

A Million a Month, Dying without God: Hudson Taylor's Vision for the Unreached

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The Congregationalist pastor had a very important book for the young Hudson Taylor. It was a copy of Medhurst's book on China. The mission-minded Taylor asked a favor of the pastor by borrowing the book. When the pastor inquired as to why he wanted this book, Taylor responded, "Because I plan to spend my life in missionary service in that land". "Well, how to you propose to go there", inquired the pastor. The visionary Taylor said, "I do not know at all, but it seems that I will do as the Twelve and Seventy had done in Judea – go without purse or script, relying on Him who had called me to supply all my need". The pastor kindly placed his hand upon the future missionary's shoulder and said, "Ah, my boy, as you grow older you will get wiser than that. Such an idea would do very well in the days when Christ Himself was on earth, but not now".

Regarding this experience, Taylor wrote (somewhat sarcastically):

I have grown older since then, but not wiser. I am more ever convinced that if we were to take the direction of our Master and the assurance He gave to His first disciples more fully as our guide, we should find them to be just as suited to our times as to those in which they were originally given.¹

Last year in preparation for our Global Outreach conference I preached a biographical message on the life of Amy Carmichael. Over the years, I've done this prior to a missions conference because it does two things: 1) It sets our sights on the critical importance of missions ("Missions is not optional"), and 2) it makes missions work incarnational, attaching the Great Commission to real people.

This Sunday I would like to focus our minds on the subject of missions by looking at the life of J. Hudson Taylor and discovering what lessons we can glean from his life and ministry.

An Uncommon Missionary

Hudson Taylor (1832-1905) was a pioneer missionary to China for 51 years, and he was the founder of China Inland Mission which is now called OMF (Overseas Missionary Fellowship). He founded CIM in 1865 and 49 years later it was the largest mission organization in the world. Taylor possessed a rare combination of faith, charisma, organization, and vision. And his impact on foreign missions was historic and stunning. Ruth Tucker in her biographical history of Christian missions says,

¹ J. Hudson Taylor, Hudson Taylor, (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Bethany House), 16. This is a reprint of the original work entitled *A Retrospect or To China with Love* published by China Inland Mission.

“No other missionary in the nineteen centuries since the apostle Paul has had a wider vision and carried out a more systematized plan of evangelizing a broad geographical area than Hudson Taylor. His sights were set on reaching the whole of China, all four hundred million people...”²

Hudson Taylor had a God-birthed vision for the unreached people in China. People were moved, not by his eloquence of speech or his impressive knowledge, but by his passion for lost souls in China. His urgent appeal was “A million a month, dying without God.”³

This was the heart and life of J. Hudson Taylor, the great missionary to China. He was not afraid to dream of new fields for the glory of God and take risky measures to see God move.

Lesson #1: God loves to use what the world considers foolish

Hudson Taylor’s life was characterized by a stunning Godward faith and a vision for unreached people. Many times in his life he would be marked as foolish for his faith and vision. Yet Taylor’s life had great impact. His life reminds me of what Paul said in 1 Corinthians 1:26-29:

26 For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. 27 But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; 28 God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, 29 so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.

His dreams were large; his burden was overwhelming; and his methods were sometimes controversial. But God’s hand was on him.

It is amazing to me how often God uses people and circumstances that seem weak or foolish. Do you know why he does that? “So that no human being might boast in the presence of God” (1 Cor 1:29).

Mission’s Zeal Fueled by a Godward Life

Hudson Taylor’s vision was fueled by his passionate God-centeredness. And it was from this God-centeredness that came an almost supernatural dependence and faith. In his autobiography, he summarized his philosophy of ministry:

“It is always helpful to us to fix our attention on the Godward aspect of Christian work; to realize that the work of God does not mean so much man’s work for God as God’s own work through man. In our privileged position of fellow workers with Him, while fully recognizing all the benefits and blessings to be bestowed on a sin-stricken world through the proclamation of the gospel... we

² Ruth Tucker. From Jerusalem to Irian Jaya – A Biographical History of Christian Missions, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), 173

³ Tucker, 180

should never lose sight of the higher aspect of our work – that of obedience to God, of bringing glory to His name, of gladdening the heart of our God and Father by living and serving as His beloved children.”⁴

Hudson Taylor came to Christ at age 17 under the influence of a godly father and mother who had prayed that God would give them a missions minded son. He came to Christ after reading a tract that he had found in his father’s library. After coming to Christ he later learned that both his mother and his sister had earnestly prayed over a number of weeks for genuine conversion in his life.

