

China's Confession -- Episode 4

by Zhiming Yuan

The sermon explores China's tumultuous history through the lens of key figures like Hong Xiuquan and Sun Yatsen, emphasizing the interplay of faith and reform in shaping the nation's destiny.

Scripture: 2 Chronicles 7:14, Psalm 33:12, Psalm 51:10, Proverbs 3:5, Isaiah 1:17, Micah 6:8, Matthew 5:9, Romans 12:2, Philippians 4:13

Topics: "Christian History", "Cultural Renewal"

Description

Zhiming Yuan delivers a sermon on the tumultuous history of China from 1840 to 1990, highlighting key events such as the Taiping Rebellion, the Westernization Movement, the Boxers' Rebellion, and the rise of influential figures like Hong Xiuquan, Hong Renxuan, and Sun Yatsen. The sermon emphasizes the impact of Christianity on these historical figures and the nation's quest for reform, democracy, and cultural renewal amidst political corruption and moral decay. Yuan reflects on the struggles, failures, and ultimate resilience of the Chinese people in their journey towards embracing God's values and principles.

Transcript

D1) From 1840 to 1990, China went through a constant series of upheavals--including the Taiping Rebellion, the Westernization Movement, the Reformation, the Boxers' Rebellion, the May 4th Movement and the revolution.

D2) Previous periods of unrest were full of confusion and violence but these hundred and fifty years of metamorphosis, though colored by pain, despair and grief--also had respites of joy, hope and dignity. It all began with the Taiping Rebellion.

D3) As a young man, Hong Xiuquan, the leader of the Taiping Rebellion stumbled across the Bible, and was deeply impressed by the majesty of God, the creator of the universe. Hong, a farmer's son, said, "The stars, clouds, lightning and rain are the wonders of God. The earth, with its mountains and valleys, seas and streams, plants and animals are His creations--clearly the work of a true God. He is worthy of worship by the whole world."

D4) Hong's ideal was to set up China as 'Taiping tien-guo', that is, a Heavenly Kingdom of Great Peace.

D5) However, as the Taiping movement gained momentum, taking the southern capital of Nanking, Hong Xiuquan departed increasingly from mainstream Christianity. Missionaries in China later considered it a

cult.

D6) While Hong and his followers abandoned their original ideals, another Chinese Christian, Hong Renxuan, brought them to maturity.

D7) Hong Renxuan was baptized and trained by missionaries in Hong Kong. He later tried to call attention Hong Xiuquan's doctrinal errors.

D8) In his book, *New Thoughts on Government*, he classified world cultures into three levels. China's antiquated customs were at a low level, the West's science and technology at a mid level, while the highest level was reserved for those who believe in Christ--a personal God who offers both just punishment and merciful forgiveness.

D9) He understood China's problem--and solution far more profoundly than his contemporaries or the Taiping leaders.

D10) The Taiping Rebellion inevitably failed.

D11) Without transforming her core culture, China sought superficial changes in the Westernization Movement, such as factories, railroads, overseas study, foreign languages, venture capitals, and technology. China's navy became the world's seventh largest after acquiring many battleships.

D12) The Westernization Movement came to an abrupt end when Japan annihilated China's North Sea Fleet during the Sino-Japanese war of 1894 to 1895.

D13) China's defeat by Japan was not the consequence of poor military tactics, but the result of moral decay and political corruption. Rampant prostitution, opium addiction, mutinies, and the embezzlement of military funds for Empress Dowager Ci Xi's sixtieth birthday left the fleet with only three cannon balls for battle!

D14) However, the Westernization Movement's failure led to fundamental reforms.

D15) In 1895, several thousand discontented candidates for the imperial selection examination assembled in Beijing. They petitioned Emperor Guang Xu to model China's reform after Japan's Meiji Restoration. The petition took three years to reach the Emperor--

D16) This led to a series of edicts for reform issued over the next 103 days--which were strongly opposed by the imperial officials and Empress Dowager Ci Xi. As a result, the emperor was detained and six key reformers were executed.

D17) The failure of the One-Hundred-Day Reformation angered the people.

D18) Having succeeded in stopping reform, the powers that be joined forces with the Boxers under the slogan 'strengthen the Qing government and destroy the foreigners'. When Ci Xi met with Boxer leader, Cao Futian, the crown prince even wore a Boxer uniform to show alliance. Riots followed. Railroads were dug up, western houses burned, foreigners killed and Christianity outlawed. Over two hundred missionaries and twenty thousand Christians in northeastern China fell victims to the Boxers.

D19) In May 24, 1900, Ci Xi ordered her forces to join the Boxers in attacking of embassies in Beijing. The next day Ci Xi declared war on all the countries with diplomatic ties with China.

D20) Shocked and outraged, seven western countries and Japan responded by forming a military alliance. A month later Beijing fell. Ci Xi fled, but not before slaughtering those officials who had considered settling with the foreigners.

D21) China's hope now rested on Sun Yatsen, a man who understood the need to reform at its most fundamental level.

D22) Sun Yatsen left China in 1879 to live with his elder brother in Honolulu. He graduated from a Christian missionary school and went to Hong Kong to study medicine--where he was baptized in a Congregational church in 1884.

