

# China's Confession -- Episode 3

by Zhiming Yuan

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*The sermon explores the history of Western missionaries in China, from the Ming Dynasty to the present day, and highlights their contributions to Chinese society and the rise of a new generation of Chinese Christians.*

**Scripture:** Matthew 28:19, Acts 1:8, 1 Corinthians 15:58, 2 Timothy 4:7, Revelation 7:9

**Topics:** "Christian Missions", "Cultural Evangelism"

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## Description

Zhiming Yuan preaches about the historical interactions between Western missionaries and China, highlighting the impact of figures like Matteo Ricci, Adam Schall von Bell, and Emperor Kangxi. The sermon delves into the clash of cultures, the introduction of Christianity, and the eventual blossoming of missionary work in China despite challenges and opposition. It emphasizes the sacrifices, contributions, and unwavering faith of missionaries who dedicated their lives to sharing the gospel in China, leading to the growth of Christianity in the region.

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## Transcript

C1) Thirteen hundred years ago, during the Tang Dynasty, a Buddhist monk named Xuan Zang journeyed to India, to the 'west heaven' on a quest for scriptures. After studying the scriptures for a decade, Xuan returned to China with thirteen hundred and thirty-five scrolls. Ming Dynasty writer, Wu Chengen turned this story into a popular fantasy novel, 'the Pilgrimage to the West.'

C2) For generations the Chinese have been intrigued by the legend that genuine scriptures exist in the West--or India. But today, we know that India belongs to the East. The nirvana yearned for in Amitabha Sutra is not in India. We must look farther west.

C3) Matteo Ricci, an Italian Jesuit priest, came to China in 1582 during the Ming Dynasty. For twenty years, he shared the western gospel with peasants in Guangdong Province.

C4) Ricci was excited to find the Chinese patriarchs' piety toward heaven. He believed this was evidence of Christian faith in ancient China.

C5) Twenty years later he took the gospel to Beijing, even converting a number of high-ranking government officials to Christianity.

C6) Matteo Ricci also taught geometry, astronomy, music, painting, irrigation, and cannon technology. He was the author of over a dozen of books.

C7) Joseph Needham, author of 'Science and Civilization in China,' wrote, "since the Jesuit missionaries came to China, the scientific knowledge of China and that of the West began to converge."

C8) During the Qing Dynasty, Adam Schall von Bell, a Jesuit missionary from Germany, was appointed Director of the Board of Astronomy in charge of reforming the Chinese calendar. He became a trusted advisor of emperor Shunzhi and was exempted from imperial court protocol.

C9) In 1650, Schall built the first European style cathedral at Beijing's Xuanwu Gate. To celebrate its completion Emperor Shunzhi gave the church a calligraphy panel with the inscription: the Gateway to the Perfect World.

C10) In 1664, three years after Shunzhi's death, Yang Guangxian, a court official, submitted a petition to the new emperor, ten year-old Kangxi. It said, "Foreigner's hearts differ from ours. We would rather have an imperfect calendar than have Westerners in China." Ao Bai, the emperor's regent sentenced Adam Schall von Bell to death by dismemberment, and ordered the caning and deportation of other missionaries.

C11) When the document of Von Bell's sentence reached the emperor and empress dowager at eleven o'clock on April 16, 1665, a violent earthquake hit Beijing. The capital was beset by windstorms and total darkness. The fearful and trembling officials requested a royal decree declaring the missionaries innocent and ordering their immediate release.

C12) Adam Schall von Bell died at 75 and was buried next to Matteo Ricci in Beijing. China remembered the unselfish contributions of these foreign-born sons in the official records of the Ming and Qing dynasties.

C13) When Emperor Kangxi grew up, he ordered Yang Guangxian the court official and Ferdinand Verbiest the missionary to forecast the movement of the sun's shadow and the positions of the stars. Verbiest's predictions all came true while Yang Guangxian failed completely. The emperor appointed Verbiest the Director of the Board of Astronomy and held a memorial service for Adam Schall von Bell. Yang Guangxian was exiled and the former regent, Ao Bai arrested.

C14) On March 22 of 1692, Emperor Kangxi issued a royal decree praising the missionaries' contributions to China and gave them total freedom to evangelize the land.

