

MANCHURIAN MEDITATIONS—1934

“Lo, these shall come from far; and lo,
these from the north and from the west;
these from the land of Sinim.” Isaiah 49:12.

方北從些這 來方遠從些這 哪看
來國秦徒些這 來方西從

節二十章九十四書亞賽以



A Chinese Inn at Miangshui, Manchuria.

THE COVENANTER CHURCH
MANCHURIA

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To our Friends in the Home Land :

Another year has passed during which we have enjoyed the unchanging goodness and mercy of God in this distant land of Manchuria. We wish to thank all who have contributed toward our support and who have remembered us in prayer during the past year, as well as the many friends and societies which sent us Christmas greetings. As it is impossible to send each of you a personal letter, please accept this printed one instead. Perhaps it will give an idea of our work and the problems faced.

Preaching Christ Among the Chinese

The old, old story of Jesus Christ and Him crucified is our only message to the Chinese people. To proclaim this message is not as simple as it might seem, for the Chinese mind is brimful of misconceptions about Christianity, and prejudices and fixed ideas die hard, so that the message has to be repeated over and over again in the simplest of language before the truth finally 'registers' that man is hopelessly lost in sin and can be saved only by the free grace of God in the Lord Jesus Christ. Salvation by character and conduct is an idea deeply rooted in Chinese thought, only the Holy Spirit can uproot this poisonous error from their minds. We must repeat over and over that Christianity is not a matter of cultivating "virtue" and acquiring merit by good works, but of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior from sin and death.

What the Non-Christian Chinese Think about Sin

The truth that "All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" is entirely foreign to Chinese thinking and sinks into Chinese hearts very slowly. The bandit, the murderer and the thief are considered sinners, but *ordinary*, average people are regarded as being quite righteous or as having only a few minor faults. What makes sin so exceeding sinful, namely that it is an offence against a holy, righteous God, they know not. One might say that the non-Christian Chinese know nothing about *sin* but only about *sins*, for they think of sin in terms of outward actions, rather than of a state of the heart alienated from God. The greatest sin of all, unbelief in the living God and His Son Jesus Christ, they do not think of as sin at all.

Many have heard the Gospel for years without believing. Recently an educated Chinese in Tsitsihar said that he was a graduate of a Christian school and had known Christianity for 23 years but had not yet accepted Christ. Such people usually praise Christianity as a good thing, but lack of personal conviction of sin leaves them cold toward it.



A Group of Chinese Girls at a Children's Meeting, Mingshui.

A fellow-missionary recently said: "When you go to a new place to work, preach again and again on *sin*; paint it as black as can be, and never be afraid you will paint it blacker than it is practised." This advice we believe to be sound. One reason why Christianity does not make rapid progress in China is that the Chinese have no sense of sin. Therefore the law of God must be proclaimed as the divinely appointed means of bringing people to a consciousness of their own sin. (Rom. 3:20).

Another common idea is that God's law is binding on Christians only, so that it is not a sin for a non-Christian to break the Ten Commandments. This is unbelief in the existence of God and the authority of his laws. Some hold that it is all right for a Christian to commit sins until he is baptized and becomes a church member, but such of course are not real, born-again Christians.

What Chinese Christians Think about Sin

It is not surprising that people recently converted from heathenism should sometimes have free and easy ideas about sin and righteousness. Only the renewing work of the Holy Spirit can give them high standards. Compromise in the face of difficulties is part of the very life-blood of the Chinese people. The idea that because a thing is wrong it must be avoided at all costs, no matter what the consequences, is totally foreign to their thinking. This pliable, compromising attitude is constantly seen in their political life, and no wonder it appears in the religious life even of Chinese

Christians. For these reasons, the standards of Manchurian Christians are low in such matters as family worship, church attendance, sabbath observance, and separation from such sins as gambling, lotteries and the use of cigarettes. Some distinguish between "sins wilfully committed" and "sins which one is compelled by circumstances to commit", regarding only the former as blameworthy.

Some young students connected with our Mission were required by their school authorities to attend an athletic meet, and another time to take examinations, on the Lord's Day. They said they could not help committing these sins; somehow they could not see that it is better to obey God rather than man. Situations such as these recur constantly, and each time our hearts are saddened by seeing our Christian friends take the easy way of compromise, thinking that because to do right would have been difficult, therefore it was all right to do wrong. A young Christian who works in the Tsitsihar Post Office married a heathen girl and had the wedding on the Lord's Day because the girl's parents wanted it on that day. A leading Christian of Tsitsihar, who has been a Christian for over 30 years, married his unconverted son to a heathen girl, and because the girl's parents were opposed to Christianity, had a civil wedding without a word of prayer or a verse of Scripture being read. He invited all his missionary friends to the wedding, quite unconscious that his unsanctified conduct had scandalized them. This man is an officer in his church and attends a daily prayer meeting there at 6 A. M., but still, after being earnestly reasoned with, keeps his store open for business on the Sabbath Day; he admits that Christians should keep the Sabbath but says merchants are an exception because to keep the commandment would mean a financial loss.

