

The Lord's Presence and Power in the Changtehfu Out-Stations

by Jonathan Goforth

The Lord's presence and power are demonstrated through the Revival at Changtehfu, where widespread conviction and repentance led to lasting transformation and forgiveness.

Scripture: Psalm 51:17, Matthew 6:14, Matthew 18:19, James 5:16, 1 John 1:9

Topics: "Revival And Repentance", "Spiritual Awakening"

Description

Jonathan Goforth preaches about the power of revival and confession, sharing stories of villages where Christians turned away from their faith but were brought back through prayer and special meetings. He emphasizes the importance of true repentance and surrender to God, showcasing how even the most broken and sinful individuals can be transformed by the grace of Jesus. Through powerful testimonies of changed lives, Goforth illustrates the impact of genuine confession, prayer, and spiritual awakening in communities and individuals.

Transcript

AFTER the Changtehfu meetings the missionaries and Chinese leaders formed themselves into bands and toured the various outstations. Among those visited was a certain village where, not long before, over a hundred of our Christians had gone over to the Church of Rome. The trouble had arisen over a lawsuit. A certain notorious character in the village had suddenly surprised every one by professing Christ. For six months he had continued to walk the way of a Christian, and then finally had turned again to his sin and was arrested for robbery. The elders and deacons of the church had come to us, begging us to interfere. They assured us that all we needed to do, in order to save the man's life, would be to tell the magistrate that he was an earnest Christian and that he must have been wrongfully arrested. We refused to perjure ourselves to save him. They left us and went straight over to the Roman Catholic priest. He named his price. He would save the man on condition that they should all join the Church of Rome. They gave the promise; the priest immediately got in touch with the mandarin, and a few hours later the man was set free. Practically the whole Church went over to Rome, just a remnant remaining faithful.

During the Revival at Changteh this outstation was the burden of many a prayer. Sometimes there would be hundreds at a time imploring God to bring the lost ones back to the fold. A deputation was sent out to the village, and they practically dragged the chief elder and the chief deacon back with them. Both men

were brought under terrible conviction. Not long afterwards Dr. M-, at the head of a band of revived Chinese leaders, went to the village to conduct four days of special meetings. Dr. M- assured me afterwards that he had never listened to people so apparently under the spirit of judgment. Over a hundred made public confession; and the whole Church turned back from Rome.

Dr. M and his band went on to Changtsun. Unusual interest was manifested in the meetings. One day as many as five thousand people gathered to listen. It was found necessary to erect platforms at different strategic points in order that all might be reached. Years later, after the Church at Changtsun had been organized, I was invited there to lead in a series of revival meetings. The church being considered too small, the meetings were held out in a large open yard nearby. For several days there was absolutely no evidence of any spiritual movement. There seemed to be some unaccountable hindrance.

On the third morning Mrs. Goforth said to me: "This is getting on my nerves. I can't stay here any longer. I wasn't present at that first meeting, but judging from little things that have been dropped you must have mortally offended the people by something you said. Why, I've never seen people act like this. You give your address, then announce that the meeting is open for prayer. You wait for ten minutes with no result, every one being as dumb as a post. Then you have them sing a hymn, after which you again open the meeting for prayer. Another long interval passes, but still not a word from any one. Then you pronounce the benediction. This has been going on for days. I can't stand it."

"I don't know how I could have offended them," I replied. "All I remember saying, at that first meeting, was that if they had any old prayers which they had learnt off by heart I would be glad if they would lay them on the shelf until these meetings were over. But I told them that if the Spirit of God prompted them to get rid of different things which they had reason to believe were hindering His cause in this place, then we would be only too glad to hear that kind of praying."

As we were talking my diary lay open on the table in front of me. I had just been writing a note in it. "Just read this," I said, handing the book to my wife. "This is the third day, with not the slightest sign of any spiritual awakening among the people. But, as surely as God is omnipotent and His Word like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces, so surely shall His people bend into the very dust before Him." Mrs. Goforth handed the diary to back to me. "I won't go home," she said. "I'll wait and see what God is going to do." Just then the Chinese pastor was ushered in. He was greatly worked up over the fact of there being as yet no sign of Revival, and he told us that the leaders felt so keenly about the matter that they had that morning started an extra prayermeeting.

