

Revival in China

Jonathan Goforth

Jonathan Goforth was a missionary in China, along with his wife Rosalind Goforth, from 1888 to 1934. During the Boxer Rebellion of 1900, Goforth and his family were miraculously saved from death and managed to escape. When they returned, God used them in a powerfully way in preaching the Gospel and bringing revival in China.

The Christian community in Shin Min Fu 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). Some day, it was hoped, the way would be opened for them to wreak on these full and complete revenge.

The crisis was reached here 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 a hope of the meeting ever ending otherwise.

As the women and girls were filling 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 your sins and to cleanse you from all unrighteousness. Go in peace."

"But I haven't confessed the worst sin of all", said him brokenly. "I won't forgive." "Then, of course", I replied, "God can't forgive you." "But it's humanly impossible to forgive", he went on. "In the Boxer year 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 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." "Then I'm 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 Boxers came to my house and killed my father. All along I have felt 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 got up in that way and told how their mothers and fathers and brothers and sisters had been murdered before their very eyes, and that ever since they had lived in the hope that someday 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 have 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 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 that would be the last time I would see him. But 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 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 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 take revenge was brought up to the front and torn into bits, and the fragments trampled underfoot.