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*The Fathomless Wealth of Christ:
Hudson Taylor's Remarkable Life of Faith*

By Carter Hudson

A Test of Faith Met by a Man of Faith

There was once a young man who lived in Kingston upon Hull in the East Riding of Yorkshire, England. Just nineteen years of age, he served as the assistant to one of the top physicians in Hull, living out of a single room in a small cottage just outside town so that he could tithe his entire income.¹ He had committed himself to work for the Lord in China and “realized that there he would be far removed from all human aid and would need to depend on God alone for protection, material provision, and help of every other kind.”² Thus he viewed his training in England as preparation for the hardships of life in China to come.

One way in which he did this was to rely wholly on God for all financial matters, including his quarterly salary. The physician for whom this young man worked was frequently occupied with various concerns and asked him to remind him whenever his salary was due so that he might not overlook it.³ The young medical student, however, decided not to directly request his salary but rather to pray for the Lord to bring the matter to the mind of his employer, thus practicing dependence on God alone through prayer.⁴

As his next quarterly payday drew near, the young man prayed fervently that his employer would not forget his salary—yet when the day came, the preoccupied doctor made no mention of his pay. The young man continued praying unceasingly, trusting that the God in whom he believed would supply his every need, including his overdue salary. But after giving his last silver coin to a family whose mother was dying and eating his last bowl of porridge for breakfast—more than a week after his salary was due—he had no provision for his next meal nor for the rent that was due to his landlord in just three days.⁵

¹ Vance Christie, *Hudson Taylor: Gospel Pioneer to China* (New Jersey: P&R Publishing, 2011), 34.

² *Ibid.*, 35.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*, 36.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 40.

Yet this young man continued to wrestle with God over these matters in prayer. He went into work the day his rent was due “with a calm inner assurance that to wait on God’s timing was best, and that the Lord would undertake for him in one way or another.”⁶ That very day, seemingly out of the blue, his employer inquired whether he had paid him his salary. The young man calmly reminded him that it had been due some time ago, and his employer was about to finally compensate him when he realized he had just sent the last of his money to the bank.

Utterly dejected after such a temporary and premature soaring of his spirit, the young man left his employer’s office and fell to his knees, pouring out his heart to the Lord.⁷ He remained at the office until 10 o’clock that night, trusting that God would not fail him but would provide for him somehow, when his employer surprisingly returned to the office.⁸ Laughing to himself as he entered, he explained to the young man that at this strange hour one of his richest patients had just paid his doctor’s bill—and because of that seemingly random action, he was able to pay the overdue salary of the young medical student, as well as the subsequent one, right then and there!⁹

To the faithful young man this action was not random, however, but the result of drawing for every need upon “the fathomless wealth of Christ.”¹⁰ He was a man of passionate conviction, set apart to work for Christ in China, and his name was James Hudson Taylor. Named after his father and great grandfather but called by his mother’s maiden name (his middle name), he was consecrated to serve in China from his very birth.¹¹ Through the founding of the China Inland Mission in 1865, he set a new standard for relying wholly on faith in God for all facets of mission work, bringing some 900 missionaries to the field, training as many Chinese workers, establishing a witnessing church of 125,000, and baptizing nearly 50,000 in his 51 years of service.¹² From his

⁶ Ibid., 41.

⁷ Ibid., 42.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Dr. and Mrs. Howard Taylor, *Hudson Taylor’s Spiritual Secret* (Philadelphia: China Inland Mission, 1958), 12.

¹¹ Christie, *Hudson Taylor: Gospel Pioneer to China*, 19.

¹² Douglas K. Wilson Jr., “James Hudson Taylor (1832-1905),” in *The Encyclopedia of Christian Civilization, Vol. IV* (UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 2320.

upbringing and evangelistic training to his many years of service in China, the key to his success remained the same: it was nothing but the simple secret of drawing upon Christ's strength for each and every need, and it shaped his entire life, including his approach to mission work and that of countless faith missions to follow.

