

Hindrances Swept Away When the Spirit Worked in Chihli

by Jonathan Goforth

The sermon emphasizes the importance of confession and unity among missionaries to remove hindrances and allow the Holy Spirit to work powerfully in revival meetings.

Scripture: Psalm 46:10, Proverbs 16:9, Ephesians 4:32, James 4:10, 1 John 1:9

Topics: "Holy Spirit", "Revival"

Description

Jonathan Goforth preaches about the importance of humility, confession, and reconciliation among missionaries and believers to remove hindrances and allow the Holy Spirit to work mightily. Through powerful confessions and prayers, hindrances such as pride, anger, lack of love, and past conflicts are revealed and dealt with, leading to deep spiritual movements and revival among the people. The sermon highlights the need for surrendering personal desires and expectations to God's sovereign will, trusting in His authority and timing for spiritual breakthroughs.

Transcript

AT a special gathering for prayer, which was held prior to the beginning of the main series of meetings at Paotingfu, the missionaries of this station were so deeply moved that I was convinced that there could be no sin on their part which would be likely to hinder the Lord's work there. Among other confessions there was one from Dr. L-. The doctor told us how that one afternoon he had gone to the street chapel in the city on his daily visit. On this particular occasion he had been detained at the compound and was an hour late. But he took it for granted that the evangelist would have gone ahead and opened the doors and be preaching to the people. He arrived to find the doors closed and the evangelist sleeping in one of the rear rooms.

"Naturally," said Dr. L-, "I was not a little annoyed; and I must admit I spoke with considerable heat. 'Is it possible,' I said to him, 'that just because I don't turn up you have no desire to save your people and that you are willing to let them perish in their sins?'" At that, it seems, the evangelist became deeply offended. "Reckon accounts!" he cried. "I'm not going to stay here any longer under a foreigner if he treats me like this." "Well, when I saw how he took it," Dr. L- went on, "I humbled myself to the dust and begged him to stay. He has stayed on, but he has been in the huffs ever since and of absolutely no use so far as the work is concerned."

Listening to Dr. L-'s confession, I thought to myself that, having humbled himself before the evangelist, there was nothing else that he could be expected to do to make matters straight. Still, as the meetings progressed, I became conscious of a very serious holdup among the people. I had just come from the mighty movement at Changtehfu, Honan, and the deep spirituality of the Paotingfu missionaries had led me to expect the same results here. But day by day went by and, although there was evidence of stirrings here and there, still I knew that the full, mighty sweep of the Spirit's power had been denied us.

We came to the final meeting. I had given my address, and the meeting was open for prayer. In the conduct of these meetings I experience, as a rule, no overburdening anxiety. I tell myself that if God does not choose to use this or that address to move His people, then He will probably use the one to follow. And if in some particular meeting no spiritual power becomes evident in the prayers then I close that meeting and wait upon God for an outpouring of His grace in the next one. This evening, however, there was a great burden upon me, and I found myself agonising with God that He would remove the stone of hindrance, whatever it might be.

Dr. L- was leaning on the pulpit beside me. "Doctor!" I whispered, "I simply cannot account for the hindrance in your church. I've always had a conviction, in leading these meetings, that once all the foreign missionaries have removed any hindering things from their midst, then no power of the devil can prevent the Holy Spirit from being made manifest. Certainly, listening to you missionaries at your prayermeetings, I cannot imagine how there could be any hindrance on your part. Still, there is something holding us up."

"Why, it seems to me," replied Dr. L- "that from what we have seen these days, we have reason to praise God for all eternity. You remember, on that second morning, how all those students fell around me in heaps, so mightily were they convicted. And then, on the fourth night, don't you remember how those hundred schoolgirls were so greatly moved? Besides, right from the beginning, there seems to have been just one stream of confession. Surely, then, we have the best of reasons to be grateful to God." "All the same," I insisted, "I feel somehow that you people have not received God's fulness yet."

I continued to pray, almost feverishly, that God would take the hindering stone away. Then suddenly a voice seemed to rebuke me. "Why all this anxiety? What are you fretting yourself about? Am I not sovereign? Can I not do My own work? Don't you know enough to 'stand still and see the salvation of the Lord?' " "Yes, Lord," I replied, "I'll do as you say. I'm tired out. I'll not even pray. I'll just 'stand still.'"

