on the streets of Peking.

While passing through Peking, on my way back from the Manchurian Revival, I was asked by the American Board people to give an account of the movement one Sunday morning in their church. During the open session that followed my address one of the High School girls made a most remarkable prayer. In substance it was something like this: "O Lord, we praise Thee for pouring out Thy Spirit upon Manchuria. The ground was dry and parched outside the wall, and there was crying need for blessing. But we, inside the wall, are just as dry and parched. May the showers of blessing fall upon us too. We plead with Thee do not pass us by." As the girl was praying she was not weeping, but it was easy to see that she was very near the breakingpoint. Her voice and manner were such that I could not refrain from watching her. There was something about her face that won and at the same time humbled one. An unusual light shone there. One of the missionaries whispered to me at the close of the service, ". . . her face was like that of an angel." Her principal told me that the girl showed very ordinary talent in her studies, but that among her schoolmates she truly walked in the footsteps of the Master.

Some months later, at the invitation of the missionaries, I returned to the same church to conduct a week of special meetings. Right at the start I became aware of a very serious hindrance. The Chinese pastor gave me a hint as to its nature, but it was not until the meetings were over that I became acquainted with all the details. It seemed that the deacons, as a body, were opposed to the meetings. They did not believe in public confessions, they said. Such things could only be prompted by the devil. They were going to keep away from the meetings, they declared, and persuade all their friends to do likewise.

It happened that the deacons had a very good reason for avoiding public confession. When the foreign armies had captured Peking, in 1900, the Empress Dowager and the Emperor and all the great ones of the Manchu dynasty had fled precipitately to a western province, leaving the royal palace with all its priceless valuables unguarded. Among those who had availed themselves of this golden opportunity for personal enrichment had been certain deacons of the American Board Church. At the time of my meetings the Empress Dowager was back in Peking; and well those deacons knew that, in a public meeting, under pressure from the Holy Spirit, there was small likelihood of their sin remaining covered up. Yes, they certainly had a potent reason for avoiding anything like a Holy Ghost revival.

As the meetings progressed some measure of spiritual activity became discernible, but there was lacking that unexplainable something which is always realised when the Holy Spirit has swept away all hindrances. We came to the last service. I had given my address and the meeting was open for prayer. Suddenly the schoolgirl, who had made that remarkable prayer months before, began to pray. Her heart seemed agonised. It was scarcely possible to catch her words through her sobs. "O Father in Heaven," she cried, "here we have come to the end of these meetings and still the hindrance remains. It seems that Jesus our Savior is not to be glorified as He ought. Our leaders will not humble themselves and get right with Thee. So the blessing has been withheld from us. O Father, is it a sacrifice that You are waiting for? If

it is, then let me be the victim. I am willing that You should blot my name right out of the Book of Life, if through my sacrifice the hearts of the people might be opened to Thee."

As the girl was praying, cries could be heard from all over the audience. I knew that some of the deacons were there that evening. How could they possibly resist that dear girl's plea? I thought. But not one of them stirred, and I closed the meeting.

During the meetings at Peking (Methodist Episcopal) my audiences were made up largely of students from the university, which was connected with the mission. The students, I was led to understand, really considered themselves above such things as revival meetings, but attended out of curiosity. "Up till now," they told one another, "this missionary has only come in contact with boys and girls who had no minds of their own. It might have been easy enough for him to manipulate them and cause them to disgrace themselves by confessing their sins. But he is up against a different proposition with us university students. We will show him that his hypnotism will not work on every one."

As the meetings progressed, the rank and file of the Christians gave evidence, at times, of a desire to get rid of hindering things. But the university students remained throughout quite unmoved. Certainly, when the meetings came to an end, none of us could honestly say that the results were exceeding abundant beyond all that we had asked or thought. I had to leave for England immediately after the closing service. Before going, I urged Dr. Pike, a man who in former years had been mightily used of God in revival work, to continue the meetings until the hindrance had been removed. I pointed out that to stop then would be to make our effort appear largely as a triumph for the devil. Dr. Pike laid the matter before the other missionaries, and it was decided to go on with the meetings.

On the twelfth day the preachers and evangelists were all broken up and confessed their faults one to another. Then the Spirit of God, I am told, swept like an avalanche through the university students. They confessed how hardened their hearts had been, and that in all their opposition they had been directed by the Evil One. The movement among them was so intense, so general, that for days it was found impossible to go on with the lectures. In this room and that impromptu prayermeetings would start up at five o'clock in the morning, and similar meetings would continue until ten o'clock at night. When the holidays came, one hundred and fifty of these students toured the surrounding country, two by two, proclaiming the Gospel of the Grace of God. Another year, I understand, a number of them had gone round the country selling cigarettes.

Pengcheng is a noted pottery center in southwest Chihli; its fame, it might be added, being derived not merely from the products of its kilns but also from the notoriously wicked character with which the name of the city has for centuries been associated. It was the northernmost station of my old field in Central China. I visited the city for the first time in 1890, but it was quite a few years before the work there began to assume encouraging proportions.

