

Lost & Found. A sermon preached on Mission Awareness Sunday, April 30, 2017, at St. Giles' Presbyterian Church, Prince George, BC by Rev. Herb Hilder.

Lessons: ZECHARIAH 4:6
I PETER 2:9-12
MATTHEW 28:16-20

When I was growing up in Welland, my home congregation often arranged for a family day at a Presbyterian church in Canada day camp about 45 miles south west of the city.

The Camp was called Camp Goforth

I knew nothing about the man after whom the camp had been named,

Only that his picture was on the wall of the Ladies parlour of St. Andrew's

And that my Dad had heard Jonathan Goforth speak at some sort of rally in the early 1930's.

My Dad remembered Dr. Goforth as both physically impressive and a superb speaker. Probably today we would add that Goforth had presence and charisma.

Over time Camp Goforth,
Like the person for whom it was named
disappeared from present thoughts.

The land was sold to developers and owing to the take over the Communists in China in 1949,

The overseas missions of our denomination shifting
 their emphasis on Africa,
 Home missions taking precedence over foreign
 fields
 Goforth's frankness about the importance of the
 work of the Holy Spirit,
 And the debates, research and opinions about
 missionaries through revisionist eyes regretfully led
 Goforth and a host of other heroes of the faith
 moving into historical periphery.

Though it is interesting, that Rosalind
 Goforth's biography of her husband, titled simply,
Goforth of China is still readily available in reprints
 after 81 years since its first publication date
 Jonathan Goforth's own monographs on prayer,
 revival and God's work in China are still readily
 available as well.

My own interest in Goforth's work dates back
 some 40 years and was an indirect result of a second
 year university course I took on the opening of
 China and Japan to the West

Goforth's missionary efforts figured
 prominently in the China material and I suddenly
 realized that Jonathan Goforth was no marginal
 character in the PCC history of missions but a
 central figure in Christian mission work in China.

He was in the late 19thc and early 20th
 regarded and revered not only by the PCC as one of
 this denomination's most respected missionaries

He and Hudson Taylor, founder of the China Inland Mission, now the Overseas Missionary Fellowship were pace-setter missionaries in China and very important in the Christianization of China.

The results of their work we are seeing now. Warlords, Incompetent government and Communism did not wipe out Christianity in China. These things merely drove Christianity underground where it continued and grew.

So my personal interest and appreciation of the work of Jonathan and Rosalind Goforth goes back a long time No matter how often I dip into the material written about Goforth, I am never bored!

I am ever amazed and thankful to God for Jonathan Goforth -missionary to China and Manchuria.

His is a story of high adventure,
Brushes with danger, death and martyrdom
His is a story of great sacrifice for the Kingdom
His is a story of remarkable evidence of God's work
in bringing 1000's to faith in the Living Christ.

His is a story from which I have received much personal encouragement in living out my own faith in the presence of the Risen Christ.

We are a long way in time and space from late
19th-early 20th c China

The country in which you and I live is not the
Canada of Jonathan Goforth

The Presbyterian Church in Canada whom Goforth
served and with whom he often battled owing to
his own sense of what was important versus what
the most vocal voices of the PCC thought was
important is not the Presbyterian Church today.

There is a story told of one of Jonathan
Goforth's last furloughs to Canada.

Like all returning missionaries, he was invited to
address the General Assembly of the PCC.

Goforth had both presence and respect of most in
the church.

He began his address civilly enough it is told.

But then his tone changed "...millions in China are
perishing for want of the Gospel and what is this
denomination expending great energy upon,

What has it continued to expend too much energy
upon – the minutiae of working toward Church
Union"

1925 – the formation of the United Church in
Canada – Congregationalists, Methodists and some
Presbyterians

The present PCC has its roots in those who did not
go into Union.

Church Union is a story for a another time and
place – but Goforth was almost prophetically

correct – much time was spent dealing with dots and tittles of Church Union at the expense of evangelism in China and other places!
 Classic misdirection – Church Union...