Background and Early Life

Hudson's father, James, was a gifted speaker and an excellent chemist who was involved in preaching engagements throughout the Barnsley Circuit in Yorkshire.¹³ The son of an amiable reed-maker, he was highly respected as a businessman and "possessed by a profound conviction of God's infinite faithfulness."¹⁴ He took the Bible quite simply—applying it in practical matters of everyday life—and was so moved by a passage in Exodus 13 about setting apart the firstborn unto the Lord that he and his wife Amelia did exactly that for their unborn son Hudson.¹⁵ In fact, they were so moved by the spiritual needs of un-evangelized China that they prayed, "Dear God, if You should give us a son, grant that he may work for You in China."¹⁶ This "child of many prayers"¹⁷ was born on May 21, 1832.

Hudson's mother Amelia was instrumental in his childhood. Her gentle discipline played a substantial role in the development of him and his siblings, impressing characteristics of personal neatness, accuracy and thoroughness, as well as a taste for reading, into each of them.¹⁸ James was no less involved in their upbringing, emphasizing the importance of punctuality—as well as prayer and bible study—and conducting regular family worship twice daily, after breakfast and tea.¹⁹ When fellow workers would come from every part of the circuit for Quarter Day, James often invited them home for tea.²⁰ On these occasions it was common that foreign missions would be the chief subject of conversation. Hudson's father was most sympathetic to China, about which he would say,

¹³ Dr. and Mrs. Howard Taylor, *J Hudson Taylor: God's Man in China* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1965), 2.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Christie, *Hudson Taylor: Gospel Pioneer to China*, 19.

¹⁷ Taylor, *J Hudson Taylor: God's Man in China*, 2.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid., 4.

²⁰ Ibid., 5.

“That is the country to aim at, with its teeming population, its strong, intelligent, scholarly people.”²¹ He often lamented the church’s indifference towards the country’s egregious needs.

It was in part due to these conversations—as well as a thorough reading of Walter Medhurst’s little book, *China: Its State and Prospects*²²—that young Hudson decided he wanted to go to China as a missionary.²³ His parents quickly lost hope that he would be called to such a service, however, for he was a sickly child who didn’t even start school until he was eleven.²⁴ Due to his frequent illness, his brief career as a student ended just two years later when he left school to continue his studies at home and help his father in the shop, preparing and packaging medicines.²⁵

By the time he was seventeen, he was a bright young lad “with few anxieties or cares, but inwardly he was rebellious and full of unbelief.”²⁶ His unbelief was fueled by his position as a junior clerk at one of the banks in Barnsley, where his coworkers openly discussed skeptical views of the world and sneered at the “old-fashioned notions” of religion.²⁷ This sheltered young Christian had become steeped in the world’s way of thinking, the impact of which was felt throughout his whole family.

A Radical Conversion

Hudson was overcome by a general feeling of unhappiness, finding it tiresome to keep up the front of a Christian life when within all was not right.²⁸ His father found it difficult to be patient with Hudson in the phase through which he was passing and his mother “redoubled her tenderness and prayers”²⁹ for him. But it was his sister Amelia—then just thirteen years old—“who was nearest to him and best able to win his

²¹ Ibid.

²² Christie, *Hudson Taylor: Gospel Pioneer to China*, 30.

²³ See note 21 above.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid., 6.

²⁹ Ibid.

confidence.”³⁰ Amelia committed herself to praying for her brother three times daily until he was truly converted, and her prayers—along with those of her mother—were answered one afternoon as Hudson leafed through a basket of pamphlets in his father’s library.³¹

Hoping to while away a few unoccupied hours, he came across a gospel tract that he intended to read in a purely detached way. Taylor writes, “I sat down to read the book in an utterly unconcerned state of mind, believing indeed at the time that if there were any salvation it was not for me, and with a distinct intention to put away the tract as soon as it should seem prosy.”³² Yet as he read the tract, he was struck by the phrase “the finished work of Christ.”³³ As Dr. and Mrs. Howard Taylor put it, he was “arrested by the words.... Truth long familiar, though neglected, came back to mind and heart.”³⁴

In a matter of minutes, Hudson was overcome by the fact that Christ’s work was finished and that the only thing in the world left for him to do was to fall on his knees, accept his savior and His salvation, and praise Him forevermore.³⁵ Little did he know that many miles away his mother was particularly burdened that Saturday afternoon by the spiritual state of her only son. She left her friends to plead alone with God for his salvation, hour upon hour on her knees “until her heart was flooded with a joyful assurance that her prayers were heard and answered.”³⁶ Heard and answered they were.

