

How Revival Came to the Schools in Kiangsu

by Jonathan Goforth

A series of revival meetings in Nanking and Hsuechowfu led to a profound outpouring of the Holy Spirit, resulting in widespread confessions of sin and a deepening of faith among the participants.

Scripture: Psalm 32:5, Ezekiel 18:30, Matthew 3:8, Luke 15:7, Acts 3:19, Romans 2:4, 2 Corinthians 7:10, James 5:16, 1 John 1:9, Revelation 3:19

Topics: "Revival Movement", "Spiritual Renewal"

Description

Jonathan Goforth recounts his experiences leading revival meetings in Nanking and Hsuechowfu, where miraculous events unfolded, including the unexpected weather favoring the tent meetings and the deep conviction and confession of sins by students, teachers, and leaders. The power of God's presence was evident as individuals were moved to confess their wrongdoings, seek forgiveness, and make amends, leading to a profound transformation in hearts and lives. The revival spread to different schools, impacting both students and teachers, with many experiencing a genuine conversion and a desire to live out their faith authentically.

Transcript

I WAS invited to Nanking in the early spring of 1909 to lead a nine days' series of meetings. The Christians there were faced with the problem of finding a building large enough to hold the crowds which were expected to attend. The Friends owned the largest church in the city, and it would only seat six hundred. The Chinese leaders proposed to erect a large mat pavilion, but the missionaries pointed out that at that time of the year it would probably rain every day, in which case a pavilion would be out of the question. To this the Chinese replied that they would have to trust the Lord for the weather. The missionaries gave way and a pavilion with a seating capacity of 1,400 was erected.

I arrived at Nanking the day before the meetings were to begin. Rain was pouring down, and it looked as if it might continue to do so indefinitely. The first thing I did was to go and inspect the tent. It was leaking like a sieve. There was not a dry place where one could sit down. Next day the meetings opened and throughout the whole nine days not a drop of rain entered the pavilion. Some days, indeed, the weather looked very threatening. It seemed as if at any moment the pentup torrents might be let loose. Still, the rain held off. The meetings came to an end and for two days it poured continuously.

On the evening of the third day the schoolgirls of the Adventist Mission came under deep conviction while at worship in the school. In the tent, on the following morning, the prayers of these girls sounded a new

and startling note. On the fourth evening the girls in the Friends' School were greatly moved. The next day the girls of the Presbyterian School all gave way.

At the prayermeeting in the Union High School, on the seventh morning, Mr. Meiggs, the principal, asked the boys how it was that they had as yet shown no signs of conviction. One of the leading students stood up. "Since you've asked us, principal," he said, "we will be plain with you. We know perfectly well that these meetings were arranged especially for our benefit. You foreign missionaries act as if you had no sin; and as if we Chinese were the only sinners to be found." Mr. Meiggs burst into tears. "Young men," he cried, "if you have seen anything wrong in me, tell me and I'll acknowledge it. If I have injured any of you, tell me and I will go and kowtow to you." At his words the boys melted, and there followed an hour of the most sweeping conviction.

The last to be brought into the movement were the girls of the Episcopal Methodist School. The school buildings were just over the compound wall from where I stayed. It was at their prayermeeting on the eighth evening that the girls broke down. Their piercing cries of conviction kept me awake till long after midnight.

On the day of my arrival at Nanking I had remarked on the unusual length of the great Oregon pine planks with which the platform in the tent was being constructed. I had expressed the fear then that they were going to take up far too much room in the pavilion and had suggested that they should be sawn in two. The reply had been that that was impossible as the planks were borrowed. When we came to the last day of the meetings I had abundant reason to be thankful that the platform was as roomy as it was. There were fully 1,500 people in the tent that day. Hundreds had to be turned away. The forenoon meeting lasted for four hours. I gave a brief address, and the remainder of the time was taken up with prayer and confession.

The unusual feature about the meetings this day was that every one seemed to want to come up on the platform to confess. I had never made any suggestion in that direction. In fact, I prefer that confessions should be given from the audience, while in prayer, and that they should be as unobtrusive as possible. Yet this day the whole trend was towards the platform. The crush was so great that it was found necessary to erect another stairway up to the platform. I obtained the services of another missionary, and he stood at one end of the platform and I at the other. The people gave their confessions facing the audience; then they usually turned to one or the other of us and asked us to pray for them.