Question: *what lessons can we learn from Jonathan Goforth – a 19th – early 20thc missionary in China as each of us in God's strength seek to fulfill the Great Commission of Matthew 28?*

Oh? You did not know or forget or overlooked or did not get the memo that the Great Commission is for each and every one of us who say Jesus is Lord. I'm sorry – Consider yourself informed!!

Jonathan and Rosalind Goforth were *under no illusions that the place in which they would live out the Christian life, preach and teach about Jesus was a very different one from the one in which they grew up.*

Different language

Different culture,

Different values,

Different assumptions

Different habits, dress and food.

Early on, the Goforths realized they would have to adapt,

Without compromising the core values of the faith.

So, they adopted Chinese dress, and lived in simple quarters.

Touch point for us –

Each of us live in a very different culture and world than the one in which most of us grew up.

Sunday shopping,

Social media

Sports on Sunday,

Busyness – has conspired to make Sunday just one day of 7 in a week

The Presbyterian Church in Canada, the church and family culture in which I grew up is radically different from today.

Long gone are the days –if we open the doors – people will come.

Churches, communities of faith that either refuse to plan 1, 3, 5 years or think that to do so is too worldly – will die!

The rapidity of change has sometimes left me feeling I have a kindred spirit in the Psalmist as he laments in a time of displacement and great change for God's people

**By the rivers of Babylon—
there we sat down and there we wept
when we remembered Zion.**

² **On the willows^[a] there
we hung up our harps.**

³ **For there our captors
asked us for songs,
and our tormentors asked for mirth, saying,
“Sing us one of the songs of Zion!”**

⁴ How could we sing the LORD's song
in a foreign land? [Psalm 137:1-4]

I know though and the Goforth experience in China
reminds me again and again,

That like the Psalmist,

I cannot spend an indeterminate length of time
sitting by the waters of Babylon – weeping and
remembering.

For though to remember is good,

Nostalgia – remembering as a default position in
life – is the great enemy of hope!

The work of mission – sharing with others the Good
News of Jesus Christ – still has to be done.

In fact, I am going to say, the need is just as great as
or even more so than it was for Jonathan and
Rosalind Goforth.

They had to contend with animism, worship of the
ancestors and Confucianism.

We as God's people today face consumerism, "it's
all about me", and busyness.

Further the mission field is not just up the Yangtze
or on the African veld,

The mission field is just beyond those doors which
you entered this morning

We all have work before us

Jonathan Goforth's work also reminds us of a
single minded conviction that says --without the presence

of the Risen Christ operating in a person's life, people really are lost.

Goforth would not be put off such a conviction and stand.

He was unswerving in his conviction that people without Jesus were lost souls

Rosalind speaks about this when she describes not only Goforth's work in China,

But also his work while at Knox College in the Ward of Toronto

In his monograms Goforth is unapologetic – without Jesus, the Chinese are 'lost souls' just as the poor were in the Ward of Toronto.

Lost souls is not a term I ever heard at St. Andrew's Welland,

Nor at Knox College for that matter

It sounded too arrogant and self-righteous

Even today, I remain very cautious about publicly saying of others – a lost soul.

Experience – personal and vocational – has convinced me more than ever that those who do not know [head and heart] the person of Jesus Christ, Those who do not lived daily with the Lord as their guide,

Really are "lost" -no matter what creature comforts with which they are surrounded or worldly power and influence they have

To quote again St. Augustine – 3rd century bishop of Hippo

**You have made us for yourself O Lord, and our heart
is restless until it rests in you.**

Ladies and gentlemen, good folk,--the lost are still
very much with us

How can those of us who realize we have
been chosen by God i.e. – we have been found by
Him,

Ever say “I’ve done enough – it’s someone else’s
responsibility!!

Retirement is not a word found in the scriptures

Our work of introducing people to Jesus,

Lifting him up that all will be drawn to Him

Making Jesus winsome – will cease only with our
own deaths or “Christ’s return!!