Taylor learned from his parents and the praying of his family that “the promises {of the Bible} were very real, and that prayer was a sober matter-of-fact transacting business with God.”⁵

After his conversion, Taylor felt a very clear and strong call to China. He began to prepare himself for missionary service through three different means:

- **Enduring hardship** - Taylor changed his living arrangements to only the most Spartan conditions, removing most of the creature comforts.
- **Economizing** - His diet was very restrictive, reducing his needs to a pound of apples a day and a loaf of bread. He wrote, “The less I spent on myself and the more I gave away, the fuller of happiness and blessing did my world become.”⁶
- **Prayerful dependence** - He said, “When I get out to China I shall have no claim on anyone for anything; my only claim will be on God. How important therefore to learn before leaving England to move man, through God by prayer alone”.⁷

Taylor had discovered that medical training was the best means of entry into the lives of the Chinese people, and so he began training in medicine. However, he was not only committed to his medical training, which he would use for his future ministry in China. He was also committed to learning the valuable spiritual lessons that he needed.

One story illustrates this well. Taylor’s employer had asked him to remind him when his wages needed to be paid. Taylor wanted to learn how to trust in God, so he prayed that God would move the heart of his boss. The time came for his rent to be due. He struggled with not paying his rent since his decision would affect someone else – his land lady. At the close of the office, his employer said, “When was I supposed to pay you?” Taylor informed him that it was some time ago. Taylor was filled with joy that God had moved his employer through prayer. But then his employer said, “But now it is too late, the banks are all closed...we will have to settle up on Monday”. Taylor was so disappointed, knowing what he would have to say to his land lady. He stayed late at the office that night and was getting ready to go home at about 10:00 pm. Suddenly,

⁴ Taylor, 8

⁵ Taylor, p. 13

⁶ IBID, p. 21

⁷ Tucker, p. 174

he heard his employer come in. His employer was laughing because a wealthy patient insisted on paying his bill that night in cash. The patient could not rest until it was paid. The doctor noted the payment in his book and then started to leave. Then he stopped and said, "Why here, just take this cash as your payment!"

This kind of faithful, risk-taking, dependant prayer was at the heart of Taylor's life and ministry.

Lesson #2: Missions passion is fueled by God-centeredness

Hudson Taylor was a man who was radically dependent upon God. And what is striking about his life is that he was dependent even before he was a missionary. God-centered dependency was a product of his life, not just his ministry. In other words, Taylor's passion was fueled by his view of God. Missions was simply the extension of his passion.

4 Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. 5 I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing (John 15:4-6).

It is a good reminder to us all that God-centered passion is not created on the mission field or in ministry; it is tested there. Therefore, I want to remind those of you who have dreams and desires for ministry that God-centered passion will not suddenly appear when enter the ministry or land on foreign soil. Ministry is merely the overflow of God-dependant heart.

A Radical Love for Jesus and Souls

Taylor left for China in September 1853 and arrived in Shanghai in the spring of 1854. Taylor had little education apart from his moderate medical training and he was not ordained. As a result, he was looked down upon by the other missionaries on the field. There were early setbacks like a poorly organized mission board, trying to learn the Chinese language and difficult financial issues. As well, he struggled living with the other missionaries whose lifestyles and godliness were questionable to him.

Taylor decided to begin making journeys into the interior of China. At one point he visited nearly sixty settlements that had never seen a Protestant missionary. It was a thrilling time, but Taylor also discovered that the people were more interested in his British dress and manners than his message.⁸ Therefore, he took a step that would forever mark him – he adopted Chinese dress. He turned from a sandy haired, blue-eyed Englishman to a shaven China man with a long black pig-tail and spectacles. Taylor found a new freedom to move among the interior people and preach Christ without the distraction of Western culture.

