

Articles and Sermons :: John Sung and the Asian Awakening

John Sung and the Asian Awakening - posted by sermonindex (), on: 2004/6/2 12:52

According to Edward Band, there were only a score of missionaries in China three decades after Robert Morrison first brought the gospel to the country, and the total numbers baptized did not exceed one hundred. In fact, in 1900, the Chinese Church was just coming of age. Although a few foreign missionaries such as Marie Monson, Anna Christiansen, and Jonathan Goforth had considerable impact, the Asian Awakening did not begin in earnest until 1931 under the ministry of a native son, Dr. John Sung.

The Spirit mightily fell on Sung, and thousands were brought into the kingdom through his ministry. William E. Schubert, a veteran missionary to China, estimates that from 1933-1936, Sung had something over 100,000 converts. If this estimate is correct, we can safely compute that between 200,000-300,000 souls were born again from 1928-1949 through Sung's relentless service. He traveled to literally hundreds of locations during his ministry, and a catalogue of the places he visited would range the length and breadth of China and Southeast Asia.

The numbers saved under Sung's ministry are all the more remarkable considering there were only about a million Protestant Christians in China prior to the Communist takeover in 1949. In addition, those converted under Sung's preaching were instrumental in bringing many more souls to Christ. Lim Puay Hian, an outstanding disciple of Sung, alone won thousands to the Lord in Fukien Province.

Sung was born in 1901 to a family of eleven children. Strong-headed like his father, a Methodist pastor, Sung had both a fiery temper and a soft heart. At the age of eight or nine, he experienced the blessings of a revival that occurred in his home church in Hinghwa in which 3,000 were gloriously saved. At the age of 13, he became his father's assistant, even standing in for him at the pulpit and earning the nickname "Little Pastor."

Sung's Education and Conversion in America

The roots of Sung's distinctive ministry can be traced to the period of his education in America. A brilliant scholar, his parents planned for him to attend the Naval College. Failing this, and further being turned away from entering the university in the national capital by the sudden death of a sister, a missionary friend helped him come to America to complete his education.

Though at first he intended to study for the ministry in fulfillment of his parents' wishes, he instead chose to take up science. At the university, Sung struggled against the dark powers of modernist unbelief. By his own testimony, he did not indulge in the four Chinese proverbial sins of womanizing, gambling, drinking and smoking, but rather in the deadlier sins of the spirit. Pride, hypocrisy, doubt, and unbelief nearly ravaged his soul.

Sung's own experience of the crushing burden of sin during this time became the basis for his vivid portrayal of sin in his future ministry. Like John the Baptist whose name he assumed from the night of his conversion, his message was marked by unrelenting rebuke of sin in both high and low places, particularly in the church.

Sung studied from 1920-1926, earning a Ph.D. in Chemistry, along with many academic awards. However, at the height of human glory, he was cast down with melancholy at the words of Jesus, "For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" (Mark 8:36). At this time, he was visited by a Methodist pastor who suggested he attend Union Theological Seminary in New York City.

At Union Seminary, Sung was bombarded with liberal theology. His favorite teacher was Harry Emerson Fosdick, later minister of New York's famed Riverside Church. His faith crumbled to the ground. In a sermon he preached in later years, he lamented the deadening effect of modernistic teaching, punning the word "seminary" with the word "cemetery." Concluding that if God was dead and Christ was not risen, there was no purpose in Christianity, he turned to Taoism, Buddhism, and to the Koran.

The more he searched for the truth in these false religions, the more confused and desperate he became. For forty days and nights, Sung endured an intense struggle between truth and error and between the Spirit of God and the spirit of Satan. On the fortieth night which was February 10, 1927, Sung reached the point where he no longer desired to live. Nevertheless, he persevered in prayer and in the confession of his sins.

As the clock struck midnight, he was suddenly overwhelmed by a vision of the crucified Christ standing before him. In a

compassionate voice, the Lord comforted him, “My son, your sins are forgiven! Your name is now changed to John.” When the vision receded, John felt a wonderful relief in the sudden rolling away of his sin-burden. Leaping to his feet with a shout of Hallelujah!, he sang loud praises to God. His songs rang through the corridors of his fourth floor dormitory. For a whole week, Sung preached the glad news of his newfound Savior ceaselessly. Gentle as a lamb to those who heard him patiently, he had the boldness of a lion against every power of darkness. His spiritual eyes opened, he went straight to his favorite teacher, Fosdick, and declared: “You are of the devil. You made me lose my faith!” For denouncing sin in high places, he was sent to a mental asylum where he was confined for 193 days. The mental hospital was God’s appointed seminary for Sung. Shut out from the world, he read his Bible through repeatedly. Henceforth, he would read no other book. Confined in the section of the hospital reserved for the most severe cases, Sung was bombarded by a tirade of jangling sounds throughout the day. Here the hothead of a scholar was properly tempered to become a patient servant of the Lord. Upon his release, he threw all his degrees and academic awards into the ocean on his voyage back to China in order to make sure he would not be attracted again by the glitters of this world.