D23) When his petition to Viceroy Li Hongzhang produced no results, Sun founded the Revive China Society in 1894. Within ten years it became the Revolutionary Alliance, with Sun as its leader.

D24) Sun Yatsen embraced Christianity and intended to govern China according to God's laws. In defining human progress, Sun quoted Confucius--'when the great truth prevails, the whole world desires justice and goodness,' and Jesus who said, 'My God's will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.'"

D25) Sun said, for China it was not 'difficult to practice what we know,' rather it was 'difficult to know what to practice.' For three thousand years the Chinese placed their faith in the wrong object and worshiped the wrong person. It was therefore impossible to live a truly righteous life. The very heart of China had to be renewed and this renewal could only come from God.

D26) When members of his political party strongly opposed Christianity, Sun cautioned the church to never become an instrument of the imperialists. He also encouraged constructive debates to promote the understanding of the Gospel. He openly declared he and his family were Christians and believed the separation of church and state was clearly the norm in civilized countries. Only without political interference could the church thrive.

D27) On October 10, 1911 the Wuchang Uprising was a success-- with two-third of the provinces declaring independence. Sun Yatsen was elected the Provisional President of the Republic of China. He quickly sought to implement democracy and reform culture and society.

D28) However, the foreign powers believed only military strongman Yuan Shikai would be able to restore order and unite the provinces. Wishing to unify China under one republic, Sun Yatsen gave up his presidency to Yuan in exchange for the abdication of the Qing court. Sun then devoted his energy to the economic development of the country.

D29) Yuan soon dissolved the parliament and declared himself emperor. Sun Yatsen once again was called to lead a campaign to restore the constitution of the republic.

D30) Sun Yatsen said, "Even when I die I want people to know that I am a Christian." He passed away in Beijing on February 22, 1925. He said in his will, "As a Christian I have wrestled with the devil for forty years. You should do likewise and believe in God."

D31) He was truly a spirit-filled man of integrity, dedicated to restoring godliness system in China, the Land of God.

D32) Revered by Chinese on both sides of the Taiwan Strait, Sun Yatsen will continue to be remembered in the twenty-first century as China returns to God.

D33) While the victors of World War 1 treated China as a second-class nation, the Soviets embraced her, abolishing the Czar's unequal treaties with China. This gesture set off the patriotic, anti-imperialist May 4 movement.

D34) The Chinese felt a kinship with Soviet socialism and scorned western capitalism, opening a door for the Communists.

D35) The Chinese Nationalist Party (Kuomintang) was founded in 1919 to establish a capitalistic China. Two years later, the Chinese Communist Party was formed to promote a socialist China.

D36) Its founder, Chen Duxiu, while not a Christian, still admired the teachings of Jesus, even calling them superior to Confucius. For this reason, Chen was able to work with the Nationalist leader Sun Yatsen, to rebuild China in capitalism before its transition to socialism. Unfortunately their successors, Chiang Kai-shek and Mao Zedong, were not as cooperative. Their hidden agendas and open conflicts continued until the Communists gained military strength during China's war with Japan. Backed by the Soviet Union and winning peasant support with land reforms, the Communists eventually took control of China.

D37) With a little help in 1946, Chiang could have defeated the Communists and established a two-party political system. But America and the alliance would not lend a hand.

D38) Founded on belief in a heavenly God, democratic America could not fathom the Chinese who were lorded over for 2500 years by far-from-perfect human dictators masquerading as gods.

D39) In three years of civil war, the Nationalists lost 1.7 million lives and the Communists 1.5 million. Over 3 million Chinese were killed by their own people.

D40) On October 1, 1949, Mao Zedong stood on the citadel of Tiananmen and shouted; "Now the Chinese people rise up!"

D42) Marx's theory of proletarian dictatorship fit nicely with China's 2500 years of humanistic autocrats.

D43) Marx's view on materialism supported 2500 years of atheistic culture.

D44) Marx's theory of class struggle validated China's 2500 year history of rebellion and violence.

D45) Marx's communal system and controlled economy were compatible with China's feudal mindset where 'everything under the sun belongs to the emperor and everyone exists to serve him.'

D46) In 1944 Mao Zedong was asked, "How will you break the rise and fall cycles of previous dynasties?" His answer: "through democracy!"

D47) Today these words are most ironic.

D48) Within forty years the Communists realized Mao's socialist vision had failed and sought new solutions. Like the Qing administration, Deng Xiaoping adopted a strategy of westernization. This time he succeeded due to improved conditions in China. As a result the Chinese expect success from Jiang Zemin and other leaders.

D49) Zhang Xueliang, a warlord who once placed Chiang Kai-shek under house arrest for 18 days in the republic's infancy--was under house arrest by Chiang for over forty years in Taiwan. He eventually converted to Christianity.

D50) Zhang Xueliang Interview: I wasn't a Christian. I was a soldier. But now I am a well-disciplined Christian with a heart-felt, sincere faith. When we believe in God, trust him with everything and we truly know him. If we abide in him, he will abide in us. The Lord is worthy of our praises.

D51) Could this centenarian's spiritual journey foreshadow the moral destiny of his beloved nation?

D52) History repeats itself, but always at a higher level. After Sun Yatsen fell, China has been climbing back step-by-step toward his values. Though at first, salvation seems so far away, each step forward in faith reassures us Almighty God awaits with open arms.

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