

***Singing in the Fire: Christians in Adversity***, by Faith Cook (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1995) (14 Quotes selected by Doug Nichols)

### **1. Small Issues**

We live in a day of small things. These are, by and large, superficial days rather than deep days; weak days rather than robust days; sometimes even despairing days rather than hopeful days - days when faith often burns low, courage fails, eyes grow dim and hands hang down ....

The question is asked and answered in the New Testament, 'Who is he that overcomes the world, but he that believes that Jesus is the Son of God?' (J John 5:5). The preceding verse has announced, 'For whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that overcomes the world - even our faith.' And the Lord Jesus Christ himself adds an exquisite promise: 'To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with me on my throne, even as I also overcame and sat down with my Father on His throne' (Rev. 3:21). [page xi]

### **2. Sold All That He Had**

Like many converted in mature years, John Bradford set out for heaven with earnest zeal. [Thomas] Sampson records that he sold his chains, rings, brooches and jewels, symbols of his unbelieving days, and distributed the proceeds among Christians in need. [page 4]

### **3. Bradford Equals Holy Living**

Only seven years of life remained for John Bradford. But such was the quality of his walk with God that his name has become a by-word for holy living: often he is referred to as 'holy Bradford'. We are told that he would not consider that he had truly prayed until he had 'felt inwardly some smiting of heart for sin and some healing of that wound by faith.' He was ever a penitent in heart and those who observed him reported that he so wept for his sins in secret that they feared he might never smile again, yet he lived so cheerfully in the public eye that it was as if he had never wept. [page 4]

### **4. Into Five Years Was Packed a Life of Spiritual Activity**

Bradford allowed himself little sleep, just one meager meal each day, and he counted it a wasted hour if he had not been able to do good to some by pen, by word or by prayer.

Into his five years of service for his God, he packed a lifetime of spiritual activity. [page 5]

## **5. Joined the Ranks of Cramer, Ridley, and Latimer**

During one brief bright interval in Bradford's two-year imprisonment he was cast, inadvertently it seems, into a single cell with three fellow Reformers and future martyrs:

Thomas Cranmer, Nicholas Ridley and Hugh Latimer. It is not hard to imagine with what earnestness and joy they studied the Scriptures together and encouraged one another to endure to the last. Commenting on these circumstances, Latimer was to write, 'We four were thrust into one chamber, as men not to be accounted of, but, God be thanked, to our great joy and comfort, there did we together read over the New Testament with great deliberation and painful study.' [page 6]

## **6. Bradford and Moorside Died Together for the Faith**

But he did not die alone. A young man, only nineteen years of age, was appointed to be chained to the same stake. It was John Leaf from Kirby Moorside in Yorkshire. Illiterate in terms of human learning, John Leaf had been taught well by the Spirit of God and no pressure of cross-examination could bring him to deny the truths he held dear. Presented with two sheets of paper, one a recantation and the other a statement of his own words at his trial, John Leaf listened carefully as both were read to him. Then taking a pin he pricked his finger and allowed a drop of blood to fall on his own avowed confession. Such was the young man who died with John Bradford.

Approaching the stake, both men fell on their faces in one brief moment of silent prayer. 'Arise and make an end,' said the sheriff impatiently, 'for the press of the people is great. 'And so the martyrs were chained to the stake. Just moments before the fires were lit, John Bradford lifted up his face and hands in one last plea to his countrymen: 'O England, England, repent thee of thy sins. Beware off false anti-christs; take heed they do not deceive you.' He asked forgiveness of any he might have wronged and freely forgave those who so grievously offended against him. After begging the prayers of the people, he turned to address young John Leaf, his fellow-sufferer. The words are unforgettable: 'Be of good comfort, brother; for we shall have a merry supper with the Lord this night!'

