The Chinese Realm Dedicated for the Preaching of the Gospel

The Act Accomplished by Elder David O. McKay, in the Authority of the Holy Apostleship

By Hugh J. Cannon, President of the Liberty Stake of Zion

Elder David O. McKay, of the Council of the Twelve, and the writer, arrived in Peking, the chief city of China, Saturday evening, January 8, 1921. The horde of ragged and revolting mendicants, grimy porters and insistent jinrikisha men, who fought noisily for possession of us, as we emerged from the station, was not such as to inspire a feeling of affectionate brotherhood. However, we had gone to Peking to do the Lord’s will, as nearly as we could ascertain what it was. His inspiration rested upon his servant in charge, and Elder McKay decided that the land should be dedicated and set apart for the preaching of the gospel of the Master.

It seemed most desirable that this should be done on the following day, as that was the only Sabbath we should be in Peking. But where, in the midst of that clamor and confusion, could a suitable spot be found? The city lies on a level, barren plain. There are no forests, and, as far as we knew, no groves nor even clumps of trees. We were wholly unfamiliar with the city and had met no one who could enlighten us.

If we went outside the surrounding walls, there was reason to believe no secluded spot could be found nor the ever-present crowd of supplicants avoided.

January 9 dawned clear and cold. With no definite goal in mind, we left the hotel and walked through the legation quarter, under the shadow of dear Old Glory, out into what is known as “The Forbidden City,” past the crumbling temples reared to an “Unknown God.” Directed, as we believe, by a Higher Power, we came to a grove of cypress trees, partially surrounded by a moat, and walked to its extreme northwest corner, then retraced our steps until reaching a tree with divided trunk which had attracted our attention when we first saw it.

“This is the spot,” said Elder McKay.

A reposeful peace hovered over the place which seemed already hallowed; one felt that it was almost a profanation to tread thereon with covered head and feet.

Two men were in sight, but they seemed oblivious to our presence, and they soon left the grove. There, in the heart of
a city with a million inhabitants, we were entirely alone, except for the presence of a divinely sweet and comforting Spirit.

Elder David O. McKay and the tree under which he, and Elder Hugh J. Cannon, stood while he dedicated the land of China for the preaching of the gospel, Sunday, January 9, 1921. This grove is within the walls of the "Forbidden City," Peking, China.

An act destined to affect the lives of four hundred and fifty millions of people now living, as well as of millions and perhaps
billions yet unborn, calls forth feelings of profound solemnity, and that, too, despite the fact that the vast majority of those affected may die in ignorance of the event.

After a prayer had been offered and the spot dedicated as a place of supplication and for the fulfilment of the object of our visit, Elder David O. McKay, in the authority of the Holy Apostleship, dedicated and set apart the Chinese Realm for the preaching of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, whenever the Church authorities shall deem it advisable to send out missionaries for that purpose. Never was the power of his calling more apparent in his utterances. He blessed the land and its benighted people, and supplicated the Almighty to acknowledge this blessing. He prayed that famine and pestilence might be stayed, that the government might become stable, either through its own initiative, or by the intervention of other powers, and that superstition and error, which for ages have enveloped the people, might be discarded, and Truth take their place. He supplicated the Lord to send to this land broad-minded and intelligent men and women, that upon them might rest the spirit of discernment and the power to comprehend the Chinese nature, so that in the souls of this people an appreciation of the glorious gospel might be awakened.

It was such a prayer and blessing as must be recognized in heaven, and though the effects may not be suddenly apparent, they will be none the less real.

And never, perhaps, has there been a land more greatly in need of heavenly aid. One cannot help but feel that if it were not for the watchful and unselfish attitude of the United States, China’s national rights would very quickly be invaded. With the largest population of any country in the world, she is wholly impotent, and in addition to her own helplessness, a curse seems to overshadow her. Millions of her people are starving. It is estimated by the committee in charge of the relief work that five dollars will save a life, but the five dollars must come from abroad.

And yet, if this nation would observe one of the simplest of the Lord’s commandments, that of the monthly fast, and give the meals thus saved to those in need, the famine problem would be solved. This would furnish two meals daily to each of the fifteen million sufferers.

The cypress tree is a symbol of sorrow and sadness in China, and this cypress grove seemed a peculiarly fitting place in which to invoke the blessing of heaven upon this oppressed and sorrowing people. The accompanying picture shows the tree, and Brother McKay, where the dedicatory prayer was offered.

At Shan-Hai-Quan, the point at which that wonder of wonders, the great Chinese wall, meets the sea, and on the frontier
of the famine district, we took a picture which we are presenting herewith. Though the morning was bitterly cold, we judged it to be zero weather, some of these people were nearly naked. The shreds of patches which only partially covered their emaciated and shivering bodies might well feel complimented at being called rags.

One contemplates China's past accomplishments with a feeling akin to awe. We respect old age, and especially so when, with antiquity, we see achievement; and it is well to remember that this land had a highly developed civilization nearly twenty-five centuries before the Christian era.

Notwithstanding her present pitiably inane condition, we have met some admirable Chinese people, and cherish the sincere hope that at no very distant day the light of the gospel may penetrate to present overwhelming darkness. Though the abject misery we beheld appealed to our tenderest sympathies, gold and silver we could not give, but the door was unlocked for them through which they may enter into eternal life.

*Enroute from Yokohama to Honolulu, Feb. 1, 1921.*