

Asia Harvest



Swing the Sickle for the Harvest is Ripe! (Joel 3:13)

1903 60th Place, Suite M1204 - Bradenton, FL 34203 - USA

Tel: (877) 868-5025

Fax: (877) 868-5025

Email: office@asiaharvest.org

Website: www.asiaharvest.org

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Sadhu Sundar Singh

The Apostle with the Bleeding Feet

From the Front Lines

with Paul & Joy Hattaway

“There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores and longing to eat what fell from the rich man’s table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores. The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham’s side. The rich man also died and was buried. In hell, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side.... [The rich man said], ‘I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my father’s house, for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.’”
(Luke 16:19-23, 27-28)

Over the years, as we have served the Lord and been involved with His work in Asia, we have seen how people in ministry (including us) can so easily be sidetracked away from the things that matter to God. We can get too busy dealing with life’s problems and challenges, and our focus can easily come off the things that matter most. Of course this is not just something that happens to people in “ministry,” but to all Christians. As we travel to various places we have seen how busy Christians have become, especially those living in Western nations. Many people hardly seem able to slow down and enjoy the Lord or their families. This is a real trick of Satan, and is designed to sidetrack us from what is important.

So what should be the most important things in our lives? Of course fellowship with the Lord Jesus must always come first, and our families next. When it comes to our interaction with the world, we must seek to cultivate a heart of action for the lost people around us. Reaching the lost must be a key motivation and aspect of any Christian’s life. Tragically and ironically, we can get so wrapped up in church life that our hearts become dulled to those things that are the heartbeat of our Heavenly Father.

In the account of the rich man and Lazarus that Jesus told in Luke 16, we read how the rich man, who was being tormented in hell, begged Abraham to send Lazarus to warn his five brothers about the horrible place of torment he now found himself in.

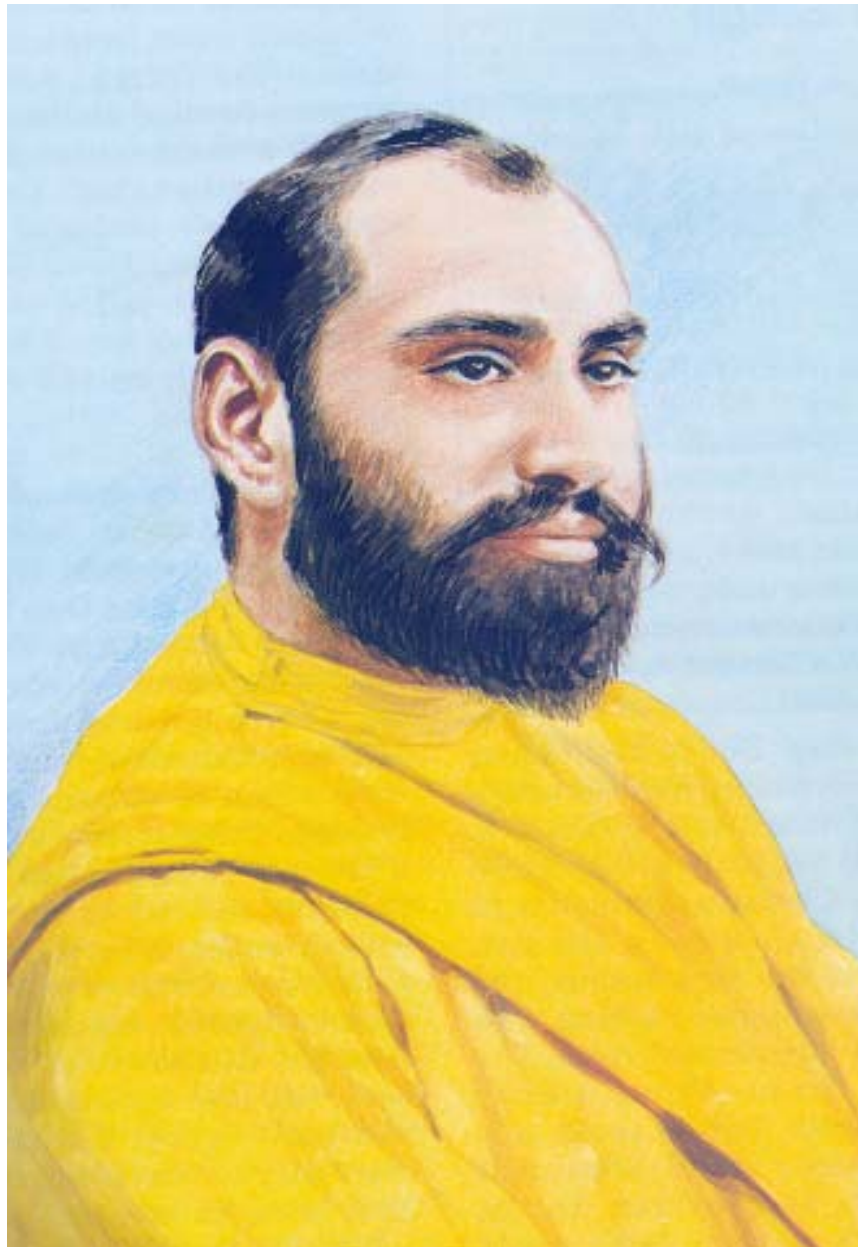
Dear friend, this should be a sober warning to us all. Could it be that people suffering in hell, like the rich man, have more passion to see the lost saved than we do? Is it possible that the lost are perishing all around us, while the devil has many of God's children focused on infighting, petty church politics, and arguments about the color of the church carpet?

