

# The Beginning of the Movement in Manchuria

by Jonathan Goforth

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*Jonathan Goforth's journey to Manchuria led to a powerful revival marked by confession, transformation, and a movement of faith among the local Christians.*

**Scripture:** 2 Chronicles 7:14, Psalm 51:10, Proverbs 28:13, Jeremiah 33:3, Luke 15:7, 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 embarked on a journey to Manchuria in 1908 with a message from God but faced challenges in conducting a Revival due to lack of support and unity among the missionaries. Despite disappointments and doubts, a powerful movement of confession and repentance unfolded, leading to the exposure of hidden sins and the restoration of faith and trust among the congregation. The Revival sparked a transformative ripple effect, with individuals confessing and making amends for their wrongdoings, ultimately leading to a widespread spiritual awakening in the region.

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## Transcript

WHEN I started on the long journey to Manchuria in February, 1908, I went with the conviction in my heart that I had a message from God to deliver to His people. But I had no method. I did not know how to conduct a Revival. I could deliver an address and let the people pray, but that was all.

On the evening of my arrival at Mukden, my missionary host and I were talking together in his study. Naturally I was keyed up to the highest pitch at the prospect of what lay ahead. My host, however, seemed peculiarly indifferent to the thought of Revival. This evening, of all evenings, he chose to impress upon me the enlightened nature of his theological views. "You know, Goforth," he said, "there's an awful windbag in your mission. What's his name? Mac - something?" "Is it MacKenzie?" I asked. "Surely you can't mean him? Why, that man is anything but a windbag. He is considered one of the leading theologians in China." "No," he said, "it's not MacKenzie. Oh, yes, I remember - it's MacKay." "But MacKay is our Foreign Secretary," I replied, "and an address from him would be more than acceptable in any land." "Well," he continued, "I heard him down at the Shanghai Conference. Why, man, his theology is as old as the hills." "I think we had better stop right here," I said, "my theology is just as old as MacKay's. In fact, it is as old as the Almighty Himself."

I learned, too, that the wife of my host was not in sympathy with the meetings, and had left the day before my arrival to visit some friends in a neighbouring city. I couldn't help but think to myself that, if the attitude

of this home were reflected in the minds of the other missionaries, then the outlook for Revival was, to say the least, not very encouraging.

But there were further disappointments in store for me. When the invitation had been extended to me, the preceding year, to conduct a series of special meetings in Mukden, I had stipulated as to the conditions of my acceptance, first, that the two branches of the Presbyterian Church in Mukden, namely the Scottish and the Irish, should unite for the services; and, secondly, that the way should be prepared by prayer. Imagine my disappointment, therefore, when I found, upon enquiry, that not one extra prayermeeting had been held. But the last straw which was laid on the back of my already wavering faith was when I learned, after the evening service on the opening day, that the two Presbyterian bodies had not united. I went up to my room, knelt down by my bed, and, unable to keep the tears back, I cried to God: "What is the use of my coming here? These people are not seeking after, Ht. They have no desire for blessing. What can I do?" Then a voice seemed to come right back to me: "Is it your work or Mine? Can I not do a sovereign work? 'Call upon Me and I will answer thee, and will show thee great things, and difficult, which thou knowest not'" (Jer. xxxiii. 3, R. V.).

Early next morning one of the elders came to see me. As soon as we were alone he burst out weeping. "In the Boxer year," he said, "I was treasurer of the Church. The Boxers came and destroyed everything, the books included. I knew I could lie with safety. There were certain Church funds in my keeping which I swore I had never received. Since then I've used the money in my business. Yesterday, during your addresses I was searched as by fire. Last night I couldn't sleep a wink. It has been made plain to me that the only way that I can find relief is to confess my sin before the Church and make full restitution "

After my address that morning the elder stood up before all the people and laid bare his sin. The effect was instantaneous. Another member of the session gave vent to a piercing cry, but then something seemed to hold him back and he subsided without making a confession. Then many, moved to tears, followed one another in prayer and confession. All through the third day the movement increased in intensity. The missionary, at whose home I was staying, said to me: "This amazes us. It is just like the Scottish Revival of 1859. Hadn't you better drop your planned addresses and just let us have thanksgiving services from now on?" "If I understand the situation aright," I replied, "you are far from the time of thanksgiving yet. I believe that there is still much hidden sin to be uncovered. Let me go on with my addresses, and after I am through you can have all the thanksgiving meetings you like."