A young Christian of our own Church called on a Saturday and said that he was compelled to break the commandments and could not attend church the next day as a friend had asked him to be best man at a heathen wedding and his parents would be displeased if he did not comply, and he did not wish to antagonize them against Christianity by going against their wishes. Then he added, "If the Pastor only understood Chinese customs, he would know why we Chinese cannot always keep the commandments." Alas, we understand Chinese customs only too well, and long for our Chinese friends to learn that Christianity has the

power to break down principalities, powers and the world-rulers of this darkness, *but only when it refuses to compromise with them.*

Another man had been a nominal Christian for years, but had backslidden terribly, and came under conviction of sin on reading a book from our Mission's lending library. He was deeply concerned over his soul, confessed many sins, including drunkenness, prayed for forgiveness, listened to the Way of Salvation, and seemed to have a new life in Christ, but when it came to the test, refused to close his newly opened business on the Sabbath Day, saying, "God must bear with me a little while first; I must lay up a little money, and have some business; after that I can learn little by little to keep the commandments." Later this man started a kind of lottery in his store. He is now a member in good standing in the Church of Christ in China, where no embarrassing questions about Sabbath observance or gambling are asked of prospective members. Many will confess sins and even weep over their sins who are not willing to *forsake* them; that God wants obedience rather than sacrifice is a hard lesson to learn.

Our Christian Group in Tsitsihar City

The Sabbath service is now attended by some 30 persons, of whom 4 are baptized Christians, and most of the rest are registered believers. A weekly prayer meeting has been started, and is usually led by one of the Chinese Christians. Two meetings weekly for children are held at our chapel, in addition to the children's Sabbath School held by Misses Huston and McCracken at their residence two blocks away. Many of the children who attend these meetings are undoubtedly believers in their hearts and will later become church members. Many have a good knowledge of the Gospel and can repeat many Scripture texts, and sing a number of Chinese psalms quite well.



Left to right; Miss McCracken
Miss Huston, Mrs. Vos, J. G. Vos,
Catherine, Dr. Donald G. Barnhouse,
Tsitsihar, 1931.

A Family of Six Won Through the Children

Four children whose family name is Wu have attended our children's meetings for over a year. They are two girls of 13 and 4 and two boys of 10 and 7 years old, all very bright children and very attentive in the meetings. Last spring their father hurt his hand with an axe and called for the Pastor to come and bandage it, which gave us our first entrance into their home. The father had been unemployed for a long time and the family was in straightened circumstances. Later they moved to another part of the city but the children continued coming to meetings.

Before Christmas, Mr. Wu called and asked for a loan to get some of his clothing out of a pawnshop. Chinese pawnshops lend money at exorbitant rates of interest and many people get deeply into debt in this way. We have been "stung" so many times that we never lend money to Chinese, no matter what the circumstances, but if they are in serious need we give them something, so we told Mr. Wu we could not lend him money, but that the Christians were planning to make a donation of food, clothing and money for the needy at Christmas time, and his family could have a part of this.

We gave the family four Chinese dollars (about \$1.25 U. S.) to buy food and some straw for fuel, and later took them a good sack of provisions given by the Christians. We also held worship in their home and taught them to do it themselves daily. The children can find their places in the Bible and sing better than their parents as they have attended meetings a long time. The whole family registered as Christians and have been attending services. Mrs. Wu cannot read or write but is intelligent and takes good care of her four children. The children all have clean faces and hands which is exceptional for Chinese children of their social class, especially in winter time. While it is still too early to be sure that Mr. and Mrs. Wu are real believers, we believe the four children undoubtedly are, and are praying that the parents will become real born-again Christians and not mere "rice-Christians" who pretend to be Christians to get a few dollars out of the missionaries. Will you pray for this family during this year? Perhaps next year we can report the baptism of this entire household. (Acts 16:31).

Country Evangelistic Trips

Country towns in Manchuria, away from the railway lines, are still quite primitive. They can be reached by motor buses in the winter when the ground is frozen solid, though the buses are ancient and battered machines, very cold and uncomfortable. Sometimes they break down en route and then there is sure to be a long wait in the cold. Broken springs are sometimes repaired by driving wooden wedges in

where a leaf used to be. A bus which could seat 15 people in something like comfort is packed with 20 or more people, plus large amounts of baggage, so that the passengers resemble sardines in a tin and it is quite impossible to move one's arms or legs more than an inch or two. When it is below zero outside and the



Chih Ko-chen and J. G. Vos starting a Country Trip on a Chinese Cart.

bus is a drafty affair, unheated, the discomfort of a 6 or 8 hours' ride can be imagined. The roads are very rough and sometimes the route lies across fields or open country where there is no road, and the bus bumps along and sways from side to side as the driver tries to gain time by driving too fast for such a rough road. The smell of scorching oil from the engine is enough to make half the passengers sick, so everyone is glad when the trip is over and it is possible to stretch and warm up in a warm, if smoky, Chinese inn

When the ground is not frozen, the means of transportation is a two-wheeled horse-drawn cart. These are of various sizes and drawn by from two to five horses, are very bumpy and never go faster than five miles an hour. An all day ride, from dawn to dark, on one of these vehicles, sometimes in wind and rain, must be experienced to be appreciated, therefore no further description will be attempted here.

