

# GREAT RESOLUTIONS

Program Twenty Eight

## The Calling and Commission of Robert Morrison

### A Challenge

In the Gospels Christ is revealed as the absolute One who came to do the Father's will. He is the One spoken of in the parable in Matthew 13:44 who found a treasure hidden in the field and in His joy went and sold all that He had to buy it. He forsook all by going to the cross to buy the field and obtain the treasure. He came to redeem us, who were created by God, yet lost in our sins. He came as the Son of Man to seek and to save the lost in order to establish His kingdom on the earth (Luke 19:10).

After He had passed through death and resurrection, He spoke to His disciples: "All authority had been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and disciple all the nations . . ." (Matt. 28:18-19).

Throughout the centuries, consecrated followers of the Lamb have taken up this charge and have given themselves to Christ for the spread of the gospel.

This was particularly the case in the nineteenth century when the Spirit stirred in many of the Lord's faithful servants to go to those sitting in darkness and in the shadow of death. These ambassadors of Christ sacrificed their all for the Lord's sake and the sake of the gospel as they went forth into China, India, parts of Africa, as well as other places.

It is interesting to note that for centuries the spreading of the gospel had been mainly to the area around the Mediterranean Sea and into Europe. Then with the early colonists, the gospel came to North America. But doors to the gospel were still closed, for the most part, in Africa and most of Asia. It was during the nineteenth century that these long closed doors finally swung open.

### Some Key Factors

There were several key factors that made the nineteenth century such a vital time for the spreading of the gospel to virgin territories.

### Testimony of the Moravians

The Moravians began to evangelize all over the world starting in 1732. Their leader, Count Zinzendorf, spoke for many when he declared, "I am destined to proclaim the message, unmindful of personal consequences to myself." It was in this spirit of the "Pilgrim Count" that the Moravians went to Greenland, to the slaves of South Carolina and the West Indies, to the American Indians in Pennsylvania, to the Baltics, and as far as Egypt and South Africa. Their lives had a great impact on many, including the young Wesley brothers, who observed their pure consecration to the Lord and the gospel.



In addition, many who were born again or revived by the great revivals in the 1700s, in turn inspired the following generations. Men like Jonathan Edwards had a deep burden for missions and encouraged believers to pray for the lost. He also published *The Life and Diary of David Brainerd* regarding David Brainerd's short life of ministry among the American Indians. This book came to into the hands of William Carey and had a great influence in his decision to go to India with the gospel. The awakenings in England and America with John and Charles Wesley and George Whitefield also had a significant impact on many young men and women. Children of God from various countries were freshly stirred by the Spirit to pray, give, and go to the lost – "unto the uttermost part of the earth." Of those who went, their numbers were always somewhat small. They endured hardships and privations, ill health and poverty. Many died within the first years of their service abroad. But the impact of their going is still felt today – a savor of life unto life.

## Sovereign Arrangement

The Lord of all is the Head over all things to the church (Eph. 1:22) and He works all things according to the counsel of His will (Eph. 1:11). He is over all the political and commercial matters among men. Even the king's heart is in His hand and He turns it according to His will (Prov. 21:1). The Lord's sovereign hand over all things can be seen in the events leading up to the nineteenth century. Improvements in transportation and a marked increase of wealth in some of the western nations made it easier for foreigners to travel abroad. Even imperialism played a role in the furthering of the gospel, facilitating its spread.

One event notably under the hand of God was the defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588. Prior to the fall of that "Invincible Fleet" the strong maritime powers were under the sway of the Roman Catholic Church. Spain's defeat paved the way for the British Empire to expand and become dominant. Witness Lee notes the significance of this: "After the defeat of the Spanish Armada, Spain's power declined while that of Britain rose. This defeat restricted the further spread of Catholicism by Spain. During the days of Britain's preeminence, the Protestant influence reached to every continent. Most missionaries in the past were British. The money used for the spread of the gospel was largely in pounds sterling."

## Knocking on China's Door

China was an especial challenge. The great commission is to go into all the world and preach the gospel to all the creation (Mark 16:15). But this ancient and proud empire was vigorously opposed to even normal discourse with outsiders, and especially opposed to contact with those from the West. Although attempts had been made in previous centuries, no one had been able to bring the pure gospel into China prior to the 1800s. The Nestorians brought a distorted religion in the sixth and seventh centuries, and the Catholics attempted to bring in their teachings in the fourteenth centuries, but it would be hard to consider either of these as the true gospel.

However, China's doors were not sealed to

eyes of faith. The evangelical revivals of the eighteenth century that were happening both in England and America ignited a fresh desire for the conversion of peoples around the world, and the unreached millions in China and other places were being fervently prayed for. A new motto was proclaimed: "China for Christ, and in this generation." It was into this generation that Robert Morrison was born – on January 5, 1782, in Northumberland in England.

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## A Time of Preparation

Robert was one of eight children born to strict, godly parents. His father was of Scottish descent, and his mother was English. His education was cut short at the age of fourteen when he became an apprentice for his father, who was in the business of making boot-trees.

During his early teens Robert experienced that "evil companionships corrupt good morals" (1 Cor. 15:33). The restricting of his conscience, however, kept him from going too far into sin. He knew he was living apart from Christ and without hope, and in the world. By the Lord's mercy, at the age of sixteen, he came to know Christ.

He testified of this experience, "... I was much awakened to a sense of sin, though I cannot recollect any particular circumstances that led to it, unless it was that at that time I grew somewhat loose and profane, and more than once, being drawn aside by wicked company (even at that time of life), I became intoxicated. Reflecting upon my conduct became a source of much uneasiness to me, and I was brought to a serious concern about my soul. I felt the dread of eternal condemnation. The fear of death compassed me about, and I was led to cry nightly to God that He would pardon my sin, that He would grant me an interest in the Savior, and that He would renew me in the spirit of my mind. Sin became a burden. It was then that I experienced a change in life, and, I trust, a change of heart too. . . It pleased God to reveal His Son in me."

