The Holy Spirit's Triumph In Revival

By Jonathan Goforth (1859 – 1936)

Jonathan Goforth was a missionary of the Canadian Presbyterian Church for a number of years in China. He and his family miraculously escaped with their lives during the Boxer Rebellion of 1900, at which time hundreds of missionaries and thousands of Chinese Christians were killed. After returning to ministry in China, Jonathan Goforth was marvelously used of God not only as an evangelist to the unsaved but also in revival movements which brought much blessing to the Chinese church. The following is a brief excerpt from Goforth's book, "By My Spirit," in which he writes of God's working in great power.

The Christian community in Shinminfu had been terribly persecuted during the Boxer uprising of 1900. Fifty-four had suffered martyrdom. The ones who were left prepared a list containing 250 names in all, of those who had taken part in the massacre. It was hoped that someday the way would be opened for them to wreak complete revenge upon these murderers.

The crisis of the revival meetings held in Shinminfu was reached on the afternoon of the fourth day. Again I had the feeling that I was a witness at a scene of judgment. After the meeting had continued for about three hours I pronounced the benediction.

Immediately cries went up from all over the audience: "Please have pity on us and let the meeting go on. For days we haven't been able to sleep. And it will be just the same for another night if you don't give us a chance to get rid of our sin now." I asked a lady missionary to take the women and girls over to the girls' school and to continue with them there until the movement subsided. I did not see any hope of the meeting ever ending otherwise.

As the women and girls were filing out, one of the evangelists came and knelt down in front of the platform. He confessed several sins with seeming genuineness, but still the burden which was plainly weighing upon him appeared to be in no way removed.

I said to him: "Since you have confessed your sins, God is faithful and just to forgive you your sins and to cleanse you from all unrighteousness. Go in peace."

"But I haven't confessed the worst sin of all," he cried brokenly. "I won't forgive."

"Then, of course," I replied, "God can't forgive you."

"But it is humanly impossible for me to forgive," he went on. "In the Boxer years a man came and murdered my father, and ever since then I've felt that it was my duty to avenge his death. Just the other day a friend of mine wrote to me, saying, 'Where's your filial piety? Your father has been murdered, and you are living without avenging him. You aren't worthy to be my friend!' Why, I simply can't forgive that man. I must destroy him."

Phoca PDF

"Then I am afraid," I said, "that it is clear from God's Word that He can't forgive you." He did not say anything more, but just continued on his knees, weeping.

Then a schoolboy got up and said: "In 1900 the Boxers came to my house and killed my father. All along I have felt that there was no other way open to me but that I should grow up and avenge that wrong. But during these last few days the Holy Spirit has made me so miserable that I haven't been able to eat or sleep or do anything. I know He is urging me to forgive the murderers for Jesus' sake. Do pray for me."

Another boy told how the Boxers had come to his home and killed his father and mother and elder brother. In fact, as many as nine boys went up in that way and told how their mothers and fathers and brothers and sisters had been murdered before their eyes, and how that ever since then they had lived in the hope that some day they would be able to take revenge. But they all confessed that they were utterly miserable, and asked us to pray for them that they might have grace to forgive those who had wronged them.

After the women and girls had left, the meeting continued for two and a half hours. There was just one stream of confession to the very end. And all the time the evangelist who wouldn't forgive was kneeling there by the platform, weeping. At the conclusion of the meeting he finally rose to his feet and faced the congregation. His face was drawn and haggard.

"My mind is made up," he cried. "I will never rest until I have killed the man who murdered my father." I thought that would be the last I would see of him.

The Next Morning

When I entered the church next morning, there he was standing by the platform, his face shining like the morning. He asked for permission to say a few words before I began my address. Turning to the schoolboys he said, "Will the boys who confessed last night and asked for grace to forgive the murderers of their loved ones please come up here to the front?" The nine boys left their seats and went and stood in a row in front of him.

"I listened to your confessions last night, boys," said the evangelist. "I heard you say that you were willing to forgive those who killed your loved ones. Then you heard me, a leader in the church, declare that I couldn't forgive and that I would not rest until I had taken revenge on the man who murdered my father.

"When I went home after the service I thought of how the devil would be sure to take advantage of my example and put you boys to ridicule. People would say that you were too young to know your own minds. Then they would point to me as an intelligent man who surely ought to know his own mind, and say, 'He doesn't believe in that foolish talk about forgiving one's enemies.' So, lest the devil should mislead you, I have bought these nine hymn books and I am going to present one to each of you, in the hope that every time you open it to praise God from its pages you will recall how that I, an evangelist, received from Him grace to forgive the murderer of my father."

Just then the list containing the names of those upon whom the Christians had planned to

Phoca PDF

take revenge was brought up to the front and torn into bits and the fragments trampled under foot.

At Newchwang

A modest tombstone in Newchwang marks the resting place of William Burns (1815 – 1868). It was here that he last labored for his Lord. It seems that everywhere this great Scottish evangelist went, both in the homeland and in China, all with whom he came in contact were brought to a saving knowledge of Christ. Even the heathen carpenter who made his coffin was no exception, and was an elder in the church when I arrived there.

After the Lord had moved so mightily at Mukden, one of the missionaries there said to me: "God has certainly blessed us here, but I am afraid that He won't be able to do anything at Newchwang. The church there is so dead it ought to be buried out of sight!"

I replied: "You now know the power of God. Just pray that mercy may be shown to Newchwang."

At the close of the meetings at Liaoyang I heard the same story. "We praise God," the missionaries said, "for what He has done for us. But there's no use you expecting anything from Newchwang. It's too far gone to be revived."

And again I replied: "But you have seen God's power. Why not pray for it?" At Kwangning and Chinchow and Shinminfu it was just the same. Newchwang was too dead for anything, they said. It was past hope.

Mr. Hunter of Kwangning had gone ahead of me to Newchwang to conduct a series of special prayer meetings. When we met at the dinner table shortly after my arrival, I could see that he was bursting with news.

"Strange things have been happening here," he cried, his face alight with joy. Just that day at the prayer meeting, he said, a woman who had denied her Lord in 1900 in order to save her life had been terribly broken. She had prayed that another opportunity might be given her for her to offer up her life for her Master. A Christian contractor, too, confessed in tears how he had cheated a certain concern out of $200, and vowed that he would pay the money back before the day was out.

The meetings began the following morning. On entering the pulpit, I bowed as usual for a few moments in prayer. When I looked up it seemed to me as if every man, woman and child in that church was in the throes of judgment. Tears were flowing freely, and all manner of sin was being confessed.

What was the explanation? How was one to account for it? This was the church which had been reported to be dead and beyond all hope. Yet, without a word having been spoken, or a hymn sung, or a prayer offered, this remarkable thing had happened! What other explanation can one offer but that it was the Spirit of God working in answer to the prayers of His revived children at Mukden and Liaoyang and elsewhere. They had seen what God could do and in the

Phoca PDF

light of that vision had interceded on behalf of their needy sister church.

– From *By My Spirit.*

Phoca PDF