On the fourth morning an unusually large congregation had assembled. The people seemed tense, expectant. During the singing of the hymn immediately preceding my address an inner voice whispered to me: "The success of these meetings is phenomenal. It will make you widely known, not only in China but throughout the world." The human in me responded, and I experienced a momentary glow of satisfaction. Then immediately I saw that it was the evil one, at work in his most insidious form, suggesting that I should divide the glory with the Lord Jesus Christ. Fighting the temptation down, I replied: "Satan, know once and for all that I am willing to become as the most insignificant atom floating through space, so long as my Master may be glorified as He ought." Just then the hymn ended, and I rose to speak.

All through that address I was acutely conscious of the presence of God. Concluding, I said to the people: "You may pray." Immediately a man left his seat and, with bowed head and tears streaming down his cheeks, came up to the front of the church and stood facing the congregation. It was the elder who, two days before, had given vent to that awful cry. As if impelled by some power quite beyond himself, he cried out: "I have committed adultery. I have tried three times to poison my wife." Whereupon he tore off the

golden bracelets on his wrist and the gold ring from his finger and placed them on the collection plate, saying: "What have I, an elder of the Church, to do with these baubles?" Then he took out his elder's card, tore it into pieces and threw the fragments on the floor. "You people have my cards in your homes," he cried. "Kindly tear them up. I have disgraced the holy office. I herewith resign my eldership."

For several minutes after this striking testimony no one stirred. Then, one after another, the entire session rose and tendered their resignations. The general burden of their confession was: "Though we have not sinned as our brother has, yet we, too, have sinned, and are unworthy to hold the sacred office any longer." Then, the deacons one by one got up and resigned from their office. "We, too, are unworthy," they confessed. For days I had noticed how the floor in front of the native pastor was wet with tears. He now rose and in broken tones said, "It is I who am to blame. If I had been what I ought to have been, this congregation would not be where it is today. I'm not fit to be your pastor any longer. I, too, must resign."

Then there followed one of the most touching scenes that I have ever witnessed. From different parts of the congregation the cry was heard: "It's all right, pastor. We appoint you to be our pastor." The cry was taken up until it seemed as if every one was endeavouring to tell the broken man standing there on the platform that their faith and confidence in him had been completely restored. There followed a call for the elders to stand up; and as the penitent leaders stood in their places, with their heads bowed, the spontaneous vote of confidence was repeated, "Elders, we appoint you to be our elders." Then came the deacons' turn. "Deacons, we appoint you to be our deacons." Thus were harmony and trust restored. That evening the elder whose confession had had such a marked effect was remonstrated with by one of his friends. "What made you go and disgrace yourself and your family like that?" he was asked. "Could I help it?" he replied.

It was a great joy to me to note the change that took place during the meetings in the attitude of my missionary host. One morning, while prayers were being offered up for different people, this missionary ran forward, crying: "Oh, pray for us missionaries; for we need it more than any of you." His wife, whose indifference to the meetings we have already noted, returned from her visit several days before the services ended. But it was not too late. Her heart was won, and she became, if anything, even more consecrated than her husband.

On the last day of the meetings the native pastor said to the people: "You people know how many elders and members of this congregation have drifted away. Oh! if there were only some way of bringing them back." At these words the whole audience stood up as one man and united in prayer for the lost sheep. They prayed as if the souls of those wandering ones were the only things that mattered. It was like a Mother pleading for the return of her rebellious son. That year hundreds of members, who had drifted away, returned to the fold. Most of them confessed that they did not think that they had ever really been converted before.

