

James Hudson Taylor, Heaven's Ambassador to China

James Hudson Taylor was born on May 21, 1832, at Barnsley, England. His parents, James and Amelia Taylor, were godly believers deeply involved in Gospel work. His conversion, at the age of 15, is a



memorial to the power of prayer. On that eventful day, James settled into a comfortable chair and looked over the tract in his hand. He had wandered into his father's library, searching for something to read to while away the time. Looking through a basket of pamphlets, he had come across a Gospel tract. He began to read it, thinking, "There will be a story at the commencement and a sermon or moral at the close. I will take the former and leave the latter for those who like it." Meanwhile, 70 miles away, his mother had risen from the dinner table in the home where she was visiting. Deeply concerned for her teen-aged boy, she went to her room and turned the key in the door, resolving not to leave the spot until her prayers were answered. Hour after hour she pleaded, until at length she could pray no longer, but, assured God had heard her cries, began to thank Him for His answer to her prayer. While this was

happening, James, miles away, was struck by a phrase in the tract he was reading: "The finished work of Christ." Years later, he described his thoughts on that memorable day, "Why does the author use this expression? Why not say the atoning or propitiatory work of Christ? Immediately the words 'It is finished' suggested themselves to my mind. What was finished? And I at once replied, 'A full and perfect atonement and satisfaction for sin: the debt was paid by the Substitute; Christ died for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.' Then came the further thought, 'If the whole work was finished and the whole debt paid, what is there left for me to do?' And with this dawned the joyful conviction, as light was flashed into my soul by the Holy Spirit, that there was nothing in the world to be done but to fall down on one's knees and, accepting this Savior and His salvation, praise Him forevermore. Thus while my mother was praising God on her knees in her chamber, I was praising Him in the old warehouse to which I had gone alone to read at my leisure this little book."

Some time after that, he mistakenly opened his sister Amelia's diary, thinking it was his own. His eyes fell on the words she had written, that she would give herself daily to prayer until God answered in the conversion of her brother. Exactly one month after she had penned those words, he had been saved. Years later, on his return to England, after 7 years in China, his father told him that two years prior to James's birth, he had been deeply stirred as to the spiritual state of China. His own circumstances had made it impossible for him to go to China for personal service, but he was led to pray that if God would give him a son, he might be called and privileged to labor in the vast needy empire which was then apparently so closed to the Gospel. He had never told his son about his exercise, in order to insure that James's call would be an answer to prayer. The effect this all had on him is evident from his words: "*You will agree with me that it would be strange indeed if I were not a believer in the power of prayer ... Brought up in such a circle and saved under such circumstances, it was perhaps natural that from the beginning of my Christian life I was led to feel that the promises were very real, and that prayer was a sober, matter-of-fact transacting business with God, whether on one's own behalf or on behalf of those for whom one sought His blessing.*"

A circular graphic with a blue and white gradient background. The text inside is centered and reads: "Amelia prayed 3 times a day for her brother's salvation. Their mother prayed for an entire afternoon on the very day that Hudson accepted Christ." The text is in a serif font.

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As James grew in the Christian life, he felt a deepening conviction that God was calling him to serve the Lord in China. He began to take more outdoor exercise to strengthen his physique and did without some normal comforts to inure himself to hardship. An increasing amount of time was spent in studying the Word of God, visiting the poor, and preaching the Gospel on summer evenings. He wrote, "I began to do what Christian work was in my power in the way of tract distribution, Sunday school teaching and visiting the poor and sick as opportunity afforded." While in Barnsley, he had enjoyed the meetings of

assembly believers. When he lived in Hull, working as a physician's assistant, he was glad to renew associations that had already proved helpful. George Muller was well-known to this group, and Taylor's exposure to this life of faith had a profound impact upon him.

Hudson Taylor left London for Liverpool on September 19, 1853, and arrived in China aboard the double-masted sailing ship, *Dumfries*, in March 1854. China's population that year was 400 million, a quarter of the human race at that time. Some missionaries had already arrived to preach the Gospel but most of them lived and labored in the coastal areas. Few foreigners had penetrated the vast interior, and a virulent hatred of "the foreign devils" had imposed a great barrier to inland travel. Quickly obtaining a knowledge of the language, Taylor was able, later that year, to engage in evangelistic journeys himself, traveling the nearby rivers to reach outlying districts around Shanghai. But his effectiveness in the work of the Lord increased dramatically due to two decisions he made:



- First, at the suggestion of a veteran missionary, he adopted native clothing and the appearance of the native Chinese men. Explaining his reason for this he wrote, *"It is not the denationalization, but the Christianization of this people that we seek. We wish to see Chinese Christians raised up, men and women truly Christian, but withal truly Chinese in every sense of the word."* This change of appearance led to his being quietly listened to while others faced rude crowds. He would often be invited into homes, while those in foreign dress would be kindly refused under the excuse that the attendant crowds would be too great.

- Secondly, deeply burdened about the vast multitudes of Chinese people who were perishing, he left the relative safety of the coast and pressed into the interior of China with the Gospel. Despite his adopting native dress, he still faced great persecution in certain regions. "Foreign devil", "foreign dog" and "foreign pig" were common names. Any visits away from the safety of the coast meant that he and his fellow-workers were in danger of being seized and held for ransom at any time. A warm reception in one town might mean opposition and violence in a neighboring area at odds with their previous hosts. But all this, said Taylor, *"led to a deeper fellowship than I had ever known before with Him Who was despised and rejected of men."*

Hudson spent his life serving Christ in that vast and needy land. On April 17th, 1905, he arrived in Shanghai for his final visit to China. After speaking to some of the believers on the coast, he made his way into the interior by train. What once took two weeks to traverse by barrow was done in two days by rail. As they neared the city of Chenchowfu, Taylor noticed a number of believers gathered outside the city, holding four large golden Chinese characters which read, **"Benefactor of Inland China."** Everywhere he went on this, his last excursion, he was welcomed by grateful saints who thanked God for sending His servant to them with the Gospel. On May 21st, Hudson Taylor's birthday, the Christians at Chowkiakow presented him with a scarlet satin banner bearing the words, **"O man greatly beloved."**

It was while he visited the believers in Changsha, province of Hunan, on Saturday, June 3, 1905, in the heart of inland China, that Hudson Taylor passed into the presence of his glorious Lord. Weeping saints bore his remains to the family grave site in Chinkiang where, years before, Taylor had laid his beloved Maria and four of his children to rest. The sentiments of hundreds of believers were expressed by the words of one Chinese evangelist,

"Lao Muhsi, Lao Muhsi, (dear and venerable pastor) we truly love you ... You opened for us the road, the road to heaven. You loved us and prayed for us long years ... We do not want to bring you back, but we will follow you."