An Eyewitness Account of Sung’s Ministry in Singapore

Perhaps my own experience of Sung’s ministry when I went to hear him in Singapore at the age of fifteen will help to describe this man of God further. My first impression was that he was a most unusual man. Attired in a white Chinese gown with a shock of uncombed hair flapping before his big forehead, his demeanor was at the same time earnest and serene. Owing to much speaking, his voice was hoarse but rich with sincerity and appeal.

Realizing that what the Chinese Church needed was repentance and new birth, he fearlessly lashed out at the sins of the people, naming them one by one. His remedy was none other than the precious blood of Christ and the renewal of the Holy Spirit. He declared our duty before a holy God to humble ourselves and to confess our sins. Many, including myself, wept bitterly for our sins.

The words of his theme song were, “In the cross, in the cross, be my glory ever. All my sins are washed away in the blood of Jesus.” By singing that chorus in repentance, we were acknowledging that we had been truly cleansed by the precious blood of Christ. We knew and felt sure that our sins were forgiven. When we were thus gloriously saved, a wave of praise and prayer went up spontaneously from our hearts and lips as in the days of the Acts of the Apostles.

After the sermon, many who had problems met with Sung. In these counseling sessions, feuding elders and deacons made up with each other. Sums of money that had been stolen were returned. Mr. Gan, a man with three wives, repented together with them. He made an agreement with his second and third wives to live apart while continuing to provide for their needs.

After a preaching tour in Malaysia and Indonesia, Sung returned to Singapore for a second campaign. He took his converts through a Bible study three times a day. His sermons in these sessions, though topical, were graduated. The result was a progression into Bible study which led the new converts into the deep truths of the Scriptures.

A thorough student of the Bible, Sung knew the Old Testament as well as the New. His sermon texts ranged through every book of the Bible. Believing in the soon coming of Christ, he would expound Daniel or Revelation in follow-up meetings after every revival campaign. These Bible study sessions, like his revival meetings, would last two hours each session, and were conducted three times a day.

Sung strongly emphasized the holiness of God by quoting the Ten Commandments and by denouncing specific sins that fit under the categories of each Commandment. Since the wages of sin is death, he spoke often on the themes of heaven and hell.

Sung was very sound in his doctrine of Christ. Making Christ’s crucifixion, resurrection, ascension, and return the center of his preaching, his sermons were orthodox and well balanced. In addition, Sung’s doctrine of the church was solid and fundamental. While he was not slow to rebuke modernist ecclesiastical leaders, he loved and worked well with God’s people.

The Nanchang Pentecost

The break-through of Sung’s ministry came in the city of Nanchang. During this campaign, Sung preached three times every day, each time with a fiery anointing. At the end of the first two weeks, God was moving mightily. Sung announced on Sunday morning that there would be a prayer meeting that night instead of the regular preaching service. That afternoon

oon, 193 students and teachers went to a village, Bean Sprout Lane, about two miles outside the city. They went two by two into the village homes to witness. The village people would come out of their houses carrying their idols. The stone idols they threw into the river, and the wooden ones they burned. The entire village gave up idolatry.

Communist Students Converted

One night during the services in Nangchang, the Holy Spirit fell on the congregation. Sung surprised us by suddenly asking everyone to go home to their rooms to pray quietly. He said, "Now I'll pronounce the benediction." However, as he prayed, the Holy Spirit fell a second time, and everybody began to pray in chorus again. Again he stopped us: "You didn't understand; I didn't say to pray here." I later asked him why he stopped us, and he told me, "I didn't want the missionaries to say, 'That crazy Sung made all the students crazy.'"

As he began to pronounce the benediction again, the Holy Spirit fell upon the whole congregation a third time, and Sung at last let us go on uninterrupted. Spontaneous prayer must have continued forty-five minutes to an hour. As Christians were coming under conviction and confessing their sins, seven or eight Communist students also began to come under conviction. They later confessed that they had been paid to come to the meetings in order to cause trouble.