C15) Visiting the Xuanwu Gate church, he wrote 'Reverence To Heaven' and 'True Source Of All Things' on two calligraphy panels. The emperor praised Jesus in a poem saying, "By the flow of His blood He accomplished His work on the cross; and through the West we share in His abundant grace."

C16) In his essay, 'Treasure of Life,' Emperor Kangxi confessed his relationship with Jesus: "The heavenly gate was closed to our people, but now the path to blessing is open. I accept the Holy Son of God, that I may become His son and gain eternal life."

C17) Missionary work blossomed in the Qing Dynasty. The men of God translated Western scientific writings into Chinese and assisted China in the production of three hundred cannons. Verbiest tutored Emperor Kangxi two to three hours per day.

C18) Aided by missionaries, Emperor Kangxi signed the Treaty of Nerchinsk with Peter the Great of Russia. Both men swore before God to abide by it. This was a rare event in Chinese history because it

was a treaty between equals. In future treaties with the West, China was an inferior and signed under humiliating circumstances.

C19) The missionaries impressed Emperor Kangxi so much, he opened China's ports for the first time to foreign trade. China had finally let the outside world in.

C20) But this did not last long. China's open door was abruptly shut by an apparently insignificant incident and a hasty decision.

C21) In 1705 the Vatican sent Monsignor Carlo Tommaso Maillard de Tournon to China. To keep the faith "pure," he issued a lengthy decree including a ban concerning the veneration of ancestors and of Confucius. Nonconforming clergy faced excommunication. Further stipulations included replacing the Chinese word 'Shangdi,' or 'God' with the Latin word 'Deus'. Calligraphy panels with words like 'Revere Heaven' may not be hung in churches and Chinese classic literature were disapproved of.

C22) Emperor Kangxi saw no conflict with the Christianity and immediately drove de Tournon from China--affirming that the Chinese 'Shangdi' was the true God, heaven was not materialistic and veneration of ancestors was merely an expression of filial piety.

C23) In 1719, the Pope dispatched Carlo Mezzabarba, to reaffirm the Vatican's decree. Kangxi granted Mezzabarba thirteen meetings, but seeing no room for a breakthrough, wrote the following:

C24) "Westerners do not understand the Chinese classics, and their opinions are ridiculous, resembling those of Buddhist and Taoist clergy, and other heretics and cultists. They shall no longer welcome in China."

C26) Emperor Yongzheng said, "Missionaries want to convert my people to Christianity so they will shift allegiance to foreign kings. Then thousands of your ships will invade us and China will fall."

C27) In fact, after more than a hundred years of closed door policy, it would take only a dozen foreign warships to subdue China,. Instead of being treated as an equal, China was forced to sign treaties as the defeated. Instead of open-minded men like Xu Guangqi and Kangxi, China's new leaders buried their heads in the sand, turning a blind eye as China was crushed over and over again.

C28) In 1792, after the Industrial Revolution, British envoy George McCartney led a delegation of several hundred scientists, mathematicians, artists, and medical doctors to China. They carried 600 crates of gifts including scientific instruments, paintings, military supplies, and models of vehicles and ships.

C29) However, the imperial court regarded these foreigners as mere "tribute bearers" for the emperor's birthday. When the British requested to station a representative in China, Emperor Qianlong issued a decree stating:

C30) "Your policies are incompatible with ours and your request will not be granted. There are many Western nations. If everyone requests to station representatives in Beijing, how can we permit all of them? China is great and abundant. We need nothing from you."

C31) Twenty-four years later Great Britain sent special envoy William Pitt Amherst to China to discuss trade issues. He was expelled because he refused to kowtow to Emperor Jiaqing.

C32) Profiteering British traders suggested to Parliament that diplomacy would get them nowhere in China. Impatient with the government's effort to establish trade with the Chinese through proper means—these traders smuggled large quantities of opium into China.

C33) In 1839, the Qing government destroyed over twenty thousand tons of British opium and drove British Superintendent Charles Elliot to sea. Britain then decided to open China's trade door by force.

C34) In 1840 sixteen British Expedition warships captured Tianjin and were headed to Beijing. This began a series of defeats and humiliating treaties for the Qing government. Similar treaties were signed with other Western Powers including the United States and France.