Presently a lady missionary, whose bursts of bad temper were notorious throughout the mission, rose and in great brokenness prayed that God would remove the hindering thing from her life. Right after her another lady missionary confessed to her lack of love for the people to whom she had come to minister, and pleaded that to her, too, grace might be given and the obstacle taken away. Then Miss L-, the Chinese headteacher of the Girls' School, whom all thought to be about as perfect a Christian as it was possible to find, confessed in tears to her selfishness and the unworthiness of the example which she was setting to her girls.

By this time Dr. L- was completely broken up. "O heavenly Father," he cried now, "forgive Thy sinning servant. I have spoken unadvisedly with my lips and hurt a Chinese brother. Thou knowest, O God, how that a long time ago Thy servant Moses spoke unadvisedly with his lips, and Thou didst punish him by not permitting him to enter the Promised Land. But only Moses was punished; the people did not suffer for his sin. The people were permitted to enter the land of blessing. Now, therefore, O God, punish Thy servant before Thee in like manner; but let not Thy people be hindered from obtaining the promised blessing."

Scarcely had the doctor ended when a man fell to the floor of the church with a terrible cry. It was the huffy evangelist. The next moment a man in another part of the audience was affected in precisely the same way. This time it was the Chinese principal of the Boys' School, one who had been undermining Dr. L-'s authority and endeavoring to work up rebellion among the students. In a few minutes men and women all over the building were falling on their knees and confessing their sins. One of the older boys cried, "Get down on your knees," and they all went down. On my left were the girls. Suddenly, without a word of command, like a wind sweeping over a field of grain, they, too, fell on their knees. Soon it seemed to me as if every last man, woman and child was down on the floor of that church crying for mercy.

That afternoon Dr. L- had finished his work at the hospital and was setting out for the church when his attention was arrested by a strange sound. At first he thought it must be the noise of an express train coming in from the North. On going a little farther he decided that he had been mistaken and supposed that it was a tornado sweeping down upon the city. He arrived at the church and there he discovered that the strange sound was the sound of a people pleading with God.

The question might very well be asked -- why was it necessary, apparently, that Dr. L- should have made that public confession that evening? This was something that puzzled me at the time, and it was not till months later that I was afforded the explanation. Dr. L--, besides being a giant in intellect and a master of the Chinese language, was renowned far and wide for his Christian piety. And it seems that, after that apparently trifling setto which he had had with his evangelist, it had become bandied about among the Chinese that "even such a man as Dr. L- had a little of the old Adam temper in him." God's gifts were, therefore, withheld until a public confession from His servant had cleared the disgrace to His name.

The native pastor at Paotingfu (south suburb), and one of the foreign missionaries had invited me to their church to hold a series of revival meetings. I had accepted the invitation, not knowing at the time that the senior missionary was opposed to any such meetings. On the evening before the meetings were to begin I called upon this missionary in order to arrange for a daily prayermeeting for the foreign leaders. "Before we agree to have a prayermeeting," he said, "I want to have a clear understanding. I don't like to be the fellow prayed at. Our methods of approach are totally different. You work on the emotions. I go after the intellect. But I'll go in with you to these meetings if you agree to my proposition. It is that you should drop all your prepared addresses, and that we four pastors, yourself included, of course, should have public discussions every day instead. We'll decide on a subject -- say 'The Kingdom of God.' Let one talk on, e.g., what is the meaning of the Kingdom of God. Another might give an address on how we can bring the Kingdom of God to pass. Then, after we leaders have expressed our views, we will have some singing and perhaps a little prayer, and then dismiss the meeting. If you will agree to that - just to meet me for a general discussion each day - then I will go in with you. But otherwise - no!"

"But you have known for months," I replied, "that I had been invited here and that I had promised to come. During all this time I have received no objection from you to my method of conducting meetings,. Surely then, on the very eve of this series, it would be almost unreasonable to expect me to drop all the addresses that I had prepared for your people."

"I fully expected you to turn down my proposition," said the missionary, "and therefore I'll have nothing to do with the meetings." I was quite at a loss to account for his attitude. Within sight of the church were the graves of seventeen foreign and Chinese leaders who had suffered martyrdom in 1900. Yet, judging by the pitiable condition to which the church had fallen, they seemed to have died in vain. One Sunday morning, not long before my arrival, there had been a free fight among the Chinese leaders after the

morning service. One of the deacons had been seriously injured. And yet this brother did not seem to care. He wanted to "get after the intellect." "But surely," I said, as I was leaving, "we are to have a prayermeeting?" "No!" he replied most emphatically, "we are not."