In 1915 I decided to hold a week of special meetings at Pengcheng for the purpose of arousing the Christians. On learning of my intention, some prominent business men connected with the Board of Trade arranged that we should have the use of the Board of Trade building, an old disused temple. A large mat pavilion was erected, at their expense, right in the temple yard. The temple -- unfortunately as I thought was situated at some distance from the city, and I was afraid, when I learned of the arrangements that had been made, that it would be impossible to draw the crowd out that far.

Yet from the very first meeting the pavilion was crammed. The Christians were most responsive. They came under conviction, confessed their sins, acknowledged their faults one to another and made restitution for wrongs done. This had a startling effect upon the unsaved. Men and women by the score confessed their belief in Jesus Christ for the first time. Among these were several noted scholars and a number of prominent kiln owners. Over fifty names in all were taken down as catechumens, but many more were rejected as not being sufficiently instructed. Evangelist Ho, who had been with me ever since the opening of the work at Pengcheng, told me that while walking through the streets in the evening it seemed to him that every one was talking about "the strange happenings over in the temple yard." He thought that the people were all on the point of turning to God.

From Pengcheng I went direct to one of the large centers of our mission, where I had been invited to conduct a ten days' series of meetings. It was a slack time of the year, and I expected, of course, that all the Christians from the neighbouring outstations would be in for the meetings. Imagine my disappointment when I learned that little or no effort had been made to get them to attend. Throughout the meetings there were never more than ten Christians from the outside at any service.

At the missionary prayermeeting, which I attended daily, little or no mention was made of the services which I was leading. The missionaries, one and all, seemed to be peculiarly indifferent to the need for a close touch with God in the life of their church. Even the missionary from whom I had received the invitation to lead the meetings showed plainly that he did not take the movement seriously. He seemed to be more concerned with the welfare of his dogs and pigeons than that God should pour out His Spirit in saving power upon His people.

At a certain meeting, while several in great brokenness were praying and confessing. I happened to notice this missionary staring in a surprised, almost amused, fashion at what was going on. My heart sank, for I knew that most certainly there would be trouble ahead. The Chinese are quick to notice anything like that, and, very naturally, feel deep resentment. They conclude among themselves that the meetings have been arranged specially for their benefit, and that the foreigners consider they have no sins to confess.

That evening, two of the evangelists came to see me. Both were splendid men from the Changteh region. They had been through the mighty movement at Changtsun some years before. "We can't stay here any longer," they said. "We are going back home. There's no use trying to save souls here. There was that missionary today, while our people were beginning to be broken up, staring at us as if he thought the whole thing were a joke." I pointed out to them that since the missionary did not appear to be awake to the need for Divine blessing it was all the more urgent that they, who had seen with their own eyes what the Spirit of God was capable of doing, should remain at their post. They promised me that they would stay on.

The meetings came to an end, and, while not a few had been blessed, there had clearly been nothing approaching a sweeping spiritual movement. Some weeks later I learned that the report had gone all around the mission that "Mr. Goforth has lost his power. He preached for ten days at ---, with hardly any result!" In this way the missionaries of that station succeeded in clearing themselves. But sometimes I wonder if it ever really occurred to them that they might be in any way to blame.

The meetings at Shuntehfu followed immediately after those referred to above. It was not long before I became aware that there existed, here in Shuntehfu, an intense desire on the part of missionaries and Chinese Christians alike for God's richest blessing. The study of the missionary at whose house I stayed

was situated directly below my room. Each morning, long before daylight, my host's heartfelt pleadings with God were borne up to me. At a prayermeeting this same missionary burst into tears, saying, "Lord, I've come to the place where I would rather pray than eat." And, with no exaggeration, that seemed to be the prevailing spirit among all the missionaries. They appeared determined not to let God go until He had blessed them.

The same spirit, too, was characteristic of the Chinese Christians. At one of the early morning prayermeetings the evangelist in charge said, "Brethren, you have been too eager to pray. You won't even wait until the one who is praying says 'Amen' before you start. You haven't given your sisters a chance. Again and again I've noticed some sister rising to pray only to have one of you men get in before her. Now this morning let it be clearly understood that the men will all pray quietly in their hearts and give the women a chance. The meeting is now open for our sisters to lead us in prayer." On the instant fully a dozen men started to pray, most of them in tears. It was impossible for one to draw any other conclusion than that the Spirit's pressure was so irresistible that they simply could not hold back.

During those days all manner of sin was confessed; wrongs were righted and quarrels made up. I saw old Confucian scholars, broken and humbled, come up on the platform and confess their Lord. Altogether five hundred men and women acknowledged Christ as Savior for the first time. It was, perhaps, the most remarkable movement of the Spirit which it has ever been my privilege to witness.

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