These Communist students were in the center of rows scattered throughout the audience where they could make the most disturbance. They tried to get out, but the Christian students wouldn't let them out of the rows. The Christian students had been praying for them. All the agitators could do was to stand up, beat their breasts, and cry out, "Oh, our unspeakable sins." They all became earnest Christians.

The Power of Divine Anointing

Divine power in no small measure was poured upon Sung. His work was not one of adding to the Kingdom by tens, but rather of multiplying by hundreds into thousands and ten thousands. Out of the population of one million Protestants in China in 1949, several hundred thousand were born again and filled with the Spirit under his ministry.

His ministry was not so much evangelism as it was revivalism. His messages were directed at spiritually dead church members more than those outside the church, though a portion of his converts were from heathen backgrounds. When I think of Sung and then consider what I see and read of present-day evangelists, he towers like an Everest over foothills. Is this an overstatement by a lover of John Sung? If you are inclined to think so, take note of the appraisal of Sung by William E. Schubert, a veteran missionary to China, who said, "Dr. John Sung was probably the greatest preacher of the 20th century. I have heard almost all of the great preachers from 1910 until now, including R. A. Torrey, Billy Sunday, Henry Jowett, and Billy Graham. Yet John Sung surpassed them all in pulpit power, attested by amazing and enduring results." May God give us more such men.

Re: John Sung and the Asian Awakening - posted by sermonindex (), on: 2005/4/5 1:33

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What an amazing testimony of what God can do with a man wholly surrendered to Him! Leonard Ravenhill said of John Sung's autobiography that it was the most apostolic thing he read outside of the book of Acts.

Re: John Sung and the Asian Awakening - posted by hredii (), on: 2005/4/5 3:27

Wow this is a great bio! My heart cannot help but wonder if he knew Watchman Nee? If John Sung ever ministered with him?

So what happened to John Sung? When did he die? Was he ever put in prison under the communists? Are any of his messages still around, in Chinese or English?

I really enjoyed reading this bio; Thanks Greg for posting it. It sounded like the person knew him personally.

Last question: who wrote the bio?

Re: - posted by sermonindex (), on: 2005/4/5 12:25

Quote:
-----Wow this is a great bio! My heart cannot help but wonder if he knew Watchman Nee? If John Sung ever ministered with him?

Sorry that I cannot answer alot of your questions. I do know that John Sung ministered with Watchman Nee for a small duration but they were such strong personalities that they clashed abit. They had such different strong giftings that they had to part and do what God was calling them to do. John Sung I believe preached till he died .. literally burning out for the Lord. What a life.

Re: John Sung - posted by Manfred, on: 2005/4/7 12:37

Watchman Nee and John Sung met a few times, but never got on too well. One of the main point of disagreement, besides their very different personalities, was that Watchman Nee did not believe that the Lord's servants should be remunerated, but that they should rather wait on the Lord to supply their needs. On the contrary, John Sung thought that it was only legitimate that those who serve should be financially rewarded by the ones to whom they ministered.

There is a picture of Watchman Nee together with John Sung, (and Leland Wang, who was another one of China's "mighty man"), in Angus Kinnear's biography of Watchman Nee "Against the Tide".

Here are two biographies of John Sung:

- 1) Leslie T. Lyall: A Biography of John Sung,
China Inland Mission, 1954
- 2) Timothy Tow: John Sung My Teacher, Christian
Life Publishers, 1985

Manfred

The Diaries of John Sung as translated by Stephen Sheng, on: 2005/4/7 15:35

Dear Greg , as you might know, John Sung is one of those Godly men, I look up to, and try to model on. (him and Brainerd and the Azusa street intercessor, Frank Bartlemen)

this book, "The Diaries" I cannot recommend highly enough. And I must say that God has blessed me with another mentor in the form of Stephen Sheng, who translated the diaries. Dr. Sheng has helped me immensely with NO nonsense guidance and counseling.

go to amazon, and they have a lot of books about John Sung. The Lyall biography is ok...its a little dry. The "Diaries" are wonderful as they are Johns words.

How can we live without revival, dear brother?

