

William Burns (1815 – 1868) was born, the third son, to Christian parents, his father being a minister in the Church of Scotland. His favourite book was *Pilgrim's Progress*. Upon entering University in Aberdeen to study law, William Burns was converted after receiving a letter from his sisters. From the moment of his conversion, he was aware of a call to the ministry of the Gospel. He completed theological training in Glasgow and helped in the formation of the Students Missionary Society.

When the Fire of the Holy Spirit Came Down

In 1839, just before his 24th birthday, he was licensed to preach as a probationer for the ministry. Robert Murray M'Cheyne, the young Godly minister of St. Peter's in Dundee, asked Burns to take his place while he was away on a mission to Palestine. William's ministry during this time was much blessed and while visiting his father's church at Kilsyth, the Holy Spirit so powerfully came upon William as he preached and upon the congregation, that the service lasted for five hours. His message was: **"No cross, no crown."**

Many people fell to the ground in repentance, calling out for God's mercy. By the time M'Cheyne came back from Palestine, there were 39 prayer meetings held in connection with the Church every week, five of them composed entirely of little children. A spiritual Revival swept the countryside. Men and women seemed to have but one concern and that was how to be right with God.

Evangelism

William Burns travelled to Northern England and despite being pelted with manure, he persisted in preaching at open air services and working amongst students, soldiers, orphans, prisoners and the insane. In 1843, he visited Dublin and conducted evangelism amongst the Roman Catholics. In 1844, he responded to an invitation to Canada, and crossed the Atlantic to minister there for two years.

Called to China

Upon his return to Scotland, the English Presbyterian Church Missionary Committee enquired

as to whether there was anyone in Scotland who would be prepared to go as their first Missionary to China. When no-one else responded, Burns resolved to go: *"tomorrow!"* Within the day, he was on his way to Hong Kong. Thirteen years earlier, Robert Morrison of the London Missionary Society had died in China. He had left behind an English-Chinese Dictionary, and the complete Bible translated into Chinese. There were only 50 Protestant missionaries in China at that time. Burns declared:

"The longing of my heart is to make known my glorious Redeemer to those who have never heard."

Tenacity Amidst Turmoil

Burns set to work translating *Pilgrim's Progress*. He preached in open fields, for 3 to 4 hours at a time, with numerous Chinese being converted to Christ. At about this time, the Taiping rebels began their civil war, which General Charles Gordon crushed.

After the suppression of the Taiping rebels, Burns found literature distribution and evangelism throughout China much easier. He developed a friendship with the new English missionary, Hudson Taylor, and adopted his practise of wearing Chinese clothing. This change made his preaching more readily received by the crowds, but as more and more Chinese came to Christ, vicious persecution intensified. Burns himself was imprisoned. Chinese Christians had their properties stolen, the fields plundered and candidates for baptism endured severe beatings at the hands of their families. Burns compiled a Hymn book and then began to translate the Psalms. Burns' motto was: ***"Always be ready."*** (1 Peter 3:15).

William Burns then became **the first Protestant missionary to Manchuria**, dying there six months later of a severe illness. He had carried the

cross

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