

"Faithful Is He" By Helen Western**~Other Speakers S-Z: Classic Christian Writings:**

Helen Western, an American missionary, had been serving for thirteen years with the South China Boat Mission, living and working among Boat People (Sampan people), when war was declared on December 7, 1941 between America and Japan. China and Japan were already at war and the Japanese had occupied territory in Canton, where Miss Western's boat was anchored on the Pearl River. Two hours after war was declared, the Japanese boarded the boats of the American missionaries and declared them prisoners of war. The missionaries were permitted to remain on their boats, upon promising not to leave them. No provision for their food or sustenance was made, and their support which previously came from America, could not reach them while they were interned on the boats. Miss Western writes of God's provision for them in the months that followed.

I shall ever remember the day when we had used our last dollar and had to make a decision in regards to the future. Should we continue our schools for the children? Should we keep our teachers, and let the students remain? What about the children we were caring for? Should we send them away? If so, where? What about our native preachers, and Bible women who had been supported by funds which had come to us from the homeland? What about the orphans in the city for whom we were so concerned?

There were so many questions facing me. I knew that I had to trust God for my own needs, I couldn't escape that, but should I send the Chinese away and discontinue the work? I put out a fleece as Gideon of old did and asked the Lord, that if it was His will for us to carry on as before and trust Him to provide, that He should put His seal upon such a step by sending to me that day some cash. It didn't matter how much, but I would take it from Him as a token that more would follow when needed.

I made a note of this in my diary but told no one about it. The evening came when I must make a definite decision and I looked in the word of God for a message from the Lord. My eyes fell upon that beautiful verse in Deuteronomy 33:27: "The eternal God is thy refuge and underneath are the everlasting arms."

However, I read it from a daily reading book, and it was taken from a modern speech translation and read a little differently, and brought an entirely new thought to my mind. It read: "Above is the God of aforetime, beneath are the arms of the ages." I began to ponder on just what that meant. Above is the "God of aforetime." Aforetime: it meant that above was Moses' God, the God that had fed the children of Israel for forty years in the wilderness where there was no food. The "God of aforetime": it meant that above was Elijah's God, who had fed His servant by the ravens. The "God of aforetime" was George Muller's God who had fed the thousands of English orphans.

Yes, and that same miracle-working God was my God, and beneath are the arms of the ages. This brought yet another new thought to my mind: above I had a God who could answer and work miracles, but if He had other plans for us then beneath were the arms that had upheld the saints through countless ages and had given grace to the martyrs. These loving arms, that sustained them, could still hold me and our Chinese who, with me, were relying on God. I purposed in my heart to trust Him, to lean back and rest in the Arms of the Ages.

That night I gathered my Chinese workers about me and explained the situation to them and gave them the opportunity of leaving and going inland if they chose. Each one had to make his own decision, with the exception of the children who were too young to choose for themselves. All decided to remain and carry on the work and trust God to provide for our daily needs.

We had a season of prayer, and were so very conscious of the presence of the Lord and realized anew that, "The Lord's hand is not shortened that it cannot save; neither His ear heavy that it cannot hear." We knew God had heard and we felt conscious too of the fact that others were praying for us at that time. We wept! We sang! We rejoiced! The next morning we would all meet around the table trusting God to have provided for us. We had no money or food on the boat. We hadn't wood to cook with even if we had had anything to cook.

Just before we separated for the night, one of the school teachers came to me and said, "I forgot to tell you. Do you remember Mr. Leung whose boat we were able to save when the Japanese were confiscating the boats to invade Wai Chow?" I did remember. We had, in a very few minutes, converted his boat into a class room, and when the Japanese arrived we were holding school on the boat and they left us together with our other school boats unmolested.

"He came to visit me today," continued the teacher, "and brought six dollars, the money that he has owed for

his boys' books." This was the answer to my fleece. It was the first gift of money received toward our support as prisoners of war.

We never missed a meal! We were fed daily by the hand of God. The Chinese whom we had been able to help through the years shared with us of their poverty. It was bread that had been cast upon the waters, and it came back buttered and jammed. One day I felt constrained to look up that passage in Ecclesiastes 11:1: "Cast thy bread upon the waters: for thou shalt find it after many days." Then I read the next verse: "Give a portion to seven and also to eight; for thou knowest not what evil shall be upon the earth."

It brought a new message to me: seven is God's perfect number. To me it meant, give to all to whom you should give, and then eight meant to go the extra mile, give more than you should and in this way you are storing up for an evil time, a rainy day. We have our own methods of preparing for a rainy day; this is God's way. When we take care of the work of God, God always takes care of His workers....

Not Our Faith But God's Faithfulness

I had always thought that if I had enough faith, God would provide for me and my Chinese workers. But I learned some beautiful lessons from the experiences of the past year. There were times when my faith completely failed. At one time we had had very little for our evening meal, and there was nothing for the morning. We had always had either food for the morning meal or else money with which to buy food.

But we were simply at the end of our resources. In China we have two meals a day; one in the morning at about ten o'clock, and the other between four and five in the afternoon. No one had ever come to us with food before the morning meal, and I felt sure that God was going to test us, in that we should be without food the next morning.