There was an elder in the Liaoyang congregation who, a short time before my arrival, had moved to new lodgings on the Sabbath Day. The missionary had called upon him and remonstrated with him, pointing out how ill it befitted his position to set such a bad example. The elder had become greatly incensed, and had claimed that Sunday had been the only day in which he had time to effect the change. On the morning of the second day this elder broke down before the congregation and confessed his sin. He had had time to move during the week, he said; but he had coveted the use of the Lord's Day. Some time after my departure from Liaoyang, the elder held a series of special meetings with the High School boys. The results, I am told, were truly extraordinary.

After the elder's confession on the second day, the pressure increased rapidly. On the morning of the fifth day, one old backslider cried out in agony: "I murdered him." Then he gave his confession. It appeared that he was a

doctor. A neighbour and himself had been at bitter enmity with each other. One day he was called in to prescribe some medicine for his neighbour, who had been taken sick. He had given him poison and the man had died. The effect of that revelation can be more easily imagined than described. In a few minutes the whole congregation seemed to be in the throes of judgment. People everywhere were crying out for mercy and confessing their sins.

On the way back to the mission compound after the final meeting, Mr. Douglas, the resident missionary, said to me: "I am humbled to the dust. This is the Scottish Revival of 1859 reenacted before my eyes. Although I was not there myself I have often heard my father tell about it. He said that the people would work in the field all day, hurry back home, have something to eat, and then rush off to the church where they would stay till midnight. But my weak faith wouldn't allow me to expect anything like that here." He then handed me a letter which he had received several weeks before from Dr. Moffatt, of Pingyang, Korea. "I thought I would let you know," it read, "that while the meetings at Liaoyang are going on, my people here, three thousand strong, will be praying that God's richest blessing may come to you."

The revival at Liaoyang was the beginning of a movement which spread throughout the whole surrounding country. Bands of revived Christians went here and there preaching the Gospel with telling effect. At one out-station there was a Christian who had a notoriously bad son. During the meetings that were held by one of the revival bands at his village, the young man quite broken up, confessed his sins and came out strongly for Christ. His conversion produced a remarkable effect upon the whole village. Heathen would say to each other on the streets: "The Christian's God has come. Why, He has even entered that bad fellow, and driven all the badness out of him. And now he's just like other Christians. So, if you don't want to go the same way you had better keep away from that crowd."

In that same village there was a Christian who had borrowed a considerable sum of money from a heathen neighbour a number of years back; which debt, as he confessed later, he had had no intention of ever repaying. But, as a result of the testimonies of the revival band, he was led to consecrate his life anew, and, as the first step, he calculated the compound interest on his debt, went to his creditor and repaid him in full.

At another village in the same region there was a certain notorious character who was renowned far and wide for his phenomenal success at the gambling table. One day this man saddled his donkey and, started up north to collect some money from certain of his victims who lived in that direction. But he got no further than the outskirts of the village when the donkey stopped. The gambler kicked and beat and cursed it, but all to no avail. The animal was adamant. North it would not go. Then it occurred to the man that there were some villages to the south where money was owing him. So he turned the donkey around and it started off without any trouble. Everything ran smoothly enough until they came to a crossroad where one branch went southeast and one southwest. The gambler had in mind a village which lay along the road running southwest. It was upon that road, therefore, that he endeavoured to urge his steed. But again the donkey had decided differently. It made quite clear to its master that if it were to budge another inch the route followed must be the one running southeast. Blows and entreaties were alike of none effect. "All right, have your own way," said the man at last, disgustedly, "and anyway, if I am not mistaken, there are some who owe me money down that way, too." So they proceeded on their journey.

In a little while they came to a village. They continued up the main street until they were directly opposite a little Christian church. Here the donkey stopped, and nothing the man could do could make it move a foot farther. In despair the man alighted. Now it happened that some of the Christians who had attended the Liaoyang meetings were holding a service in the church. The gambler, standing non-plussed outside the door, heard the sound of singing. His curiosity aroused, he decided to enter and see what it was all about. The power of God was present there that day. He heard this one, in tears, confessing his sins, and that one, with radiant face, telling of the joy and peace that had come into his life. Soon a powerful conviction came over the man. He stood up and confessed his sins and told how he had been led to the meeting. "How can I help but know," he cried, "that this is the voice of God?"

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