C35) Maintaining the illusion of greatness, the Qing Dynasty rejected contact with foreigners. For the next twenty years the West made no progress in trade expansion with China.

C36) In 1860, when the allied forces took Tianjin again--Emperor Xianfeng imprisoned all thirty-nine Anglo-French negotiation delegates in Beijing.

C37) Three days later, when the allied forces entered the city, half of the delegates had been tortured to death. In retaliation, the Garden of Yuanming, the Emperor's luxurious summer palace was burned.

C38) Pressured by the Western Powers, the Chinese emperor began to receive foreign diplomats in 1873. Consequently, Guo Songtao was sent to London, the first Chinese ambassador in history.

C39) Who were these people from the West? Were they China's curse or blessing? Were they friend or foe? China still asks these questions to this day.

C40) When missionaries like Matteo Ricci and Adam Schall von Bell offered to share their science and faith as with peers, China rashly closed her door. Now the West forced themselves upon China with battleships and cannons, blasting open the gate that once kept them out.

C41) With the cannon fire of 1840 the West brought to China not only opium and unwanted foreign influences, but also new technology, democracy, and Christianity.

C42) Arnold Toynbee, the renowned historian, said, "A developed civilization would be divided into components such as technology, politics, arts, and religions. Each component's ability to propagate is usually in reverse proportion to its value. The less important components are better received, while the more important ones are mostly rejected This is the most unfortunate law in cultural exchange." In the past one hundred and fifty years China has been unable to escape this law.

C43) Bo Yang Interview Christianity teaches that all men are created equal, that we are all God's children. There is no such concept in China. This is of great concern. What do the Chinese live for? What do they love? Perhaps their love for parents, children or themselves is genuine--but this love cannot transcend blood. Christians on the other hand have purpose, life and love beyond family--in glorifying God.

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C44) Liang Yancheng Interview China has only understood western culture from the Enlightenment onward, not realizing Western democracy is intimately related to God. The Chinese talk of how atheism and agnosticism ushered in the Enlightenment and explain democracy in terms of succession of tyrannies. However, after much study in America, I concluded that Western history and Christianity are inseparable.

In fact, the most successful revolutions in the West, the ones with the least bloodshed, were all led by Christians--men who believed in forgiving their enemies. -----

C45) While western capitalists drained the lifehood of China, men of God also came, quietly surrendering their lives in service to China.

C46) When Karl Marx mockingly called China an 'obstinate rock' in 1862, he had no idea that three hundred years earlier a missionary named Alexandre Valignani had come to China to awaken her, saying, "Oh, rock, rock, when will thou open?"

C47) On the ship to China the captain asked Robert Morrison, "do you intend to change this proud and stubborn nation?" He replied, "No, it is God who will change her."

C48) Richard Timothy's personal secretary, Liang Qichao became a great reformer and patriot of China.

C49) Hudson Taylor came and five generations of his descendents stayed, dedicating their lives to China. Taylor said, "If I had a thousand pounds, China should have it; if I had a thousand lives, China Should have them."

C50) Morrison, Timothy, Taylor and thousands like them came, lived and died in China--enduring misunderstanding, hostility, hardship, and sacrifice. They never ceased to come.

C51) What motivated them? Money? Power? Fame? Politics? Why did they leave comfortable lives to quietly serve and die? Entire families were wiped out by the Boxer's swords; Poverty and famine killing others. Why did they come?

C52) Because of Jesus--who came and died for us.

C53) When the Word became flesh and lived among us, His wonder surpassed understanding.

C54) Countless Christians took up their crosses and followed the footsteps of Jesus into China.

C55) They were seeds from heaven.

C56) And when a seed falls on the ground and dies, it produces many seeds.

C57) John Song threw away his PhD to devote his life to spreading the gospel in China. Watchman Nee built church after church declaring himself the watchman of Chinese souls. Mingdao Wang chose life imprisonment rather than deny his faith. Western missionaries were expelled and atheism ruthlessly ruled China--but that's when an amazing thing happened. Seeds began to sprout; vast numbers of Chinese Christians appeared--evidence that the kingdom, power and glory of God is returning to Shen Zhou, the Land of God!China is awake and entering a new era!

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