

GREAT RESOLUTIONS

Program Thirty

Sufferings and Joys of the Persevering Pioneer

Part Three of the Life of Robert Morrison

Trials of Employment

Like the apostles of the New Testament, those who served the Lord on the mission field suffered in many respects. God's enemy, Satan, hates that the word of God would be released and made known among peoples of all the nations. In his work of translating the Bible into Chinese, Morrison encountered obstacle after obstacle. He was not wrestling against blood and flesh, but with the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenlies. When Morrison finally published the Chinese translation of the New Testament in 1815, these evil spiritual forces stirred up men on earth to cooperate with them to stop any further light of the gospel from being diffused.



The East India Company, afraid of reprisals from the Chinese government, informed Morrison he could no longer continue in its employ. But the company found it difficult to actually carry out its decision, since Morrison was nearly indispensable to their operation in China, and because he had such a blameless testimony in his character and work. For example, when the ambassador from England was summoned to try to settle a heated dispute between the Chinese government and British traders, including the East India Company, Robert Morrison was chosen to translate for the ambassador.

Morrison's printers were also afraid of the Chinese government, and destroyed the

valuable printing blocks that were used to print the New Testaments. The printers did this to destroy evidence that they had been involved in printing Bibles. This was a serious loss and a great setback to Morrison in his tireless struggle to get the Word of God out among the Chinese people.

A Place for Training

Morrison and his coworker William Milne decided that the peaceful state of Malacca on the Malay Peninsula should be the new base of operation for their work. Close enough to China that they could still serve its people; it did not have the hostile environment that China did. In Malacca they planned to establish a printing center as well as a school to train native believers and European missionaries. Morrison's high expectations for this school were tempered by the initial lack of students.

But as the local people became more trusting, the number of students increased,



and the school began to prosper. The printing work also prospered and Chinese Bibles and tracts began to come off the presses, as well as Anglo-Chinese dictionaries and grammars.

Salvation of Sinners

Progress was also made in winning souls. Morrison was cheered when he received word from America that a young man from China, living in New York, was saved when he read through Morrison's Chinese New Testament. Then, two precious ones turned from idols to serve the living God and were baptized. This

was ten years after Morrison had left England. Other conversions followed. Morrison prayed over one newly-baptized family, "Oh, that this small Christian family may be the means of spreading the truth around them in this pagan land." The new believers, though few in number, were an encouragement to the laborers to press on in the tedious work of translating the rest of the Bible.

Completion of the Whole Bible

In November of 1819 Morrison, with Milne's help, completed the translation of the entire Bible. The translation was not perfect by any means, but Morrison hoped it would serve as a foundation for improved translations in the future. He told the London Missionary Society, "If Morrison and Milne's Bible shall in China at some subsequent period hold such a place in reference to a better translation as Wycliffe's or Tyndale's now holds in reference to our present English version, many will bless God for the attempt; and neither the Missionary Society nor the Bible Society will ever regret the funds they have, or shall yet expend, in aid of the object."

Morrison was not surprised to encounter criticism for his translation work. He knew that Wycliffe, whose bones were dug up and burnt after his death, and Tyndale, who was strangled and burnt, were both condemned for translating the Scriptures. "If such things occurred so recently," he commented, "more modern translators need not be surprised if their works are censured and condemned."

Robert Morrison yearned that a "happier era" would be ushered into China by the opening of the Scriptures. He said, "I trust that the gloomy darkness of pagan skepticism will be dispelled by the Dayspring from on high, and that the gilded idols of Buddha, and the numberless images which fill the land, will one day assuredly fall to the ground before the force of God's word, as the idol Dagon fell before the ark."

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Morrison prayed fervently for the empire of China, echoing the Apostle Paul's words: "that the word of the Lord may have free course and be glorified . . ." The publication of a six-volume Anglo-Chinese dictionary was completed just a few years after the Bible.

Loss of His Wife and His Co-worker

Besides persecutions, misunderstandings and criticisms, Morrison also bore sufferings of a more personal nature. His wife Mary continued to be of ill health, and eventually had to return to England with their two children. She remained there for five years; Morrison labored on despite his loneliness. In April of 1820 Mary was improved and she and the children rejoined Robert in China. The family enjoyed sweet times together at their home along the seaside. Mary was busy caring for their children and home, but she also spent much time reading the Word of God and church history.

This harmonious family life was soon cut short, however, as Mary again was taken ill. Although her husband, doctor and friends did all they could, she died at home with Robert and their children. This was a devastating blow to the Lord's servant, and his own health suffered greatly at this time. Eventually he had to make arrangements for his children to return to England to be cared for and raised to "fear the Lord in all wisdom." After they left for England, Morrison returned to his now desolate home to continue his work.

