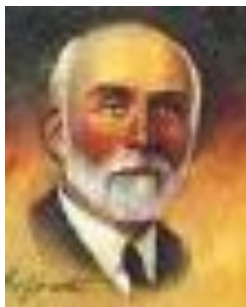


REVIVAL, THE NEED OF THE TIMES

CHAPTER 6



JONATHAN GOFORTH

A SURRENDERED LIFE UNDER GOD'S CONTROL

“Present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God”

(Romans 12:1)

“Be filled with the *Holy Spirit.*”

(Ephesians 8:18)

THIS REPORT IS BY CHARLES CLARKE

THE following report describes how a man of God determined to fulfil revival conditions.

Jonathan Goforth had gone into a period of retirement to recover from the exhaustion he suffered from the harrowing experiences of the Boxer persecution. He thought back over his thirteen years as a Presbyterian missionary in China. They were barren years. Up till now he had argued that you could not expect a harvest all at once. The sowing had to be done first. But now the years were passing and there was no spiritual harvest. This was not right.

Restless and discontented, he returned to an intensive study of the Scriptures: “Every passage that had any bearing on the price of accession of power became life and breath to me. There were a number of books on revival in my library. These I read over repeatedly. So much did it become an obsession with me that my wife began to fear that my mind would not stand it. Of great inspiration to me were the reports of the Welsh revival of 1904 and 1905. Plainly, revival was not a thing of the past.

Slowly the realisation began to dawn upon me that I had tapped a mine of infinite possibility.”

Then a friend in India sent him a little pamphlet of selections from the writings of Charles Finney. On the cover was a quotation of Finney’s which said that a farmer might just as well pray for a temporal harvest without fulfilling the laws of nature, as for Christians to expect a great ingathering of souls by simply asking, without fulfilling the laws governing spiritual harvest.

“If Finney is right,” he vowed, “then I am going to find out what those laws are and obey them whatever it costs.”

As he gave himself to prayer and Bible study, God began to deal with him. He graphically describes the Spirit’s conviction concerning resentment against a brother missionary. It came to a head in a meeting during which Goforth was speaking. He was talking to the people while in his heart the Holy Spirit was speaking to him. In the midst of his address, the speaker answered the voice within: “Right, Lord, I’ll go straight round to his house tonight and apologise.”

Jonathan soon found that Finney was right. He was speaking to a crowd of Chinese at a fair when he saw conviction move over the faces of his congregation. An evangelist standing just behind the speaker said, “Oh, these people are being moved, just as they were by Peter’s sermon at Pentecost.”

Later the same day as Jonathan was conducting a meeting with a team of ten native evangelists, the same thing happened.

“Conviction was written over every face. I called for decisions and the whole audience stood up as one man, crying, “We want to follow this Jesus.” I expected one of the evangelists would be ready to take my place, but what was my surprise when I turned round to find the whole band standing there motionless, looking on in wonder.”

Now a great change came. It was as if the people melted. They would begin to pray but broke down weeping. “For almost twenty years we missionaries had been working among the Honanese and had longed in vain to see a tear of penitence roll down a Chinese cheek.” The tears were rolling now and it seemed like a miracle.

KOREA

IN 1907 our ardent seeker went with Dr. R D Mackay to Korea where a remarkable revival movement was in progress. Here was a God-sent opportunity to explore further the secrets of revival. Jonathan Goforth soon traced this great movement back to its source. The missionaries at Pingyang had heard of the revival in the Khasi Hills of India, and had made a firm agreement to pray together every day at noon until a similar blessing was poured out upon them.

After a month one brother said, “We are spending a lot of time and nothing comes of it. Let us give the meeting up.” The majority disagreed and determined to spend more time in prayer, though now they changed the time from 12 noon to four in the afternoon. After many months the blessing came.

Jonathan was tremendously impressed by all he saw and experienced in Korea. He says: “It is one thing to read about revival in books. To witness its working with one’s own eyes and to feel its atmosphere with one’s own heart is a different thing altogether. Korea made me feel that this was God’s plan for setting the world aflame

... Those missionaries were just ordinary people. I did not notice any outstanding figure among them. It was in prayer they were different ... They seemed to carry us right up to the throne of God.”

On the way back to Honan via Manchuria, Jonathan stayed at several mission stations and always told the story of the Korean revival. Everywhere a deep impression was made. At one gathering of missionaries he spoke at length, then realising that the time had gone he cut out the last hymn and closed the meeting. He looked up but no-one moved. All remained in prayer.

“The stillness of death seemed to pervade the assembly. For at least six minutes no-one stirred.” Gradually suppressed sobs were heard here and there. Then followed a season of mutual confessions and reconciliations, and the beginning of revival among the missionaries. They covenanted to pray each afternoon at four o'clock until the revival came.