The significance of Hudson Taylor’s conversion experience cannot be overstated, for it would shape the trajectory of his entire life—and impact thousands more as a result. In September of 1849, just a few months after his joyful conversion experience, Hudson went through a trying season of spiritual deadness that left him longing for the touch of God in a new way.³⁷ That it came is a testament to the faithfulness of God, who delivered him in characteristically remarkable fashion. Thanks to the Lord’s work through a four-day series

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ Dr. and Mrs. Howard Taylor, *Hudson Taylor’s Spiritual Secret* (Philadelphia: China Inland Mission, 1958), 13.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid., 14.

³⁶ Ibid., 13.

³⁷ Ibid., 16.

of evangelistic meetings in his church, Hudson's commitment to God was rekindled in a mighty way.³⁸ He recalls:

Never shall I forget the feeling that came over me then. Words could not describe it. I felt I was in the presence of God, entering into a covenant with the Almighty. I felt as though I wished to withdraw my promise but could not. Something seemed to say, 'Your prayer is answered; your conditions are accepted.' And from that time the conviction has never left me that I was called to China.³⁹

Preparation and Training – A Faithful Response to a Faithful God

Hudson remembers distinctly hearing the words—as if God had spoken them directly to him—“Then go for me to China.”⁴⁰ These words would become the thesis of his life, the axis around which everything else turned. Suddenly his parents' prayers, his prenatal consecration, and his childhood desire were all united, and from that moment on his life “was unified in one great purpose and prayer.”⁴¹ Everything was now done in light of and in preparation for his calling. His parents advised him to do everything within his power to prepare himself physically, mentally, and spiritually for God's work in China—and prepare he did.⁴²

He replaced his nice feather bed with a hard mattress, was careful not to self-indulge at the table, and woke up at five each morning to study Latin, Greek and Hebrew—all to prepare for his life of ministry.⁴³ Moreover, through the careful and tedious comparison of brief verses in the gospel of Luke written in Chinese Mandarin, he soon discovered the meaning of more than six hundred Chinese characters.⁴⁴ He gave up his Sunday evenings to visit the poorest parts of town, holding cottage-meetings and distributing tracts, soon becoming a welcome figure whose “bright face and kindly words opened the way for many a straight message.”⁴⁵

³⁸ Christie, *Hudson Taylor: Gospel Pioneer to China*, 28.

³⁹ Ibid. 17.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Christie, *Hudson Taylor: Gospel Pioneer to China*, 29.

⁴³ Dr. and Mrs. Taylor, *J Hudson Taylor: God's Man in China*, 13.

⁴⁴ Christie, *Hudson Taylor: Gospel Pioneer to China*, 31.

⁴⁵ See note 37 above.

Rarely is such conviction and discipline seen in anyone, let alone a teenager. Hudson Taylor's teenage years—from his struggle of faith to his dramatic conversion to his committed preparation for a life of sacrifice—stand as a tremendous example to us today, reminding us that God can move powerfully within people of any age. This is something the apostle Paul knew well—firmly reminding his young disciple Timothy in their correspondence—and a truth we ought to stay cognizant of as we raise our own children today. Dr. and Mrs. Howard Taylor put it well: “At no time in life is there greater capacity for devotion, if the heart's deepest springs are open to the love of Christ.”⁴⁶ Open to Christ's love they were in the heart of Hudson Taylor.

One of the points made in Walter Medhurst's little book on China—which young Hudson read so meticulously—was the huge potential of medical missions throughout

China, causing him to think seriously about medical studies as a preparatory route to his life of mission work.⁴⁷ After serving as the assistant to Dr. Robert Hardey in Hull (the period in Taylor's life from which the introduction to this paper is drawn) from the spring of 1851 to the summer of 1852, the twenty-year-old felt called to move to London to further his training as a medical student.⁴⁸ Based in London, the Chinese Evangelization Society had recently begun sending out missionaries and made Taylor an offer to help with his living expenses in the city.⁴⁹ He had received a similar offer from his father, and after praying about the matter, decided to accept neither in order to “depend solely on the



⁴⁶ Dr. and Mrs. Taylor, *Hudson Taylor's Spiritual Secret*, 15.

⁴⁷ Christie, *Hudson Taylor: Gospel Pioneer to China*, 31.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 45.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

Lord, as he knew he would often need to do in China.”⁵⁰ What courageous faith!