Another important truth to highlight about
Goforth’s work – *is his complete dependence upon the
power of the Holy Spirit to accomplish great things for
God.*

Goforth’s mantra was the latter part of the
verse Carol read from Zechariah--...**by my Spirit.**
Goforth lived his whole life immersed and living
out the promises of God.

They were his guide in all times and situations

These promises were energized and made living

truths because Goforth was totally dependent upon
the Spirit of the Living God.

Goforth did not see the Spirit as some dated, historical being – sent by God to jumpstart the church at the time of Pentecost and then to recede into some sort of heavenly back room.

No, Goforth knew the work of God in | China or anywhere else needed the Spirit.

For though he, Rosalind and his helpers might be able to create a climate,

Situation for conversion, only the Spirit could and can convert!

From the writings, it is clear that Goforth had an experience of being baptized by the Holy Spirit. Not surprising in some respects for Revival swept parts of the world in the early years of the 20th century – including Korea in 1909.

Did Goforth's baptism of the Spirit happen at this time?

Perhaps...but there is a sense that Goforth experienced an infilling of the Holy Spirit – long before he arrived in China in 1888.

The specific date is secondary to the result though.

The baptism of the Holy Spirit energized Goforth's ministry.

His preaching and teaching became alive.

His personal energy level seemed limitless

His sensitivity to go where he believed God was leading him was consistently borne out in worldly results.

Lives were changed,
 People were converted
 Really exciting stuff.
 The Goforth material is full of seeming impossible
 things becoming possible!

I wonder...whether one of the reasons
 for discouragement, despair and malaise in many
 communities of faith today,
 The sense that we are just going through the
 motions – is that *we have ceased long ago to take
 seriously the promises of Jesus related to the ongoing
 work of the Holy Spirit [john 14-16]*
 That is, we have tried to replace full dependence
 upon the Holy Spirit with some sort of programme
 or self-study
 Or methodology or an individual.
 And we wonder why it is not working!

Look no programme, study or individual can
convert people to seeing the Lordship of Jesus
 Christ in their lives (head and heart)
 That is the Holy Spirit's preserve and gift to us.

Maybe we need to be spending more time and
 energy in intentional prayer – *holy Spirit fall afresh on
 me* rather than looking out for some magic formula
 for church spiritual growth and course on spiritual
 health!!!

*Goforth's life and work also reminds us that doing
 the work of mission,*

*Being faithful and obedient to Jesus Christ,
Lifting Him up so that in time all will be drawn to him
Is **not** cost free nor energy neutral.*

The world has never been a friend to the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

His followers have always suffered a degree of persecution for holding to their beliefs.

To read the Goforths' story is to be humbled, unnerved and amazed.

Yes, there were tremendous Kingdom advances under Goforth's leadership,

But it came at a cost

- ❖ Four of their seven children died from disease in China
- ❖ Goforth himself was nearly martyred during the Boxer Rebellion of 1900-01
- ❖ Their home with all its personal possessions was destroyed twice – once by fire, once by looting.
- ❖ They were geographically separated from family in friends
- ❖ They lived in very primitive conditions in a culture which saw them as 'foreign devils'

Yet the Goforths persevered!

And I for one am heartened and encouraged by that.

I do not welcome suffering in this life – I think only the pathologically unbalanced do!

But Goforth's life reminds me that *the faithful will not and do not live a charmed removed from suffering life.*

I believe that suffering is one of the greatest tests to our faithfulness and obedience to the promises and person of God in Jesus Christ.

All believers will experience suffering and upset sooner or later.

The promise God's people – Jonathan, Rosalind Goforth, those who came to a knowledge of Jesus as Lord and Saviour under the Goforth's work, You, me, all and any who call Jesus Lord and Saviour – live under and hold to is that Jesus continues to hold in his hands the tattered pieces of our lives.

We are not alone – never have been, never will be

¹⁸ And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."^[a] [Matt 28:18-20]

That is the call to mission given to each of us

ARE YOU READY?