John Foxe describes the end in these words: 'He spoke no more words that any man did hear, but embracing the reeds said thus, "Strait is the way and narrow is the gate that leadeth to eternal salvation and few there be that find it.'" From an early account of the martyrdom we learn that he endured the flame 'as a fresh gale of wind in a hot summer's day, confirming by his death the truth of that doctrine he had so diligently and powerfully preached during his life.' So John Leaf and John Bradford joined that 'merry supper with the Lord', and in their dying inscribed the Reformation truths more deeply on the conscience of the nation. 'Us they may prison, they may bind, and bum, as they do,' Bradford had once said, 'but our cause, religion and doctrine, which we confess, they shall never be able to vanquish and put away.' [pages 7-8]

## **7. Am I Ready for God's Use?**

There are so many stones in the brook that you cannot count them. Yet in every ten you cannot find more than one or two that are useable. There was no room in David's pouch for stones which had not been polished smooth. The process of attrition was essential. In the same way those believers who have not yet experienced trials and afflictions, and who have not yet been disciplined by God, are still not ready for his use. What I am anxious to know is whether I myself am qualified to be a 'smooth stone' in the hand of my God. -- Wang Ming-Dao [page 20]

## **8. Baptism of Suffering for the Chinese Church**

A dark day for the Chinese Christian church, it brought with it intense persecution for all Bible-believing men and women who refused to compromise their faith. From that day on Christ's warning that a man's foes would be those of his own household became literally true. Parents were ready to betray their children, and children their parents, in an attempt to curry favour with the new government.

For many years God had been preparing the Chinese church for this baptism of suffering into which it was now plunged. Faithful missionaries had toiled indefatigably, often in remote and unyielding areas, seeing few tangible results for their labour. But it was seed well sown, which was to grow silently despite persecution. More than this, God had raised up Chinese pastors - men of ability and godliness who had taught the people both by preaching and the written word: men of the calibre of John Sung, David Yeng, and, of course, Wang Ming-Dao. The *Spiritual Food Quarterly* had been in circulation for almost twenty-five years and many of these messages were recalled and reread when the people faced a famine of the Word of God. Some of the sermons

seemed to carry an almost prophetic note, as if the preacher had been secretly prepared by God in the themes he chose. Preaching on Peter's denial of Christ, Wang Ming-Dao showed tenderness and sensitivity towards believers who might fail in the hour of trial: 'There are many saints like Peter. In a moment of weakness they stumble and fall; they are guilty of giving offence to their Lord ... At such a time their greatest need is to be aware of the Lord's forgiveness and pardon; to become conscious of the Lord's compassion and love.' [page 26]

## **9. The Chinese People Went to God**

One by one the voices of faithful church leaders had been silenced and their people scattered. Wang could now say sadly: 'We have nothing! no pastors, no churches, no Bibles, "" nothing! We only have God. Therefore we go to him in desperation.' [page 27]

## **10. Paid the Price to Preserve the Word of God**

Now, however, no printer would dare accept his material, and Wang was obliged to set up the type himself for the *Spiritual Food Quarterly*, often labouring far into the night. And so to encourage frightened believers to remain steadfast, he wrote in July, 1955:

We are ready to pay any price to preserve the Word of God and we are equally willing to sacrifice anything in order to preach the Word of God ... Dear brothers and sisters, let us be strong through the mighty power of our Lord ... Let us be prepared to be faithful to the Lord at any cost. Don't be cowards! Don't be weary! Don't give way! Don't compromise! The battle is indeed furious ... but God's glory will be manifest there.

[page 27-28]

## **11. Ming-Dao's Last Sermon**

On 7 August he preached a sermon - in fact it was his last - on 'The Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners,' and at the close of the service he distributed printed copies of his message. It contained these heroic words: 'We shall make whatever sacrifice is required of us in being faithful to God. Regardless of how others may twist the truth and slander us, we because of our faith shall remain steadfast.'

[page 28]

## **12. Ming-Dao Imprisoned for 23 Years**

Wang Ming-Dao was fifty-five years of age and at the height of his usefulness as a spiritual leader when he was imprisoned. He emerged twenty-three years later, a frail old man, deaf and nearly blind. [page 28-29]

## **13. The Word of God Sustained Ming-Dao**

Sometimes he was seriously ill often mistreated, always denied access to any means of grace, but Wang did not waver. To what did he attribute his ability to overcome? It was to the sustaining power of the Word of God, memorized in early years. In his own words, 'It was the Word of God that gave me the very best moment of my life when I overcame my lies ... If I were not for God's protection I would be dead by now, but it was the Word of God that rescued me.' [page 32]

## **14. The Fire of Affliction**

When the fire of affliction draws songs of praise from us, then indeed are we purified, and our God is glorified ... Singing in the fire! Yes! God helping us, if that is the only way to get harmony out of these hard apathetic hearts, let the furnace be heated seven times hotter than before. -- Susannah Spurgeon [page 34]