⁸ Tucker, p. 176

However, his choice cost him the ridicule of most of his fellow missionaries and the concern of his family back in England. Eventually in 1857, he left his mission board and began to work independently.

Through a variety of circumstances he ended living in Ningpo on the coast of China and there he met Maria Dyer, who had grown up in China. After they were married, Taylor took over a hospital ministry. It wasn't long until Hudson realized that he needed more medical training to run a hospital, and he returned to England in 1860.

The Visionary Recruiter

This trip would prove to be historic. While they were in England, Taylor completed the needed medical training, worked on a translation of the New Testament, and he formed China Inland Mission. CIM was built on Taylor's passion for the lost souls of China and on a two radical new approaches: First, he could not wait for the educated, ordained ministers to go. He recruited dedicated men and women among England's massive working class.⁹ Secondly, in order to avoid the appearance of relying on human resources, the missionaries did not take offerings or other direct forms of appealing for money. They were to depend entirely upon God for their needs.

Taylor's influence upon England for the cause of China in the 1860's was stunning. He befriended the famed London Pastor Charles H. Spurgeon who became a life-long supporter. Spurgeon said about Taylor: "China, China, China is now ringing in our ears in that special, peculiar, musical, forcible, unique way in which Mr. Taylor utters it."¹⁰

In 1866 Taylor and a group of 15 new missionaries set sail for China. However, the dreams of reaching China met the realities of working with people. The early days of CIM were fraught with personal conflicts and difficulties as they adjusted to difficult living conditions and the radically different culture. Starting a new work proved costly to everyone and tensions rose quickly. In 1867, God saw fit to allow Gracie Taylor, the eight year old daughter of Hudson and Maria, to become seriously ill. The focus of the mission shifted and when Gracie died, it served as an impetus to bring most of the missionaries back together again.

Lesson #3: The most powerful message is your "life's message"

Hudson Taylor had an uncanny gift for recruitment and inspiring people with a vision for China. But his message was deeply rooted in his life. Hudson Taylor was "all-in" when it came to China. It was his life's calling.

God often chooses to take his message and embed it into the life of his followers.

7 But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. 8 We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; 9 persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; 10 always carrying in the body the death of Jesus,

⁹ Tucker, p. 180

¹⁰ Tucker, p. 180.

so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. 11 For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh (2 Cor 4:7-11).

Renewed Ministry Focus

The focal point of the mission was to reach the interior people of China. Therefore, the strategy was to dispatch CIM missionaries all over the interior region to set up missionary stations. One such station was in Yangchow.

The people of Yangchow were not amenable to the mission's presence and so rumors were spread through the papers regarding the mission's practices. Eventually, the people believed these lies and formed a mob that stormed the mission compound, setting it on fire. The missionaries barely escaped. News of the incident returned back to England. Politicians in England used the incident to dispatch the Royal Navy, accusing the Chinese of attacking British citizens. The conflict ended without military incident, but the Times of London blamed the controversy on China Inland Mission. The negative publicity was deadly to CIM.

Financial support plummeted, recruits suddenly lost interest, but the missionaries returned to Yangchow, planted a church and the work flourished producing many converts as the local people observed the relentless passion to persevere.

Hard Providence

God chose to bless Hudson Taylor, but often at a great personal price. The negative publicity with the Yanchow incident continued, but the attacks became directed at Taylor personally. The next two years would be exceedingly trying. Hudson, under the pressure of the international negative publicity suffered a mental collapse. In 1870, their five year-old son Sammy died, and they made the heart-wrenching decision to send their other three children to England to complete their education. And in July, Maria had a problematic delivery of a baby boy (Noel) probably connected to the onset of cholera. Maria's health was so poor that she was unable to nurse him, and Noel died two weeks later. Several days later Maria died as well. She was 33 years old.