At ten minutes to three that afternoon I went up on the platform to open the second meeting. Already hundreds of people were crowding towards the front, seeking for an opportunity to confess. I saw immediately that it was useless for me to think of giving an address. I got five other missionaries to help me, and we stationed ourselves on different parts of the platform. Sometimes there would be as many as thirty people up on the platform at a time, with, perhaps, half a dozen missionaries among them. Occasionally we would see a group of schoolgirls, with their heads all huddled together, ashamed at being seen by the great audience. But when their turn came their voices would ring out over the crowd. "You people needn't imagine," they would say, "that we want to come up on this platform and be stared at. For days we have tried to find peace by confessing our sins in private. But it is no use. We know this is the only way."

At ten minutes to nine, exactly six hours after the meeting had opened, I was compelled to leave in order to catch the steamer for Peking, where another series of meetings was awaiting me. As I left the tent scores of people were still waiting for a chance to confess.

Some of those confessions stand out in my memory as clearly now as when I listened to them twenty years ago. One schoolgirl said: "My father has a terrible temper. At school I was led to believe in Jesus, but I was in such fear of my father that I did not dare tell him about it. When my parents went to the temple to worship the gods they took me with them, and I said nothing. When they went to the theatre they always asked me to accompany them, and I was afraid to refuse. When they gambled at cards, I was a coward and joined in. But I'm going home today to confess Jesus to my people. Won't you all pray for me?"

The Chinese pastor of one of the Nanking churches broke down completely at one of the meetings. "For the first two days of these meetings," he said, "I did not realize that I had any sin. I got nothing out of Mr. Goforth's addresses. Then, on the third day, he spoke on the Laodicean condition. That searched me through and through. For the first time I saw myself as I was. Six months ago I had a quarrel with my son. In my temper I said things that I ought not to have said. Afterwards I was too ashamed to hold family worship. For six months now we have had no family worship in our home. If any of my family had died during that time, in their sin, I believe that God would have held me accountable."

One man, as he was about to confess, was quite overcome. The whole platform shook with his sobs. I thought that it must be a case of murder that was coming out. Finally, regaining his composure, he said: "When I first believed in Jesus the devil said to me, 'There's no need for you to testify or to preach the Gospel to others. That's the work of pastors and evangelists.' For seven years I've followed the devil's advice. I shudder to think of how many soul I have murdered."

There was a certain evangelist who had been used in a remarkable manner in the saving of souls and in quickening the churches. But for a year back, though he seemed as earnest as ever, there had been a marked lack of results in his work. The missionaries could not account for it. On the last day of the meetings the evangelist came up on the platform, greatly broken up, and confessed to having broken the seventh commandment.

Another evangelist confessed that the gown he was wearing had been acquired by unlawful means. He tore the garment off, threw it down on the platform and walked away without it.

An expreacher, who had gone into business and acquired considerable wealth, cried out: "There is no telling how many souls I have murdered, because I gave up the preaching of the Gospel and followed my covetous heart."

There was one of the Chinese leaders who had done not a little to hinder the progress of the meetings. At the first few services he had heard many confessions from his own people, but none from the foreign missionaries. The devil worked him up, and he went around among the people, saying, "We are just a lot of fools. The foreign missionaries have sins just the same as we have; but they won't demean themselves by confessing them. Their reputations are too valuable." In this way, by appealing to their pride, he had managed to gather around him a considerable number of the leaders. At the last meeting this man was searched as by fire. As he stood there on the platform he seemed to be in a veritable agony. He said that the sight of five or six missionaries up on the platform at one time, waiting their turn to confess, had cut him to the quick. He had realized, then, that the devil had simply used him as his cat'spaw.

But perhaps the most remarkable confession of all was that of an evangelist who had charge of an important church in a neighbouring city. Asking his mother to stand up, the evangelist went over all the bad temper and unfilial conduct which he had displayed towards her, and begged her forgiveness. He then told of how shamefully he had treated his wife. "My wife," he said, "has not had any educational

advantages. She cannot even read. And sometimes, when I compare her with these beautiful, intelligent High School girls, I think to myself, would that she would die off, and give me a chance to marry one of these brilliant girls instead. I am going home now to confess my sin to my wife, and I vow to God that henceforth I will love her as I ought."