The one redeeming feature of Chinese inns is the fact that they are warm. They are made of mud, with straw roof, clay floor and

paper windows. There are no beds, as all sleep on a heated mud platform or "k'ang" which is covered with straw mats. Each inn has a long k'ang on each side, with an aisle between; 20 or 30 people sleep on each k'ang, each person having a space of about 2½ by 6 feet. This costs 10 Chinese cents per person per night (about 3 cents U. S.). In larger towns individual "rooms" can be obtained, shut off from the general room by a paper partition which reaches part way to the ceiling. This room accommodates two persons and costs the equivalent of 15 cents U. S. a night. We usually stay in such rooms when available, though the Chinese consider it an extravagance and a proof that the foreigners have lots of money!

The k'angs are always infested with roaches and often with bedbugs. The entire inn is sealed up tight with no ventilation except when someone swings the door open to go in or out. The air is dense with stove smoke, tobacco smoke and sometimes opium smoke. Spitting on the dirt floor goes on at all hours; sometimes persons obviously in an advanced stage of tuberculosis spit on the floor for days. In small country inns the sanitary facilities are the most primitive imaginable and some inns actually do not have a trace of a toilet of any kind, indoors or outdoors. It is hard to believe that people can live in such a filthy way when a little trouble would make it unnecessary. One Chinese gentleman, after seeing a foreign residence, said, "We Chinese like to be clean too, but it is too much trouble!"

During the autumn of 1934 I made two country trips of two weeks each, while Mrs. Vos and Catherine remained in Tsitsihar. During these trips many thousands of tracts were given out, Scriptures and Christian Literature sold, and many sermons and evangelistic talks delivered, as well as private conversations held. In one town, Mingshui or "Clear-water", meetings for children were held daily for two weeks, the attendance growing until 150 attended a single



An Inquirer's Class of Christian Boys and Girls, Mingshui, Each holds a Scripture Portion.

meeting. During two weeks of meetings 27 persons registered as believers. How many are true Christians, only time can reveal. The work in such country towns is more promising than in large centres like Tsitsihar, where theatres and motion pictures and other distracting influences are always at work.

Literary Work Done During 1934

Chinese Christians often say that all denominations are alike. This idea is true to some extent, but the Covenanter Church is different. While we cannot expect Chinese Christians, recently converted from heathenism, to understand all the doctrinal differences between different denominations, we do expect them to know the practical differences and the standards of church membership and Christian life which the Covenanter Church professes. For this reason we are preparing a series of Chinese leaflets explaining the principles of the Covenanter Church, which we believe to be those of the Word of God.

The first great difference between the Coveranter Church and other denominations in Manchuria is Sabbath observance. Many missionaries and Chinese Christians hold that the Sabbath has been abrogated, and that observance of the Lord's Day, beyond Church attendance, is optional. Others hold in theory that the Sabbath should be kept, but fail to keep it in practice. Perhaps the majority of Chinese Christians in North Manchuria work on the Lord's Day as on other days, and practically none consider it wrong to do shopping or other business on the Lord's Day. Nearly all the missionaries in Manchuria consider it all right to make long railway journeys on the Lord's Day and do so regularly. For these reasons we have published a Chinese tract of 5,000 characters entitled "The Christian Sabbath", which aims to set forth the Bible teaching about the Lord's Day and to controvert the errors of the Seventh Day Adventists and those who say the Sabbath has been abrogated; it appeals to Christians to keep the Lord's Day holy at any cost.

A second tract has been published, entitled "The Christian's Preparation for Baptism". This sets forth Biblical standards of the Christian life, tells how a Christian can become a church member, and urges Christians to separate from all kinds of sin as

the condition of fellowship with God and good standing in the Church. Three particular sins, which are special occasions of stumbling to Chinese Christians, are condemned in this tract, namely, compromise with idolatry, failure to keep the Sabbath, and intermarriage with non-Christians.

A third item of literary work is a translation into Chinese, done jointly with Mrs. Li of Tak Hing in South China, who is now helping in Manchuria, of the "Brief History of the Reformed Presbyterian Church" published by Synod in 1929. This will soon

be placed in the hands of the printer, and should be a help to Chinese Covenanters to understand their historical background and realize why and how the Covenanter Church is different from other denominations.

Friends at home who are not members of the Covenanter Church, and would like to help



Georgia Catherine Vos,
Tsitsihar, 1931.

support our work, can send contributions to Mr. Joseph M. Steele, Market National Bank Bldg., Philadelphia, Pa., marked "Discretion of Mr. and Mrs. J. G. Vos, Manchuria". Friends who are members of the Covenanter Church should make their contribution to Synod's Budget through their own congregational treasurer.

Our little girl, Georgia Catherine, is now 2½ years old and can speak both Chinese and English. We are thankful that she is perfectly well and strong, even in this far northern climate.

Please continue in prayer for this work and for us during 1935. With our kindest regards and Christian greetings, we are,

Very sincerely yours,

JOHANNES G. VOS,
MARIAN M. VOS.

24 Li Ho Hutung,
Tsitsihar, Manchuria.
January 20, 1935.