Noel was now the third child that the Taylor's buried in China. He was buried next to Grace and Sammy in Chin-Kiang on the Yangtze River.

A grieving Taylor returned to England to heal, report about the work, renew his time with his children. In 1872 God provided another missionary helpmeet. While in England he was married to Jeanie Faulding, a devoted single missionary who had served in China for 6 years. However, hard providence would come again as Jennie gave birth to still born twins in 1873. In 1874 Taylor was nearly paralyzed from a fall.

Yet in the midst of this season, God was using Taylor in profound ways. He published an appeal for 18 new workers and published a book entitled *China's Millions*. He was also influential on the famous Studd family who were renowned for their skills in cricket.

Three of the Studd brothers were converted, and one of them, Charles Studd, became a missionary to China along with six other Cambridge students.

A Bold New Vision

Hudson and Jennie began traveling back and forth from England and China, recruiting more missionaries and addressing issues on the field. Taylor had a new vision. He calculated that if he could find 1000 evangelists who could preach to 250 people a day, the whole of China could hear the gospel in three years. It was an unrealistic goal, but by 1882, CIM had entered every province and in 1895, the mission had 640 people investing their lives in China.¹¹ God blessed his impossible dream.

His influence in the United States was also growing. In the 1880's he traveled and spoke at the famed Niagara Bible Conference where he became friends with C.I. Scofield. He later traveled to Chicago where he ministered along with D.L. Moody.

But the window for missions in China was closing. In June of 1900 an imperial decree was issued from Peking ordering the death of all foreigners and the extermination of Christianity. What followed was the greatest holocaust of Protestant missions.

135 missionaries and 53 missionary children were murdered in the uprising. In Shansi Province alone, 91 CIM missionaries became martyrs for their faith. Taylor was in Switzerland at the time recuperating from physical exhaustion. In 1904, his beloved Jeanie died. He returned to China for one last time. One month after arriving in the land that he loved, he died.

Lesson #4: Some of the best, suffer the most

It is amazing to me how often I find that the people who made the greatest impact for the kingdom of Christ suffered greatly. Great victories are often wrought through deep personal pain. Jesus himself said as much:

24 Then Jesus told his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. 25 For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it (Matt 16:24-25)

I have heard it said before and I find it true that "Before God can use a man greatly, he must wound him deeply." Why does he do that? I think that the apostle Paul answers that question in 2 Corinthians 1:9-10 – "Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death. But that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead."

Reliance upon God is forged in the furnace of suffering. Some of the best, suffer the most.

¹¹ Tucker, p. 185

A Lasting Legacy

Taylor's impact on foreign missions was enormous. At his death in 1905, there were 205 stations with 849 missionaries, and 125,000 Chinese Christians in the China Inland Mission. He was the father of modern "faith missions movement," and his writings inspired future missionaries like Amy Carmichael, Jim Elliot and countless others. CIM continued to grow after his death and by 1914 was the largest foreign mission organization in world.¹²

In 1950, after the Communist takeover, CIM was officially expelled from China after 100 years of ministry.

One person summarized well Taylor's contribution to missions:

"With only trade school medicine, without any university experience much less missiological training and a checkered past in regard to his own individualistic behavior while he was on the field, he was merely one more of the weak things that God uses to confound the wise. Even his anti-church planting missionary strategy was breathtakingly erroneous by today's church-planting standards. Yet God strangely honored him because his gaze was fixed upon the world's least reached peoples. Hudson Taylor had a divine wind behind him."¹³

Hudson Taylor was a man on a mission from God. He truly had a divine wind behind him that led to a focus of energy to reach the unreached people in China. And I think his lasting legacy and the lesson for all us to really hear is this:

Lesson #5: Reaching the unreached requires a God-centered vision, relentless passion, and personal sacrifice.

Over one of the entrances to the China Inland Mission buildings in London there used to be a scripture from Mark 11:22. This text was meaningful to Hudson Taylor, so pivotal to his life, and so critical in reaching the unreached.

It read: "Have faith in God."

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¹² Tucker, p. 188.

¹³ Tucker quoting Ralph Winter, p. 188.