However, I couldn't sleep. I rolled and tossed all night. All last winter we had no light as kerosene was so very expensive, and consequently we went to bed very early. In fact we went to bed when it got dark and got up at daylight....

I could think of the little children who gathered about the table for each meal, and rejoiced and sang as they watched God provide for us. Peter Chan our music teacher, partially blind, had translated for us that beautiful little chorus: "I know the Lord will make a way for me." We sang it at every meal.

I wondered if the children would be offended in the Lord if they were called upon to miss a meal. Then there came to my memory two lines of a very beautiful poem:

"Listen! I'll fling my challenge
to the sky!
God CAN deliver; but if not, I'll
trust Him, and trusting die!"

I repeated these lines over and over again and fell asleep. The next morning I awakened and looked in my book of poems for these lines but they were not there. I am very fond of poetry, and have a large collection of very choice poems. But somehow this one was missing. Then I looked through my desk and found it on the back of a letter sent to me...dated December 17, 1938. I always destroy my letters after they are answered, but apparently I had kept this one for the poem it contained.

The poem is entitled, "But If Not" and is built around those three little words taken from Daniel 3:18. We so often quote Daniel 3:17 about the time when Daniel and the three Hebrew children were facing the fiery furnace. Daniel said, "If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us out of thine hand, O King."

So often we forget the next verse which starts out, "But if not." "But if not, be it known unto thee, O King, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up." This poem was a challenge and thrilled my soul.

"I know my God is able to deliver;
Able to save from direst human ill;
Able, as when He saved the Hebrew
children -- Almighty still!"

But if perchance, His plans are
not my plans,
If hid in darkness should my path-
way be;
If, when I plead He does not seem
to answer, nor care for me;

Then, though men scoff and bitterly
deride me,
Listen! IÂ'll fling my challenge to
the sky!
God CAN deliver; BUT IF NOT, IÂ'll
trust Him, and trusting die!

I determined to trust Him, it didn't matter whether we had food or not, nor what the children thought. God would care for even that. I went to teach in my classes thrilled and completely at rest. At ten o'clock I returned to find our family of twenty-three gathered around the table. God had provided! It was not my faith, for it had completely failed and I learned a beautiful lesson, that it is not our faith, but that we have a faithful God!

A Chinese nurse from a mission hospital about ten miles outside the city had brought me a basket of vegetables. I had spent a month at that mission station two summers before, shortly after their missionary doctor had been killed by Chinese bandits. I had grown to love these Chinese nurses.

When war was declared, the hospital was taken over by the Japanese and the patients were afraid to come. They have a huge compound and grow their own vegetables. One night the nurses felt led to gather some vegetables for me. They threw them over the compound wall at night to one of their Christians who kept them in her home until morning; then the nurse brought them in and delivered them at my boat and slipped away while I was in class.

The night before, one of our little boys couldn't sleep. His mother was our cook. She was a widow with four boys. She originally had five, but one had died of starvation before she came to the Gospel Boats. Her four boys were now in school and the mother was cooking and helping us with the work on the boat.

The older of the boys knew that there was nothing to cook for the morning meal and he too couldn't sleep. He somehow felt as if this time God was in a fix. He must come to the rescue. He searched through their old sampan to see if there wasn't something that could be converted into cash. He found two old brass kettles and with his mother's consent took them out and sold them. With the money he bought sweet potatoes and while there wasn't near enough for our large family, the child didn't know and was at rest.

The next morning he went to school so happy, and so thrilled and was surprised to come home at ten o'clock to see the big basket of vegetables and the lovely meal awaiting him. "Why God wasn't in a fix at all!" he cried.

Deliverance

The last part of April the Japanese boarded our boats to tell us that we could have the opportunity of leaving the Orient and being exchanged for Japanese prisoners in America, if we so chose. We chose to stay, although many were preparing to leave. We had watched a boat leave a couple of weeks before carrying the greater part of the British and American community, and we expected to see another such boat leave.

Just a few days before the boat was scheduled to sail, the Japanese officers together with the Swiss Consul, again paid us a visit. This time they informed us that for military reasons, we would have to leave. We were brokenhearted. The work among the Boat People had been our very life. Our work was in no condition to be left alone...But then the boat was delayed, and in the days that followed we could see the hand of God working in our behalf and in behalf of the work....

Coming home on the repatriation vessel, the S. S. Gripsholme, I overheard one man say: "I wouldn't go through that again, not for a million dollars." Personally I felt I would not exchange my experiences for a million dollars. Christ has been so precious and so very real. I have learned more of the love of God during this past year than in all the years of my life. He not only provided for us but protected us....

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Through the dangerous mine-laid water enroute to the homeland, God safely led us all the way....I am firmly convinced that nothing can come to the child of God without the permissive will of our Heavenly Father. The Lord knoweth how to deliver His own, whether in peace or in the midst of war, "On land or on the raging sea."

**"No bomb or shell on me can burst
Except my Lord permit it first,
Then let my heart be left in peace,
His watchful care will never cease.
No bomb above, no mine below,
Need cause my heart one pang of woe,
The Lord of Hosts encircles me,
He's Lord of earth, and sky, and sea."
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