The next year Morrison experienced sorrow upon sorrow. He learned of the declining health of his beloved fellow laborer, William Milne. Milne was a zealous, indefatigable worker. But he, like Morrison, had suffered the loss of his wife, and he had also lost two of his six children. This soldier of Christ bore his grief as he cared for his remaining four children. It is recorded that his daily journal from that period of time was often blurred with tears. His faithful service of ten years came to end at his post in Malacca. In June of 1822 he fell asleep in the Lord. Robert Morrison adopted one of Milne's orphaned children.

Pressing On

After the loss of his wife and co-laborer, Morrison pressed on until December of 1823. At that time he decided to return to England with the intention of remaining there for a year for rest and fellowship. He brought a large collection of Chinese books back with him with the hope that they would be useful to future missionaries learning the Chinese language. Morrison had little opportunity to rest, however. He was soon invited to speak at many places. God's children had been praying for China and were eager to hear of the spiritual condition of its people. He traveled throughout England, Ireland, Scotland and France to preach and to share with fellow believers concerning his work. He was also presented before the King of England who graciously accepted a copy of the new translation of the Bible. Wherever he went, he urged Christians to renew their efforts to evangelize the countries in the East. His work was so consuming that he delayed his return to China for another year. During his stay in England he remarried. In 1826 he returned to China with Elizabeth, his new wife. He had planned to also bring his children back as well and hoped they could be trained to carry on his work in China. But the East India Company would not permit the children to return with him. This became another trial Morrison had to face.

Upon his return, Morrison continued his labor. His relationship with the East India Company became more difficult. Strains were also increasing daily between the Chinese government and the English traders. On the other hand, Morrison was encouraged to see that some of Milne's converts had faithfully stood and even carried on the work. More were added to the faith and were baptized and the small church among the Chinese began to grow. Others remained as hidden believers in the face of persecution. Morrison was also encouraged by the arrival of some American missionaries. He pressed on by writing a commentary of the Bible and by publishing more tracts and books. But in the midst of the progress being made, persecution continued by the Roman Catholics who rose up against him to stop his presses and publications. But the native believers continued to sow the good seed by distributing the already

printed publications.

In 1834 Robert Morrison's employment with the East India Company finally ended. Also in that year Elizabeth became ill and she and the younger children returned to England, leaving only their oldest son in China with Robert. That summer Robert became ill and on August 1, 1834, at the age of 52, China's pioneer missionary died in the arms of his son. He was buried in a private cemetery beside his first wife and son. The inscription on his tomb reads, "After a service of twenty-seven years cheerfully spent in extending the kingdom of the blessed



Redeemer. . . he sweetly slept in Jesus." Before he died, some had begun to realize the importance of Morrison's years of labor. He was granted an honorary degree by the University of Glasgow, and was made a Fellow of the Royal Society.

Gracious Perseverance

Webster defines perseverance as the continued effort to do or achieve something despite difficulties, failures, or opposition. What was it that enabled Morrison to persevere in the face of daunting obstacles and heavy trials? We would agree with his biographers that Robert Morrison's clear vision of the purpose for his living and service was what caused him to persevere and stay the course. His resolve to bring the gospel to China was surely one that was strengthened from above. He was sustained by the Lord in his daily intense labors, in anxieties and persecutions, in the disappointments regarding the indifference of the Chinese to the gospel and in personal trials of loneliness and the loss of his loved ones. He enjoyed times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord. He held to the promise in

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Isaiah 30:15 “in quietness and in confidence shall your strength be.” He rejoiced in hope; endured in tribulation; and persevered in prayer (Rom. 12:12). At one point Morrison admitted he was tired. “Yes, tired in the work, but not of it. I delight in the work.”

Morrison’s employment in a secular job allowed him to stay in China. Thus he was able to live for his higher calling of making known the gospel of Christ to the nation of China. He carried out his mission with singleness of heart to the Lord. He patiently labored to translate the Bible into Chinese and also produced an abundance of Christian tracts and literature. He established the Anglo-Chinese College at Malacca to advance the Lord’s interests. Although he was extremely restricted by the Chinese government in how much he could preach the gospel and teach the truth, he still saw a few converts come to Christ and continue without faltering in their faith. By the Lord’s grace he cut the way and laid a foundation for future generations of missionaries and other believers. With much prayer and persevering labor during the years of his service to the Lord, untold numbers of obstacles were overcome and the door to China began to crack open. With all praises to the Lord, we are thankful for the testimony of our brother Robert Morrison.

Marty Robert and Bill Lawson

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