Here's another John Sung bio from David Smithers, on: 2005/4/7 15:39

"The modern Church, much like ancient Israel, has never been very comfortable with God's prophetic people. In every corner of the Church today you can find those who are echoing the words of stubborn King Ahab - "Is that you, (Elijah) you TROUBLER of Israel?" (I Kings 18:17). Usually when something tastes unpleasant to us, we try to add something else to sweeten it up. Because contemporary Christendom is so uncomfortable with the prophetic voice of repentance, some are trying to redefine the role of a prophet as one who merely encourages the Church about future events. Prophets are not placed in our midst to sing us sweet lullabies, they are the alarm system for the House of God! Leonard Ravenhill described the role of a prophet this way, "Prophets are God's emergency men for crisis hours. They thrive on perplexity, overcome adversity, defeat calamity, bring the new wine of the Kingdom to burst withered wineskins of orthodoxy, and birth revival."

One of the most unique prophetic men of the Twentieth Century was the revivalist, John Sung. He operated as a true apostolic evangelist, with countless signs and wonders following his ministry. Unlike any other modern saint that I have ever studied, John Sung epitomizes that rare combination of New Testament purity and power. His life and ministry were po

werfully marked by a genuine prophetic anointing. He was the embodiment of a burning zeal, unquenchable passion and an unrelenting fearlessness. Some called him the "John Wesley of China," while others called him "the Ice-Breaker" or the "Apostle of Revival." Most everyone who has ever witnessed or studied his ministry, considers him to be one of the greatest revivalists of our century. Yet to our great shame and loss he has been pitifully forgotten and neglected by most of the Western Church. He is the forgotten prophet of the forgotten Chinese revival of 1927-1937.

John Sung was born on September 27, 1901 in Hinghwa of the Fukien province in southeast China. He was the son of a respected Methodist minister and was converted as a young boy at the age of nine. In 1920 John Sung at age nineteen left for America to study at Wesleyan University of Ohio. He later went on to study at Ohio State University and Union Theological Seminary. Within five years and two months from the day he entered college, he earned three academic degrees: a Bachelor of Science, a Master of Science and a Doctor of Philosophy, all while doing menial labor on a full time basis. However, these high honors did not come without taking a great toll on his spiritual life. After a few years in America, sitting under a steady diet of worldly philosophy and liberal theology, John Sung found himself backslidden and doubting everything that his father had taught him.

On February 10, 1927, around the same time when revival was starting to break out in China, John Sung recommitted his life to the Lord Jesus Christ. This was just the beginning of a much deeper work. After repenting of his sins he was suddenly filled with an inexpressible joy. He immediately began to preach to all his classmates and professors. This drastic change in John Sung's behavior made some believe that he had become mentally unbalanced. He soon found himself being committed to an insane asylum by the seminary authorities. He was allowed to take with him only his Bible and a fountain pen. He would later refer to that asylum as his true theological seminary. John Sung was incarcerated for 193 days, a little more than six months. During that time he read the Bible from beginning to end forty times. He devoted almost every waking hour to reading the Bible and prayer. Through those months of quiet solitude, the Holy Spirit was carefully laying the foundations for John Sung's revival ministry. He was being prepared to participate in one of the mightiest revivals of the twentieth century.

After finally being discharged, John boarded a ship on October 4, 1927 bound for Shanghai. "He had been seven and a half years in the United States. He was now a man of outstanding scholastic attainments, and doubtless any of the national universities of China would have welcomed his services. . . ." In spite of all the possible opportunities that his education could afford him, John Sung was determined to go home and preach to his countrymen. He realized that what China needed most was not more science teachers but preachers of the gospel. One day as the ship neared its destination, he gathered up all his diplomas, medals and fraternity keys and threw them overboard into the ocean. The only exception was his doctor's diploma, which he kept only for the benefit of his father. Like Paul, John Sung could say, "What things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ" (Phil. 3: 7). After arriving back in China, John Sung was soon married and then later joined the Bethel Bible School of Shanghai. It wasn't long before he became the school's field evangelist. He allied himself with Andrew Gih and a few other graduates from the school to form the "Bethel Evangelistic Band." God used this apostolic team mightily to spread the fires of revival all over China as they went forth preaching and singing the gospel. When John Sung was not behind the pulpit, he was reserved and even subdued. However, when preaching he was a man of fervency and intense emotions. He often would pace back and forth across the platform or sometimes leap over the Communion rail. At other times he would walk up and down the aisles to point his finger at someone in the audience and then run back to the front of the church and then stand on the Communion rail to finish his sermon.