From then on our one difficulty was to get the meetings closed. Sometimes after a meeting had lasted for three or four hours I would pronounce the benediction, and immediately dozens would come running up to the platform, pleading with me to give them a chance to confess. Each day the unconverted came in larger numbers, and many were brought under conviction. One Christian said to me: "Before these meetings there was no special interest in the Gospel in my village. But today, when I went home for my noonmeal, about ninety of my fellow-villagers gathered around me and asked me to tell them all about 'this Jesus and His way of salvation'." Among the new converts were two noted witches. They had Pastor Hsi and the elders go back with them to their homes to hold a service. All in their families turned to the Lord.

Even among the Christian leaders the brokenness and conviction were startling. Pastor and elders and deacons all besought God to forgive them for the coldness and laxity of their Christian service. Many prayed earnestly for a deeper experience of the spirit of brotherly love. Others in shame confessed how

they hadn't read their Bibles, how they hadn't prayed, how they had not made any attempt to save those around them.

Sometimes, when people ask: "What about permanent results?" I tell them the story of Kuo Lao Tsui. Kuo lived in a little village about five miles from Changtsun. He had once been one of the wealthiest men in the district, but had become addicted to opium, and in a short time had squandered almost everything. His condition was such that even the weight of a quilt on him was agony to him. He couldn't sleep a wink unless dosed full of opium. His wife finally died of a broken heart, leaving one little child. Kuo had immediately taken to himself another wife, a young woman in her teens who had been forced into the marriage by her family. It is said that when the poor girl had correctly sized up the situation she fell into a fit of weeping that lasted for days; for she knew quite well that this husband who had been forced upon her might die off at any moment; and that would mean that both she and the child would be sold into slavery.

During the Revival at Changtsun a number from Kuo's village attended the meetings, and were brought under conviction. One day four of the new converts called at Kuo's house and told him to get ready as they would be back in half an hour to take him to Changtsun "to get saved." When the men returned the first thing they did was to destroy Kuo's opium pipe and pitch his opium into the fire. Kuo had had a suspicion that they would do this, so he had secreted some morphia pills in the lining of his garment. It was his intention that, when the craving came on him with its irresistible power, he would first make sure that no one was looking and then just take one of these pills out and eat it. But his friends were up to his tricks. They searched his garment, removed all the pills and threw them into the fire, too.

Poor Kuo was now in a terrible state. "What am I going to do?" he groaned; "I can't live without it." "We'll pray for you," his friends replied. As Kuo couldn't even bear the jolting of a cart, the men set him in a big animal feedbasket, and the four of them carried him the five miles into the meeting. To his great surprise, Kuo slept all through the first night without any uneasiness. As yet, however, it did not occur to him to give God the credit. He decided that it was probably due to the fact that the extra dose of opium, which he had taken as a precautionary measure prior to setting out on the journey, had not as yet worked off its effects. The second night, as he was about to retire, an intolerable craving came over him. His friends, seeing his distress, walked him around the village several times, brought him back to his room, prayed with him, then put him to bed. He slept peacefully all through that night. In five days the craving had completely disappeared, and Kuo was a new man in Christ Jesus.

In a few years Kuo came to be recognized as one of the ablest preachers in North Honan. He set to work, too, and recovered all the property which he had lost. On one occasion I heard him give his testimony before a large crowd which had gathered from his own and neighbouring villages. "You people know what a hopeless wreck I was at fortyfive years of age," he said. "I had squandered away all I possessed. My first wife had died of a broken heart. My second wife was living in a continuous agony of apprehension. She expected me to die off any day. In those days I couldn't walk five li to save my life. Now I'm sixty years of age and I can walk ninety li any day without the slightest difficulty. I have a happy wife and four happy children. My two eldest daughters are graduates of the Christian Girls' School at Changteh. My youngest son and daughter are at present attending the same school. Yes, I can certainly recommend my Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, for He has surely done great things for me."

In that same district there was a farmer by the name of Yeh. Early in the fall of 1908 Yeh became involved in a lawsuit with a certain Mr. Chang, who lived in the town of Changtsun. The Changs were a wellto do scholarly family, with considerable influence in the neighbourhood; while Yeh was only a poor, insignificant

peasant. The Changs won the case. Yeh, burning with a sense of injustice, went up to the higher courts at Changteh to have the case retried. As he was passing through the city he encountered a Christian from his native village, who, on learning of his business in Changteh, persuaded him to put it off for a day and come with him to the mission. It was during the Revival. I happened to be preaching that day on the text, "But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses" (Matt. vi. 15).