"The love of Christ," he went on, "has not constrained me in my ministry. When I give an address on Sunday, the people praise me and say that I have done well. Even the foreign missionaries sometimes compliment me on what they call my splendid preaching. But it is all on the surface. I have no love for souls in my heart. If they all perished, it would make no difference to me . . . For a long time I have been using the church collections for myself. The first Sunday after I return home I shall confess to my congregation and make full restitution . . . I have a younger brother who is an opium sot and a beggar. It is all due to my harshness. I never tried to win him with love. I don't know where he is, but I shan't rest till I find him."

The evangelist kept to his word. After the meetings were over he went back to his own church and confessed everything to his people; and I understand that not long afterwards a revival began. He then started out to look for his brother. He went from city to city, and found his brother, finally, in the last stages of destitution, on the streets of Yangchow. He so pleaded with him that the other, far gone though he was, yielded to Christ. The two of them went back home together, and the last I heard was that the younger brother had found steady employment in the mission hospital.

I came to Hsuechowfu in the fall of 1915 to conduct a series of meetings running over fifteen days. The missionaries had been having considerable difficulty with their High School. There were over 150 students in the school, two-thirds of whom were from non-Christian families. The missionary headmaster was finding it almost impossible to maintain any sort of discipline. In fact, not long before my arrival, matters had come to such a pass that he had decided to expel a dozen of the boys at the end of the year. He expressed the hope to me, though, that the Lord would so change the hearts of those boys that he would feel justified in reversing his decision.

To add to the trouble, it had been found necessary to dismiss one of the teachers. The teacher had been greatly chagrined over his loss of "face," and had told his friends that if the missionaries ever wanted to get him back to the church they would have to bring five hundred yoke of oxen to drag him there. I heard, too, that one of the High School students, on learning that I had been invited to come and conduct a series of revival meetings, said, "Well, if that man can melt bars of iron with his words, then perhaps he can hope to do something with us students."

On the third day of the meetings, one of the students came up on the platform, greatly broken up. He claimed that the non-Christian boys in the school were not being saved because of the poor example that he as a Christian, had been setting. He confessed to a number of things and, generally, gave one to understand that he was an exceedingly bad boy. After the meeting I made inquiries, and learned that he was the son of one of the deacons and the best boy in the school. That afternoon the boys were called together for an hour of study. The principal noticed that this boy's seat was empty. He went to his room and found him in tears, praying with the most intense earnestness for the salvation of his fellowstudents. At the study hour, the following morning, the deacon's son again failed to put in an appearance. The principal again went to his room and found him praying in the same agonizing way.

From day to day there were indications of the Spirit's power; but it was not until a full week had passed that I began to notice anything out of the ordinary. At the missionary prayermeeting on the eighth morning all present seemed to be deeply moved. No one could pray without breaking down. The one thought running through the prayers of the missionaries was that the church was in its present state because too little of the love of God had been manifested in their lives.

At the afternoon meeting, on the tenth day, there was a most unusual sense of the presence and power of God; but, as yet, no great brokenness. It was just that one felt, somehow, that the Spirit of God was in supreme control. It was well on to nine o'clock in the evening when the meeting finally broke up. That night many of the unconverted students wept all night over their sins, the Christian boys doing what they could to comfort them.

On the eleventh morning, I had just been speaking a few minutes when one of the boys cried out, "Please be patient a moment, and let me confess my sins." He made his confession, and I had just got nicely started again when another boy broke in and asked me to let him have a chance to confess his sins. I saw then that it was useless for me to go on with my address. I threw the meeting open, and many of the boys took advantage of the opportunity. Each one, on ending his confession, would ask me to pray for him. After I had responded to the first few I would say: "Now, will some one who has come through to victory pray for our young brother?" As a rule, it would be a fellowstudent who would respond.

At the afternoon meeting, which was just a repetition of the one in the morning, a strikinglooking gentleman, evidently under intense conviction, claimed that the church was in its miserable condition because of his wrong living. A missionary whispered excitedly to me that this was the exteacher. A day or so later, the teacher was put to a severe test. There was a certain backslidden medical practitioner in the city who had been making a most decided nuisance of himself during the meetings by always trying to get his prayer in before anyone else, whenever an opportunity presented itself. It was a wellknown fact that, in spite of his profession of Christianity, he was living a life of vice. He was a little late in arriving at one of the early morning prayermeetings, but, nothing daunted, he was pressing up to the front as usual, when the exteacher put out a restraining hand, saying, "Brother, sit down here. Don't disturb the meeting." His only reply was a terrific blow on the chest. The next moment the medical practitioner was stalking out of the building, foaming mad.

