

God who Reigns over Rain

Susan Verstraete

They were locked in a tiny, bug-infested jail in inland China. The heat inside was suffocating, and the doors and windows were sealed tight by the guards. Outside their prison, crowds of people called for their death, rioting until late into night. At daybreak, it began again. “Mie yang,” they shouted, “Destroy the foreigner!” Archie and Flora prayed for a miracle.

It was 1900, the third year of worsening drought and famine in China. The Chinese people were looking for someone to blame for the disfavor of the gods, who (they believed) controlled the weather. Dowager Empress Ci Xi seized the opportunity to point a finger at the foreigners she hated—the missionaries and businessmen from the West who were colonizing and Christianizing China. On June 21, she declared that all foreigners in China should be “burned and killed” by the Society of the Righteous and Harmonious Fists (dubbed “The Boxers” by the English), who were her willing executioners.



Before the Boxer Rebellion was over, 182 members of evangelical missionary families would die a martyr’s death, along with nearly 32,000 Chinese believers.

Archibald Glover heard rumors of danger for several months before he decided to close the mission station in Luanfu. Perhaps he delayed leaving on account of his wife, Flora, who was six months pregnant, or because of how difficult the trip would be for Hedley and Hope, their two young children. He certainly was worried about the new converts in the churches he worked with in China, and he didn’t want to abandon Miss Gates, a veteran missionary who served with his family. But when Glover was convinced that, as foreigners, they were putting the church in physical danger by remaining, he decided to take Miss Gates and his family to Hankow, a safe city in central China. And so began the trip Glover would later dub “a thousand miles of miracle.”¹

Every mile of the 68-day trip across China was full of danger. In the first few days, wicked men extorted money from the family, and threatened them with death if they did not pay ransom. Later, a rioting crowd stripped them of every

belonging, including their shoes and all but the smallest amount of clothing. They suffered from hunger, cold, exposure, and ridicule.

But in every awful situation, Archie and Flora were able to see God’s hand at work. Over and over again, the family was in terrible danger, and over and over again the Lord provided a way of escape. They reminded each other that they had been allowed to share in the suffering of Christ through these events, but they also pointed out God’s mercy in every small deliverance—when the crowd returned the children’s shoes or when a stranger along the way took pity on them with a cup of water or a place to stay the night.

When Archie and Flora came to the town of Lanchen, it seemed as if it really was the end. They were locked in the small jail along with several jailers, who talked openly of the best way to kill the foreigners. The crowds outside shouted for them to be executed. Archie realized that nothing but the power of God could deliver them. Suddenly, he remembered the Scripture, “Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me” (Psalm 50:15).

Archie, Flora and Miss Gates began to pray to God for rain—a great, gully-washing rain that would convince the townspeople that the Lord God was in control of weather. They knew that the end of the drought would remove the reason the townspeople called for their death. They knelt with the children and prayed out loud in Chinese, so that the guards could understand.

As they poured out their hearts in prayer, God caused the rain to pour from Heaven. Glover said, “Never have I seen such a rain. The rain fell in sheets as if some mighty reservoir had suddenly burst its banks. All that day and far into the night it poured and poured...” In moments, the streets were empty, and the immediate danger was passed. The stunned guards allowed the inmates to open the door to enjoy the rain-washed air. The little group was eventually freed and after many more trials, arrived in Hankow.

When Hudson Taylor heard news of the persecution of believers in the Boxer Rebellion, he said, “Doubtless it means fuller blessing, but through deeper suffering.” I think Glover and his family would agree. Through great suffering they saw great mercy.

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¹ A. E. Glover, *A Thousand Miles of Miracle*, Christian Focus, 2000