After contracting a serious illness from a patient through a pinprick on his finger that nearly cost him his life, Taylor received a letter from Charles Bird, the secretary of the Chinese Evangelization Society (CES), informing him of their desire to send him to China.⁵¹

The First Voyage

On Monday, September 19, 1853, at just twenty-one years old, Hudson Taylor boarded a small, three-masted clipper called the *Dumfries* alongside a twenty-three member crew.⁵² He had just said a long and difficult goodbye to his mother, as both realized it might be a very long time before they would see one another again and that their reunion could well be in Heaven rather than on earth. Its departure delayed several days, the ship left the dock in Liverpool for the long journey to China—and long it was. Nearly six difficult, life-threatening months later, the small ship finally docked in Shanghai, where Hudson would face even greater trouble than he had on the voyage over.⁵³

The situation in Shanghai was extremely dangerous due to the aftermath of the Taiping Rebellion, and Taylor soon discovered that the two missionaries with whom he had been best acquainted were no longer present in the country—one dead and one having recently left for America.⁵⁴ The CES had failed him at this point, but he was given lodging by a colleague from the London Missionary Society named Dr. William Lockhart, showing the genuine solidarity that existed between Protestant mission organizations at the time.⁵⁵ Howard and Geraldine Taylor wrote of the atmosphere into which young Hudson was thrust: “...sharp fighting was to be seen from his windows, and he was unable to walk in any direction without witnessing misery such as he had never dreamed of before.”⁵⁶

⁵⁰ Ibid., 46.

⁵¹ Ibid., 55.

⁵² Ibid., 57.

⁵³ Ibid., 64.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 66.

⁵⁵ Jacques A. Blocher and Jacques Blandenier. *The Evangelization of the World: A History of Christian Mission* (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2013), 355.

⁵⁶ Dr. and Mrs. Taylor, *Hudson Taylor's Spiritual Secret*, 36.

During Taylor’s first sojourn in China, which lasted six years, there were various missionary societies already present in the five foreign-friendly port cities.⁵⁷ At that time two-thirds of the Protestant missionaries in China were American and one-third British, with a total of seventy in the region.⁵⁸ Conversions were few and far between, and before the arrival of the great missionary Robert Morrison less than fifty years earlier there was not a single Protestant Christian in all of China.⁵⁹

Taylor soon learned that he would receive a salary of eighty pounds from the CES for his first year in China, and “it quickly became apparent that such compensation was woefully inadequate.”⁶⁰ Yet despite his shoddy financial support coupled with numerous other difficulties, his first few years in China were marked by a dozen journeys for the purpose of spreading the gospel—he wanted to push further into China to the regions yet unreached.⁶¹

He quickly realized both the curiosity and distrust that were caused in the countryside by his Western clothes and made the controversial decision to dress and wear his hair as a Chinese—a decision met with fierce criticism from his colleagues.⁶² Yet this one decision is illustrative of Hudson Taylor’s role as a missionary pioneer, pushing the limits of what was known and practiced in mission work and thus lifting all others to a higher standard of what it means to work wholeheartedly and courageously for God.

Furlough in England – A Burdened Heart

After six years in China—during which Hudson eventually broke with the CES, married Maria Dyer and helped start a church and hospital in the great city of Ningpo—he and his wife left for a stay of equal duration in England.⁶³ While there, he reestablished his health (which had become seriously impaired while in China), obtained his doctorate, and

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Christie, *Hudson Taylor: Gospel Pioneer to China*, 69.

⁶¹ See note 58 above.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Blocher and Blandenier. *The Evangelization of the World: A History of Christian Mission*, 357.

revised the New Testament in the Ningpo dialect.⁶⁴ But most of all what Taylor felt was a deep burden for “the millions of Chinese who were perishing.”⁶⁵ He could not forget the moral darkness of the people he had seen, and the fact that the great majority of them had never heard the gospel was too much for him to bear.⁶⁶

Consequently, these years of retreat proved painful for Hudson as he sunk into heavy guilt at being away from the country to which he was called. He recalls, “I had no moment of respite during the day and did not sleep for most of the night.”⁶⁷ He felt the need to evangelize China’s interior with increasing urgency, but when he communicated his vision to the British missionary organizations already working in China they all gave the same response: they lacked the necessary means and there were far too many obstacles to evangelizing the interior of China.⁶⁸ Hudson felt otherwise.