The surprising thing about it all was that the teacher made no attempt to retaliate. He was a great muscular fellow, while the other was an insignificant specimen, about half his size. The teacher, moreover, had always been noted for his ferocious temper. Speaking of the incident later to several of us, he said: "I know that the Holy Spirit must have filled me that night that I confessed my sin. Had He not done so, do you suppose that I would have received the blow from that wretch without moving a muscle or saying a word. If it had happened a few days before I would have leaped upon him and choked him to death." At the closing meeting the teacher gave a striking testimony, in which he told of what great things God had done for himself and his family. Standing around him were his father and mother, his wife and children and brothers, fourteen in all. "Here we are," he cried, "all saved! All praising God!"

At the missionary prayermeeting, on the twelfth morning, we heard from the principal of the Girls' School how that, as far as she knew, every girl in the school had been brought to Christ. She said that the last to yield was a big, ugly, undisciplined girl, who had broken every rule in the school. This girl, when she was finally convicted, found it almost impossible to contain herself. She first went and apologized to all the teachers, even getting down and kowtowing to them. Afterwards she went to all her schoolmates, whom

she had offended, and asked their forgiveness. During this scene, said the principal, the Confucian teacher, a fine old scholar who had resisted all approaches of the Gospel by saying that "he was a pupil of the great sage Confucius, and had no need of this Western Jesus," was deeply touched. Amazed at the unbelievable change that had come over that uglydispositioned girl, the tears began to roll down his cheeks, and he cried, "Jesus has conquered. He is God. I yield."

As the principal ended her story, someone said, "Oh! if only the same thing would happen over at the Boys' School!" The words had hardly been spoken when Mrs. G-, the wife of the principal of the Boys' School, burst into the room, evidently in great excitement. Addressing me, she said: "Do please go over to the High School and see what you can do there. For an hour the boys have been down on their faces, weeping. My husband and the other teachers are just as bad as any of them." Hurrying over to the school, I found it as Mrs. G- had said. I asked the principal how the movement had started and he said: "This morning I told all the Christian boys to go over to the prayermeeting in the church, and asked the boys who were unconverted to remain with me here. Some seventy odd remained. I talked to them for a little while, and then I said, 'Now, boys, just tell God all about it.' Presently the worst boy in the school, the leader in every prank and devilry, came under conviction and confessed his sins. This started the others, and it wasn't long before the whole seventy of them had given way completely."

For about half an hour I made no attempt to interfere, and then, judging that the boys were through confessing, I started up some choruses. In a little while we had the whole crowd back in their seats. Then I spoke to them for a few minutes from 2 Cor. v. 14. I told them about the love of Christ in His being made sin for them, and penalty due for their transgressions. Then I went on to tell of how He had risen from the dead, and that through faith in His finished work we might rise with Him. "Now, young men," I said, "if you will take your stand by Christ today, just stand up." With that every boy, but one, jumped to his feet.

Afterwards pipes were smashed, cigarettes and tobacco thrown away, and stolen knives and pencils and handkerchiefs restored to their owners. The boy who had not stood up at my invitation was exceedingly troubled all that day and on through the following night. If anyone would mention Jesus to him, he would fly into a rage. But about four o'clock in the morning he came into victory. He went immediately to his teacher to get permission to go back home and bring his people into the meetings. His father, he said, had died three months before in unbelief; and he had murdered his father's soul because he had been in a Christian school and had had a chance to tell his father of the way of salvation, but had not done so. His home was a good sixteen miles away, yet he was back again at the one o'clock meeting with a number of his friends and members of his family, eleven in all.

At the close of the meetings, eight of the High School boys asked for a special interview with me. I found that their one desire was to learn the secret of that power which would enable them to remain true to the stand which they had taken. The prayers of these boys and girls, so recently brought out from unbelief, were really remarkable for their keenness of perception. They prayed with apparently as clear a realization of the meaning of the Christian discipleship as those who had grown old in the faith. When I left, the teachers assured me that there was not a boy or girl in the schools who had not given convincing evidence of a saving faith in Jesus Christ.

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