He always emphasized repentance and the need for complete restitution where it was at all possible. He fearlessly denounced all sin and hypocrisy wherever he found it, especially among hardened ministers. Yet he also moved audiences with the message of Christ's tender and unfailing love, like few others could. Dr. Sung's meetings were always accompanied by a tremendous amount of conviction and brokenness over sin. It was not uncommon for hundreds of people to be seen with tears streaming down their faces and crying out for mercy. Convicted sinners frequently would rush forward to openly confess their sins before the whole congregation. "In the course of his preaching, Dr. Sung often received the gift of prophecy." On several occasions he pointed out the sins of some backslidden pastor with an incredible and fearful accuracy. Leslie T. Lyall writes, "Sometimes he would single out an individual, a pastor or office bearer in the church, and say, 'There is sin in your heart!' And he was always right."

When John Sung was not actively preaching or organizing a new evangelistic team, he usually could be found writing in his diary or adding to his ever growing prayer list. He carefully prayed over an extensive list of people's needs, which was accompanied by dozens of small photographs. John Sung was a faithful intercessor and always requested a small picture of those desiring prayer in order to help him intercede with a deeper burden. Everywhere he went, he urged the people to give themselves to prayer. "The fact that the Chinese Church is a praying Church today, can be attributed in part to the influence and example of this man who prayed." Nothing was allowed to hinder his time in prayer. John Sung made

It was his regular habit to be up every morning at 5 a.m. to pray for two or three hours. "Prayer for John Sung was like a battle. He prayed until the sweat poured down his face." At times he would literally collapse upon his bed and uncontrollably weep and sob under the burden of travailing prayer. John Sung believed that prayer was the most important work of the believer. He defined faith as watching God work while on your knees. Mr. Boon Mark said of John Sung, "He talked least, preached more and prayed most."

Because it was evident that John Sung was a man of great power in prayer, the sick and crippled increasingly came to him to receive prayer for their bodies. John Sung always made time to tenderly pray for their needs. "Dr. Sung usually had one meeting in every campaign at which he would give an address on healing and the necessity for sincere repentance before inviting the sick to come forward." Hundreds were instantly healed of every kind of ailment and disease. The blind received their sight; the lame walked, and the deaf and mute were all wonderfully healed as John Sung cried out to Jesus in prayer. Sometimes he would personally lay hands on and pray for as many as 500-600 people at one time. In spite of the fact that so many marvelous healings followed his ministry, he suffered for years from intestinal tuberculosis. This disease consistently plagued him with painful and infected bleeding ulcers in his colon. Nevertheless he still continued to fervently preach, sometimes in a kneeling position to lessen the terrible pain. Finally after years of suffering with this affliction, he died at only 43, on August 18, 1944.

John Sung was a true revival pioneer. He led multiplied thousands of Chinese and Southeast Asians into new realms of spiritual power and reality. The call of revival, is a call to be a pioneer! If we are serious about revival, we must be willing to go places where the modern Church has never been or has long forgotten. Therefore we must stop looking to contemporary Christianity for the steps to our revival dreams and visions. We cannot afford to let the Church's present weakness and failure steal our hope and faith for a future revival. God is not calling us to imitate the weak things around us. He is inviting us to believe Him for the power and purity of the Church as seen in the New Testament! Our seventy years are finished, and it's time for us to stop listening to Sanballat and Tobiah and get busy rebuilding the House of Prayer (Dan 9:1-3, Ezra 1:1-5).

Resources Used : John Sung by Leslie T. Lyall, The Diaries of John Sung translated by Stephen L. Sheng, The Revival in Indonesia by Kurt Koch, Go Home and Tell by Bertha Smith, The Theology of Revival in the Chinese Christian Church, 1900-1949 by Chun Kwan Lee, Into God's Family by Andrew Gih, Launch out into the Deep by Andrew Gih, Twice Born and Then? by Andrew Gih, The Shantung Revival by Mary K. Crawford, The Awakening: Revival in China 1927-1937 by Marie Monsen "

<http://www.watchword.org/smithers/ww51a.html>

Re: John Sung - posted by Manfred, on: 2005/4/10 7:43

Quote:

"So what happened to John Sung? When did he die? Was he ever put in prison under the communists? Are any of his messages still around, in Chinese or English?"

John Sung fell ill with tuberculosis and cancer. He was first operated on in 1940-41, where he spent six months in a famous Peking hospital. During this time he was often visited by Wang Ming-tao, with whom he enjoyed a rich fellowship.

He was operated again in 1943, and 1944. And eventually died in 1944 at the age of 42; before the Communists took over the country.

He is still being considered by many in the Far East and elsewhere as the greatest Chinese evangelist ever.

Manfred