

# Dr. John Sung—"Billy Graham Of China"

by Dr. Paul Lee Tan (1/10/00)

China was in turmoil. The Boxer Rebellion, civil wars, foreign aggressions, Anti-Christian movements, liberal theology, the Second World War...one event after another erupted over that vast land. Just when China needed a nationwide spiritual revival, God blessed China with a man who was utterly fearless and dedicated in the manner of those ancient prophets: Dr. John Sung.

Dr. Sung (1901-44) came from a family with 11 children. His father was a poor, rural pastor of the Methodist Episcopal church in Fukien province (opposite Taiwan). With the encouragement and support of friends, John Sung went to the United States, enrolling at Ohio Wesleyan University in 1919. He graduated with top honors. He continued at Ohio State University for his Master's and Doctor's degrees in chemistry--a unique accomplishment for a Chinese of that time.

Confronted with the claims of the Gospel ministry, he was encouraged to go to Union Theological Seminary. Its doctrine and teaching distressed him. But as he studied the Bible through the night, he experienced a transformation of soul that caused him to weep and shout for joy.

The seminary thought he had gone crazy and threw him into the insane asylum. For some 6 months, he was confined there...but he read the Bible over 40 times! Upon the intercession of an American friend and the Chinese Embassy, he was released and headed back to China.

When his ship entered the China Sea, John Sung made a crucial decision. Taking his doctor's degree, academic gold key, and other certificates of scientific attainments, he dumped them all into the sea! From now on, he was to follow Jesus Christ completely...no turning back!

John Sung preached extensively all over China. He early decided NOT to preach the social gospel, which was in vogue at that time. He confined his messages to the subjects of the Cross, salvation, filling of the Holy Spirit, the power of Jesus' blood, etc. His best preaching was on "Sin," where hundreds would cry out for salvation, repent, and changed their old lives. He dug deep into the Scriptures and had a devotional approach to Bible interpretation.

Dr. John Sung was part of an evangelistic band which went all over China. Half a million people heard the Gospel. All over the China coast, north and south of the Yangtze River, in faraway Northeast China, and overseas into Southeast Asia, as far as Indonesia. Today, thousands of Chinese all over Asia still speak lovingly of his ministry and effects on their lives.

John Sung was the greatest evangelist China ever had before or after. What was the secret of his success? Writer Bobby Sng of Singapore cited five reasons:

(1) "He had a Bible-Centered Ministry". He spoke from the Bible. His spiritual and pictorial presentation brought life to his messages. As one church leader stated, "One reason why Chinese churches are conservative theologically is that we have learned to take the Bible seriously"

(2) "He Took SIN Seriously". At each meeting, he would mention specific sins like opium-smoking, concubinage, adultery, gambling, cheating and a multitude of other...and invite the audience to repent by raising their hands. Many would be reduced to tears. It was said that the income tax department always knew when John Sung was in town...

(3) "He Emphasized Witnessing". The Gospel Bands were his outstanding creation. After prayer and some preparation, he would immediately organize his converts into bands of 205 persons, assigning them districts to witness, and encourage them to go out weekly.

(4) "He was Utterly Fearless". He never hesitated to speak out against pastors, church leaders, and missionaries if he detected inconsistencies in them. Sometimes, he did this during his meetings. Many would bow their heads in tears and shame. He did alienate people, but his over-riding concern was to please God not man.

(5) "He was A Man of Prayer". He would pray aloud, intimately with God, like someone was in the room with him. He knew God like he knew a close friend.

Dr. Timothy Tow of Singapore tells of his having several big suitcases of about 10,000 names--a people who had written him on a particular need, desiring his prayer, and attaching a photograph.

John Sung died at age 43, dying from the effects of pouring out his life unceasingly in strenuous preaching and Christian service.