Robert experienced “the kindness of youth and the love of espousals” and immediately gave himself to read the Word of God and attend a weekly group prayer time at his father’s shop. He was a hungry seeker and often stayed up late to read the Bible and spiritual books. Even on the job he would have an open Bible or spiritual book before him as he busily worked. He assembled together with other believers on the Lord’s Day and became burdened for the salvation of his friends and unsaved family members. He also was beginning to know the Lord’s proving and testing in many areas of his life.

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Robert separated himself from his companions who did not help him follow the Lamb, and he formed new companionships in the Lord which helped him establish life habits of prayer, fellowship, and care for others.

He knew peace and joy in believing, and also knew something of his own vileness and unworthiness before God. Although his “first flash” of affection toward the Lord declined, he had an inner witness that his love and knowledge of the Savior were increasing.

### **Called and Commissioned**

At the age of nineteen, Robert began to consider Christian ministry. He testified, “It is my desire, if He pleases to spare me in the world, to serve the Gospel of Christ as He shall give me opportunity.” This became his prayer, as well as his daily motivation. He took steps to prepare himself for entrance into an academy of higher learning. Even though he worked from six to six, he spent evenings diligently studying Latin, Hebrew and Greek. At one point, however, he realized he was making learning and his books a god. He received the Lord’s speaking from Matthew 11 to come to Him to find rest. In addition to his studies, Robert visited the aged and the sick and instructed poor children.

Robert’s mother made him promise that he

would not go to the mission field while she was still alive. Only after she died did he apply to Hoxton Academy with an “earnest desire of being instrumental (under the good hand of God) in turning sinners from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God – in being instrumental in the building up of the church.” Although he excelled at the academy, he was still looking to the Lord for his next steps. He said, “. . . I would willingly resign myself to the direction of my heavenly Father. He knows best, and will choose and use what instruments He seeth meet. His will be done.”

When a child of God begins to follow the Lord in a definite manner, it is no surprise that Satan throws up some obstacles. Just when Robert was ready to go forward to receive some Bible training, his family pleaded with him to return home. They wanted him to take over and run his father’s business, since his father had become ill. Robert’s determination to follow the Lord’s calling remained steadfast. He responded to his family with full sympathy, but let them know of his undeterred plans. Later his family realized that Robert was following the Lord’s divine arrangement for him according to His will.

### **Initial Difficulties**

During his years at Hoxton College, Robert became clearer of his calling to the mission field. Some still tried to persuade him of the need at home, but he remained firm in his resolve to go abroad to take the gospel to the nations. Although his family was opposed, Robert declared, “How shall I stand before Jesus in the day of judgment, should I now forsake Him and His work when a difficulty arises?” He prayed in earnestness as he appeared before the London Missionary Society board. He was immediately accepted. He pondered as to where he would be sent, having some inclination toward China and Africa.

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He prayed, "That God would station him in that part of the missionary field where the difficulties were the greatest, and, to all human appearance, the most insurmountable." His prayers were answered, as he was assigned to go to China to "translate the Bible into that tongue." The missionary board realized and had written of "the importance and practicality of translating and publishing the Holy Scriptures in the Chinese language." Therefore, his first task was to begin to learn the language. He received help from a Chinese teacher in London and was exposed to a manuscript found in the British Museum of a portion of the New Testament from a hundred years earlier compiled by the Roman Catholics.

Although typically missionaries were sent forth in groups, no companions were found to go with Robert to help bear his responsibilities. He wrote to a friend, "I wish I could persuade you to accompany me. Take into account the 350 million souls in China who have not the means of knowing Jesus Christ as Savior. . ." Going to the mission field alone would be a foretaste of his days to come as a lonely laborer. He decided to make a final visit to his family and friends. This proved to be emotionally trying, but he stayed resolute of heart and proceeded to prepare to launch out. The mission board had a special time of prayer and consecration for Robert as he was about to leave. He was encouraged by the Lord to fear not since the Lord promised to be with him (Matt. 28:20). Before he left, he sent a farewell letter to his family members filled with tender feelings, especially regarding each one's salvation. He pleaded with them in love to "come to Jesus, come to Jesus." Since no missionaries were allowed to sail directly with the trading ships, he had to take an indirect route through America.

Thus, on January 31, 1807 the zealous Englishman, Robert Morrison, sailed for China. His going would initiate a period of gospel preaching in China that would lead countless precious souls to faith in the Lord Jesus. Robert Morrison was the first of many missionaries to follow. The first American missionaries, Elijah Bridgman and Peter Parker, came about twenty five years later. Some of these who went forth were well educated young men and women,

with bright prospects in the world. The Oberlin Band, the Cambridge Seven, and the Student Volunteer Movement comprised college students whose love for the Lord caused them to give up bright prospects in the world. Their slogan was, "The evangelization of the world in this generation." As Witness Lee testified, "These missionaries brought with them three treasures: the Lord's name, which is the Lord Himself, the gospel, and the Bible." Just as the Lord, who was rich, became poor in order that we might become rich (2 Cor. 8:9), so these missionaries left all to enrich those who were without God in the world.

Some observers did not believe a Christian work could be carried out in China. As soon as Robert Morrison arrived in China he was asked by one skeptic if he expected to have any spiritual impact on the Chinese. He answered, "No sir, but I expect God will!" And indeed He has.



Marty Robert and Bill Lawson

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