For the first day or two it was quite evident that the Holy Spirit was being grieved and hindered. For one thing, the students gave a lot of trouble. There were about fifty of them. Knowing that the senior missionary was opposed to the meetings, they had decided to do as they pleased. It was impossible to keep any order among them. It just seemed as if the devil had taken hold of them. Late in the evening of the fourth day I was in my room preparing an address on the subject, "Quench not the Spirit," when a message was brought to me. It was from the missionary who had arranged for the meetings. All it said was, "Come quickly to the Boys' School. I'm in trouble."

As I was hurrying over to the school I wondered to myself what could be the matter. I knew that this missionary had charge of the prayermeeting in the school that evening, but he struck me as being the last man in the world who was calculated to set an audience on fire. What, then, could have happened?

On entering the school, a strange spectacle met my eyes. The boys were all, without exception, crying at the top of their voices and pounding the desks before them with both hands. The missionary was looking on, quite helpless. I asked him how this had come about, and he replied: "I was just quietly leading the prayermeeting when suddenly one boy after another broke out weeping. I tried to get them to sing, but they wouldn't sing. Finally, in despair, I sent for you." I said I wasn't quite sure what to do myself. For a while I just waited and prayed that God would reveal His will in the matter.

Presently one of the boys would stop pounding his desk, go over to another boy and say, "Please forgive me for that row we had yesterday. It was all my fault." Then one would take a pencil out of his desk, go over to another and say, "This is your pencil. I stole it." Another would go over to his schoolmates and say, "I've been speaking a lot of nasty things about you behind your back. Please forgive me."

This went on for over half an hour. When I saw that it was about over I felt that it was time for me to interfere. The teachers had gathered by this time, so we started up some choruses. But the boys paid no heed. They did not even seem to hear us. Then I took the big schoolbell and rang it with all my might. Still they paid no heed. Right in the centre of the room there was a rickety table piled high with slates. I went over to the table and shook it as if I were going to knock everything to pieces. That caused some of them to look up. I caught their eyes and said, "Boys, stop crying!" They obeyed, and in this way the movement gradually subsided. We then sang a hymn and I said, "Now, boys, you had better get off to bed."

For the rest of the meetings those boys behaved like angels. On the morning following this incident, I gave an address on "Quench not the Holy Spirit." The whole audience seemed to be deeply moved. One after another, the quarrelsome leaders got up before the church, and in tears confessed their faults one to another. The rule in that mission was that candidates for baptism must be on probation for at least six months; but so manifest to all had been the work of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of the students that the regulation was temporarily set aside, and on the Sunday after my departure fortyfour of them were baptized.

The missionaries at Hwailu had been through the Boxer year, having had the most remarkable deliverances. I had every confidence that the Lord was going to move mightily at Hwailu. Yet it soon became evident that here, too, there was a very serious hindrance somewhere. I was informed that there were grave quarrels within the bounds of the mission, prominent leaders being among the chief offenders.

As the meetings progressed these leaders, realising how they were holding things up, got together and tried to make matters right. One of their number, however, was as stubborn as a man could be. He would listen to nothing and would give way in nothing.

On the fifth day, in the middle of a meeting, this man suddenly gave vent to strange sounds, and made as if to bore his head into the ground. At once I turned to Mr. Green and asked him if the man was accustomed to have epileptic fits. "No," he replied. "Then have him taken out," I said. "The only thing it can be is demon possession." Mr. Green spoke to some helpers, who went and laid hold of the man in order to lead him out of the church. With that he became furious. He vowed he was going to kill Mr. Green and all his family. He would never rest, he cried, until he had wiped them out.

I asked the man who had taken charge of the poor fellow to pray for him in the hope that the demon might be cast out. It was only with the greatest difficulty that they managed to drag him out of the church to a room nearby. They told me afterwards that, as they prayed for the man, there would be times when he seemed to be filled with great terror. "Save me, save me!" he would cry. "I'm slipping into hell." Again fierce turns would come to him, and nothing would do but that he would exterminate the whole Green family. Often he would attempt to bore his head into the ground, as he had done in the church. At other times he would try to climb up the wall of the room feet first. Hour after hour through these various changes the Christians kept on praying. Finally the demon was cast out.

The following day, which was the last day of the meetings, this man was amazingly changed. He was now willing to go further than any of the other leaders. No mere patching up of the quarrels would do for him. He wished to see the matter settled right to its very foundations and everything cleared away so that the Holy Spirit could move unimpeded in their hearts.

