

The Life And Death Of Missionaries

John And Betty Stam

Missionaries With The China Inland Mission

by Carl Stam - Grandson Of John Stam



It was at the beginning of the third century that Tertullian of Carthage said that the blood of the martyrs was the seed of the church. Certainly this truth has been seen in the life and death of my great aunt and uncle, John and Betty Stam.

They were young missionaries serving with the China Inland Mission in the early 1930's. Scarcely one year after their marriage in China, they found themselves caught up in the advance of the Communists into the town where they were living. They were captured, held for an exorbitant ransom, marched through the streets of the village, and they were beheaded.

Betty Scott had been raised in China. She was the daughter of a Presbyterian missionary couple. Perhaps her childhood faith, her utter dependence on God, and her preparation for giving her life for the gospel can best be witnessed in the words of her own poetry.

At age ten she wrote:

I cannot live like Jesus
Example though He be
For He was strong and selfless
And I am tied to me.

I cannot live like Jesus
My soul is never free
My will is strong and stubborn
My love is weak and wee.

But I have asked my Jesus
To live His life in me.
I cannot look like Jesus
More beautiful is He
In soul and eye and stature

Than sunrise on the sea.
Behold His warm, His tangible
His dear humanity.

Behold His white perfection
Of purest deity.
Yet Jesus Christ has promised
That we like Him shall be.

As a young woman of eighteen, she wrote this, a poem which Elizabeth Elliot learned as a 12-year-old and copied into her Bible:

Lord, I give up all my own plans and purposes
All my own desires and hopes
And accept Thy will for my life.
I give myself, my life, my all
Utterly to Thee to be Thine forever.
Fill me and seal me with Thy Holy Spirit
Use me as Thou wilt, send me where Thou wilt
And work out Thy whole will in my life at any cost now and forever.

This young woman was ready to worship her Lord in life or in death.

John Stam had grown up in large Dutch Reformed family in Paterson, New Jersey. His father, my great grandfather, came to faith Christ after a woman had given him a Bible written in both English and in Dutch. He read it with the purpose of learning a language. God's purpose was to bring him to the knowledge of and faith in a loving Savior.

John and Betty Stam's gravestone in China properly proclaims the grand purpose of their calling:

John Cornelius Stam
18 January, 1907
"That Christ may be magnified whether
by life or by death." Phil. 1:20

Elizabeth Scott Stam
His Wife
22 February 1906
"For me to live is Christ
and to die is gain." Phil. 1:21

8 Dec. 1934, Miao Sheo, Anhwei
"Be thou faithful unto death and I will give thee a crown of life." Rev.
2:10

Several years after their death, hymnwriter Will Houghton, wrote a song text

in their memory: "By Life, or By Death."

Donald Hustad recalls that it was most often sung as a solo at missions conferences and times when Christians were being challenged to whole-hearted surrender to the Lord in Christian ministry.

Thanks to the providence of God and the courage of the Chinese Christians, their baby daughter was smuggled to safety and raised in the home of her loving grandparents.

The last letter from John was written the day before their death and was found hidden in the clothing and blankets of little Helen Priscilla.

Tsingteh, An.
Dec. 6, 1934

China Inland Mission, Shanghai

Dear Brethren,

My wife, baby and myself are today in the hands of the Communists in the city of Tsingteh. Their demand is twenty thousand dollars for our release.

All our possessions and stores are in their hands, but we praise God for peace in our hearts and a meal tonight. God grant you wisdom in what you do, and us fortitude, courage and peace of heart. He is able-and a wonderful Friend in such a time.

Things happened so quickly this a.m. They were in the city just a few hours after the ever-persistent rumors really became alarming, so that we could not prepare to leave in time. We were just too late.

The Lord bless and guide you, and as for us, may God be glorified whether by life or by death.

In Him,
John C. Stam

Indeed, these young followers of Jesus had prayed that the Lord would be honored in their living and in their dying.

The blood of martyrs had become the seed for a renewed energy in foreign missions. John's alma mater, Moody Bible Institute, experienced a remarkable growth in missionary zeal. When my parents were students at Wheaton College in the early 1940's, they had hundreds of classmates, including many of my Stam relatives, who were preparing for foreign missionary service, at

least in part, because of how God had used the witness and courageous faith of John and Betty Stam.

I count myself blessed to have grown up with this strong missionary heritage. My mother, 77 years old and going strong, has never been to China but “goes to China” every Friday night as she teaches English to the families of Chinese graduate students at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. At present, if you were to ask my 9th grade daughter Clara what she hopes to do after college, she would say that she plans to be a Christian missionary in China.

May God be praised in our living and in our dying. Amen!

SOURCE: <http://www.carlstam.org/familyheritage/jbstam.html>