MANCHURIA

IN February 1908, Jonathan Goforth traveled north to Manchuria, by invitation, in order to conduct special services there. He began at Mukden amid a cold unresponsive atmosphere.

He says: “I knew I had a message of God, but I had no method. I could deliver an address and let the people pray and that was all.” That, however, proved to be God's method.

No sooner did he ask the people to pray than the work of conviction became apparent. The work of the Spirit began among the Christians. In meeting after meeting they stood up and confessed their sins, sometimes tearing up their tickets of authority as elders and announcing their resignations because they were unworthy. Terrible sins were unmasked by the Holy Spirit - sins of adultery, and theft, and murder. It was an awful shakeup in each church, with distressing scenes as the leaders writhed under pains of conviction.

The Chinese Christians called this the Little Judgment - the Judgment of the Holy Spirit by which they were brought to a penitence that would save them from the Big Judgment at the Great White Throne.

Dr. Walter Phillips was at one gathering when the Spirit first fell upon the church in Manchuria. His description is typical of what happened in many parts of China:

“It was at Chinchow that I first came into contact with the revival. Meetings had been going on there for a week, hence I was ushered into the heart of things unprepared. In candor, I must add, with a strong temperamental prejudice against ‘revival hysterics’ in every form, mine is an unbiased witness.

“At once, on entering the church, one was conscious of something unusual. The place was crowded to the door, and tense, reverent attention sat on every face. The very singing was vibrant with new joy and vigor ... The people knelt for prayer, silent at first, but soon, one here and another there began to pray aloud. The voices grew and gathered volume and blended into a great wave of united supplication that swelled till it was almost a roar, and died down again into an undertone of weeping.

“Now I understood why the floor was so wet - it was wet with pools of tears! The very air seemed electric - I speak in all seriousness - and strange thrills coursed up and down one's body. Then above the sobbing, in strained, choking tones, a man

began to make public confession. Words of mine will fail to describe the awe and terror and pity, of these confessions. It was not so much the enormity of the sins disclosed, or the depths of iniquity sounded, that shocked one ... it was the agony of the penitent, his groans and cries, and voice shaken with sobs; it was the sight of men forced to their feet, and in spite of their struggles, impelled, as it seemed, to lay bare their hearts that moved one and brought the smarting tears to one's own eyes.

“Never have I experienced anything more nerve-racking than the spectacle of those souls stripped naked before their fellows.

“So for hour after hour it went on, till the strain was almost more than the onlooker could bear. Now it was a big, strong farmer groveling on the floor, smiting his head on the bare boards as he wailed unceasingly, ‘Lord! Lord!’

“Now a shrinking woman in a voice scarcely above a whisper.

“Now a small boy from the school, with tears streaking his piteous grimy little face, as he sobbed out: ‘I cannot love my enemies. Last week I stole a farthing from my teacher. I am always fighting and cursing. I beseech the pastor, elders and deacons to pray for me.’

“And then again would swell that wonderful deep organ tone of united prayer. And even as the prayer sank again the ear caught a dull undertone of quiet sobbing, of desperate entreaty from men and women, who, lost to their surroundings, were wrestling for peace.”

CHINA

AMONG the Chinese Christians the terrible Boxer persecution of 1900 had left a legacy of hatred. Many of the young people had seen their parents brutally murdered. Some of the evangelists had returned home to find parents, wives and children dead. The result was widespread bitterness and a desire for revenge which poisoned and crippled the life of the church. All this was cleansed away as revival torrents swept through the church.

Pastor Goforth, moved from the astounding scenes in Manchuria, the province of Shansi, and then back again in his own district of Honan, preaching three times a day in many places. With only a few exceptions the scenes were always the same—conviction and confession, and restitution and reconciliation, on the part of the Christian; and then the cleansed church moving out in powerful evangelism among the people.

The exhilarating sense of God's Presence was wonderful. Crowds thronged the meetings. Thousands were converted and baptised. Demons were cast out. Sickness was healed. Opium smokers and alcoholics were delivered. This glorious work went on for years, renewing the church and saving the people.

So Jonathan Goforth found the secret of revival. Let me underline four elements in the secret.

- 1 His own desperate longing for revival.
- 2 His search in the Scriptures and in the writings of others who had found the secret.
- 3 His own brokenness and yieldedness as the Spirit convicted and guided.
- 4 The covenanted praying on the part of the missionaries that persisted until revival came.

But the heart of the secret was Jonathan himself. He was the pioneer of the revival.
As he himself said:

**“Revival is simply the Spirit of God
fully controlling the surrendered life.”**