When we sat down for supper that last evening we were not a very optimistic party. Certainly the results at Hwailu had not been nearly what I had hoped for or expected. At each meal we had been in the habit of singing the chorus, "The Lion of Judah shall break every chain and give us the victory again and again." A visiting missionary tried to cheer us up. "Come on, Mrs. Green," he said, "let's have the old chorus once again." With that, Mrs. Green burst out weeping. "I can't sing it," she sobbed, "I'm too disappointed. I believed that, when Mr. Goforth came here to lead these meetings, all our hindrances would be swept away just as they were at Changteh and Paotingfu. But here it is all over now and our quarrels remain unsettled, and everything seems to be just the same as ever." The visiting missionary insisted, however, and the chorus was sung - Mrs. Green, in spite of her tears, joining in with us.

As we were rising from the table, Miss Gregg, one of the single ladies at Hwailu, entered the room. "I'm going to wind up my affairs here as soon as I can," she told us, "and I'm going right back to England. When I heard that Mr. Goforth was coming here to conduct revival meetings I told my Chinese sisters that the Lord would be sure to sweep away all our hindrances and give us abundant blessing. But here the meetings are all over and the quarrels remain unsettled. I'm so disappointed. I simply cannot face those women again. They trusted me so implicitly. So the only thing I can do is to go back to England."

Miss Gregg went on to tell us that about a year before a printed motto had been given her. She repeated it to us. As I remember, it ran something like this: "Whatever my Father sends me, be it joy or disappointment, no matter how hard it may be to bear, since I know it comes from my Father, I'm going to receive it with both bands joyfully." "During the course of this year," continued Miss Gregg, "the motto has become somewhat blurred. Well, this afternoon Miss -, having a headache which prevented her from

attending the service, repainted the motto in the most beautiful ornamental letters and hung it on the wall opposite the door of my room so that I would be certain to see it as soon as I entered. Well, when I opened the door and saw that motto hanging there - it was just too much. I went right over and turned its face to the wall. I simply couldn't bring myself to receive such a disappointment as this 'with both hands joyfully.'

"Miss Gregg," I said, "I think I am beginning to see where the hindrance lies. You had heard how God had moved at Changteh and Paotingfu and elsewhere, and you made up your mind that He must do a similar work here in Hwailu or so disappoint you that you would throw up your work and go back to England. In other words, as far as you were concerned, God had no option. He must please you in your own way or else lose your service. Remember that God is sovereign. He can never lay aside His sovereign will and authority. I understand that Mr. Green is out there now in the tent holding a prayermeeting with the Christians. How do you know but that at this very moment every hindrance has been removed?"

Just as I finished speaking Mr. Green came bounding into the room crying, "Hallelujah!" "All quarrels have been made up," he said, "and every hindering thing laid away; and they're all waiting out there in the tent for you people to come and rejoice with them over what God has done." Miss Gregg didn't wait for him to finish. She was already on her way to the tent. Since then Miss Gregg has been mightily used all over China in this movement for the deepening of the spiritual life.

For various reasons I think it would be better for me to leave unmentioned the name of the next station visited. Few more painful or more depressing experiences have fallen to my lot in China than during the meetings which I conducted there. The missionaries had become notorious through their quarrelling. And, as if that were not pitiful enough, the Chinese Christians had taken sides.

On the first day of the meetings an evangelist, who had been through the Changtehfu revival and had been deeply moved then, made an earnest plea to the congregation. "Brethren," he cried, "by our quarrels and divisions we are quenching the Holy Spirit and letting God's work here go to pieces. I tell you I am willing to do anything to make peace. I am willing to get down and kowtow to any one who has anything against me. But, brethren, do let us give way to the Spirit of God and remove all these hindering things from our midst." Never have I listened to anything more moving. It seemed that all concerned in the quarrels must surely yield and get right with one another. But no one paid the slightest heed.

Again, on the fourth day, the evangelist, in a veritable agony of weeping, pleaded with his fellow Christians to forgive one another and allow the love of God to be shed abroad in their hearts. This time the women in the audience seemed to be somewhat moved, but the men remained as cold as ice. When I left that place it was with the sad conviction that the devil remained in full control.

While I was at this last place the senior missionary happened to be on furlough. It seems that shortly before his return the junior missionary, with whom he was at enmity, moved out so as to be away before the other's arrival. As the junior missionary was on his way to the station the Chinese who stood in with the senior missionary followed the young men, jeering at him and pelting him with clods. When the senior missionary returned a few days later the Chinese on the other side pelted him with manure and any kind of filth which they could lay their hands on. Not long after, this missionary had the greatest difficulty in keeping his "Christians" from taking sword and spear in hand and killing each other. No missionary lives there now.

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