A Pinnacle Moment – The Founding of the China Inland Mission

Five years into his furlough in England, in the summer of 1865, Hudson Taylor’s inner turmoil came to a head. One Sunday morning, the contrast between the multitudes of rejoicing Christians in church and the millions of lost and perishing in China proved more than he could bear, and he excused himself early from the service.⁶⁹ Alone on the empty shores of Brighton that morning he “met the crisis of his life.”⁷⁰ Leslie Lyall describes the tension well:

For weeks he had known that God was calling him to undertake a major attempt to evangelise [*sic*] those unreached millions. Yet his whole nature shrank from the responsibility. It was so unthinkable that he, an unknown young man, without any existing organisation [*sic*] behind him or any wealthy backers, should attempt anything so impossible.⁷¹

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Leslie T. Lyall, *A Passion for the Impossible: The China Inland Mission 1865-1965* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1965), 23.

⁶⁷ See note 62 above.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ See note 65 above.

⁷⁰ Dr. and Mrs. Taylor, *Hudson Taylor’s Spiritual Secret*, 80.

⁷¹ Lyall, *A Passion for the Impossible: The China Inland Mission 1865-1965*, 23-24.

Yet that is exactly what he did. Then and there he felt the sudden and strong conviction that he needed to ask God for twenty-four able and dedicated workers, two for each of China's provinces without any missionaries and two for Mongolia.⁷² He knew the Lord was speaking and that if he submitted to His will the workers would be provided, and their financial support supplied as well.⁷³ There, in the margins of his Bible, the China Inland Mission was born.

With the support of his wife and several friends, he deposited in a bank account his entire fortune for this new organization—which came to, he reported, “ten pounds, and all the promises of God.”⁷⁴ The China Inland Mission was founded on the principles by which Hudson Taylor had already lived and worked as a missionary, and they testify to the innovative strategy and courageous faith of this remarkable man. Missionaries would be recruited from all denominations, they would receive no fixed salary but wait upon God to supply their needs, and they would not appeal for nor collect funds.⁷⁵ Further, the work in China would be directed by Taylor himself and others on the ground rather than a European committee, the evangelization of *all* of China was strategized, and the missionaries would dress as Chinese and conduct worship in Chinese-style buildings.⁷⁶



The first team to leave for China with the CIM.
From the Jubilee Story of the China Inland Mission; Marshall Broomhall 1915

The workers Hudson had prayed for were provided, and the rest is truly history.

⁷² See note 62 above.

⁷³ Dr. and Mrs. Taylor, *Hudson Taylor's Spiritual Secret*, 80.

⁷⁴ Blocher and Blandenier. *The Evangelization of the World: A History of Christian Mission*, 358.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

The China Inland Mission would go on to set a new precedent in the field of mission work, influencing countless faith missions to follow and bringing the gospel to the heart of China with unparalleled success. When someone asked him near the end of his life whether he took legitimate pride in thinking of all that he had accomplished, Hudson Taylor simply responded, “That is not how I see things. I often think that God must have searched for someone rather weak, rather small, so that he could use him, and he found me.”⁷⁷

The Legacy of a Life

Hudson Taylor was many things, but above all he was Christ-like. For him, everything stemmed from relying on and obeying the God who proves himself faithful when we depend on Him. Taylor has left a significant impression on the history of Christian mission through his pioneering vision, his mission strategy and his gift for organization, but perhaps most of all “by the example of his life of prayer and of unconditional confidence in the interventions of God.”⁷⁸ He stands as a remarkable example to us today of what it means to take up our cross daily and rely on the incarnate God, to kneel at the foot of the cross and place our trust in the One who knows us better than we know ourselves.

Hudson Taylor’s life of radical faith and passion for the gospel ought to challenge us to reflect on our own lives today and to ponder where we place our trust. His wealth was not in temporal things but in Him from whom all things have their being. His eyes were fixed not on things seen but ultimately on those unseen. His hope was built on



Yours faithfully in Christ,
Hudson Taylor in 1893.
 From *The Story of The China Inland Mission* by Geraldine Guinness
 1893; London: Morlan & Scott

⁷⁷ Blocher and Blandenier. *The Evangelization of the World: A History of Christian Mission*, 368.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

nothing less than Christ, and his trust in Christ alone—the simple secret of his success. And we, too, may have his success, for we have his Bible and his God.

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