Yeh was mightily convicted, and resolved then and there that he would become a Christian. All thought of going to law with the Changs passed from his mind. He wondered instead what he might do to lead them to Christ. The difference in their social levels, which rendered opportunities for contact of remote possibility, constituted the chief difficulty. It happened, however, that, shortly after his return home, Yeh was passing one day in front of the Chang house when Mr. Chang himself came out. Yeh bowed courteously and asked after his health. The old scholar glanced at him with supreme contempt, then turned away without saying a word. Such a rebuff was enough to dishearten any man but not Yeh. After that, whenever he met one of the Chang family on the street, he would go out of his way to be friendly with him.

Gradually old Mr. Chang began to soften. For a long time the family could think of no explanation to offer for Yeh's sudden change of attitude. He had gone up to Changtehfu threatening all manner of revenge, and then a few days later had returned and had thereafter manifested only the friendliest and most lovable spirit towards them. What could have happened? They wondered. Then one day a member of the family came back with the news that, while Yeh was at Changteh, he had gone over to the place where the "foreign devils" lived in the north suburb, and had decided to become a Christian. Whether that provided the solution of the mystery or not, they did not know. The fact remained that Yeh was plainly desirous of letting bygones be bygones. They finally decided to meet him halfway. Three months later Yeh had won the whole Chang family to Christ.

I wish to mention just one other incident before concluding this chapter. For a number of years the condition of the Church at Linchang, which was one of our largest outstations, situated about thirty miles northeast of Changtehfu, had been anything but encouraging. I finally decided to give it a week of special meetings. We had good reason to believe that the unsatisfactory condition of the Church was largely due to the wrong living of one of the deacons. Nothing definite, however, could be fastened on the deacon. He was a wily customer, and always managed to cover up his tracks. On the Sunday morning that the meetings opened, I approached the deacon and urged him to stay for the whole series, pointing out how valuable his assistance would be to us. He made no reply, but immediately headed for his home, which was about twentytwo li away.

Monday came and there was no deacon. Tuesday -- and still he had not put in an appearance. Elder Chang became so wrought up about the matter that he set out early on Wednesday morning and brought the deacon back with him. At the close of the forenoon service I said to him: "Now, deacon, you have remained away two days. Won't you please stay with us till the end of the services?" He simply mumbled something incoherent and left me. Elder Chang did his best to get him to stay, but was met with the scornful reply: "Do you suppose that I could demean myself and confess my sins like those people did this morning? Why, I would die first."

Later, I saw the deacon and the elder out across the ploughed fields, the deacon struggling to get away and the elder trying to hold him back. Finally, the elder gave it up and came back, weeping, to the room where Mrs. Goforth and I were staying. He was very discouraged. I suggested that the three of us should

unite in prayer for the deacon. "His case is not beyond God's power," I said. "Remember what Christ said, that 'if two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of My Father which is in heaven.'" (Matt. xviii. 19). As we knelt in silent prayer, I cried, "O Lord, Thou canst see that this deacon won't stay at the meeting and thus give Thee a chance to bring him to a consciousness of his sin. Yet, even in his own home make him realize that he is the most miserable man in this country today. Don't let him sleep a wink tonight. Give him the consciousness that he is passing through hell; and bring him back on the morrow to glorify his Savior."

Early next morning the deacon turned up. He was the picture of misery. "I've passed through hell since I left here yesterday," he moaned. "I couldn't sleep last night. I'm sure that I'm the most unhappy man in China today."

When the deacon came up on the platform that morning to make his confession he was so overcome with emotion that he was scarcely able to speak. He took his stand by the blackboard. "My sins are too great," he cried, "for me to confess them simply by word of mouth. I must write them down." In large, clear characters he wrote, "LIAR." Then, turning to the audience, he said, "Yes, I'm a liar. I've lied to God the Holy Spirit. When He moved me at the great Revival at Changtehfu I vowed that in everything I would endeavor to live as became a leader in His Church. Instead, I have served the devil. I'm a liar." He turned to the blackboard again, and wrote "ADULTERER." Then "MURDERER." "Another man and I," he said, "planned to waylay a wealthy business man. We were going to kill him and then take his money. We waited by the roadside in the dark for hours; but our intended victim decided, almost at the last moment, not to leave the city that night. Nevertheless, I'm a murderer at heart."

It is impossible to put in words the effect that was produced by that remarkable confession. It seemed to be the one thing needed to allow the Spirit of God full power over the people's hearts.

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