Reaching the lost was always the driving force of Jesus' ministry here on the earth. He spoke about it, demonstrated it, and taught His disciples that God's heart is such that He would leave 99 sheep that are safe in order to pursue the one that is lost. Lots of Christians want to talk about signs that the world is coming to an end, yet they somehow miss the one main sign that Jesus said would take place before His return: ***"And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come"*** (Matthew 24:14). The heart of Jesus is always towards pursuing the lost and bringing them into the Father's kingdom. Only when the harvest has fully come in will our Lord Jesus return. We should also note that the very last instructions Jesus gave to His disciples before returning to heaven were, ***"Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned"*** (Mark 16:15-16). Aren't you glad somebody shared the Good News with you?

Our adversary is skilled at taking our focus away from the lost and onto our own needs and problems. It seems that first and foremost the devil does all he can to prevent people from being saved by the precious Blood of Jesus. If that fails, he then works at making the Christian lukewarm for God's kingdom and ineffective at reaching the lost. He hopes to deceive us so that we lose all sense of urgency, and cause us to give the majority of our time to things that are of no consequence, and little time to those things that count for eternity. We live as though we will be in this world forever, even though David reminded us, ***"Man is like a breath; his days are like a fleeting shadow"*** (Psalm 144:4). In this newsletter we take a look at the life of Sadhu Sundar Singh, a man who was fully committed to reaching the lost from the moment of his conversion to the day he died. May we become as serious about God as this Indian man was!

Dear friend, if this brief message has spoken to you, we encourage you to stop what you are doing and talk with our loving God. Ask the Lord to give you His heart, and to refocus your life so that the things that are a priority to the heart of God also become your priority. Cry out to God, and pray that he will reconfigure your life and busy schedule. ***"Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain a heart of wisdom"*** (Psalm 90:12).

Sadhu Sundar Singh - The 'Apostle with the Bleeding Feet'



Sundar Singh, the son of a wealthy Sikh landowner, was born in Patiala state of North India in 1889. Considering his background, nobody would have guessed that this man would one day be remembered as the most famous Indian evangelist of the early 20th century. As a young man, Sundar's mother took him every week to sit at the feet of a *sadhu*—an ascetic Hindu holy man—who lived in a remote forest. When their son was old enough, his parents wanted the best for Sundar so they sent him to a Christian school run by missionaries, so that he could learn English. When Singh was 14 his mother suddenly died. This tragedy plunged the teenager into deep despair and violence against anything to do with religion. He began to hate the missionaries,

“...persecuted their Christian converts, and ridiculed their faith. In final defiance of their religion, he bought a Bible and burned it page by page in his home compound while his friends watched. The same night he went to his room determined to commit suicide on a railway line.

However, before dawn, he wakened his father to announce that he had seen Jesus Christ in a vision and heard His voice. Henceforth he would follow Christ forever, he declared.”¹

Singh later shared what happened on that night when he decided to kill himself:

“Jesus came into my room. As I was praying for the last time a

bright cloud of light suddenly filled the room, and out of the brightness came the face and figure of Jesus. He spoke to me.... ‘How long will you persecute Me? I have come to save you. You were praying to know the right way; why do you not take it? I am the Way.’ He spoke in Hindustani, and He spoke to me.”²

Sundar Singh's father and other family members did not share the excitement of his new found faith. His enraged father, Sher Singh, held a ‘farewell feast’ where he publicly disowned Sundar, pronouncing him “dead.” Several hours after the feast Sundar fell violently ill and realized he had been poisoned by his own family. He rushed to a nearby Christian hospital and his life was spared.

On his 16th birthday, Singh was publicly baptized at Simla in north India. A year later, in October 1906, he shocked everyone by appearing in a yellow robe and turban—the dress of a *sadhu*. He declared, **“I am not worthy to follow in the steps of my Lord, but, like Him, I want no home, no possessions. Like Him I will belong to the road, sharing the sufferings of my people, eating with those who will give me shelter, and telling all men of the love of God.”³**

In his formative Christian years Singh became close friends with a British missionary named Charles Andrews. Singh's zeal for the things of God soon became legendary. He was known to pray several hours each day and to fast for weeks at a time. He took a vow of poverty and decided to hold nothing back from the cause

of Christ. His travels not only took him to Hindu, Muslim and Buddhist settlements throughout the Himalayas, but also to Europe, America, Australia and various Asian countries where he spoke to large audiences. On one trip, while still a teenager, Singh walked barefoot through fanatical Muslim territories in the Punjab, Kashmir, Afghanistan, and through parts of the present-day Pakistan. In all the places Singh went he wore the garments of a *sadhu*. Soon

after the start of his ministry, Christians gave Singh the nickname, “the apostle with the bleeding feet.” On a number of occasions he reported being helped by angels, and the only word to describe some of his escapes from death is miraculous.

On many occasions he was arrested, beaten, and stoned. He faced incredible hardship, yet he carried on, a trophy of God’s grace in one of the harshest spiritual

climates in the world. There were many admirers of Sadhu Sundar Singh, but also many critics. For many of the missionaries in India his ways were just too radical to embrace. Those who enjoyed safe Christianity felt threatened by the intensity of his commitment and his methods of operation. Missionaries persuaded Singh to enrol at a Bible college in Lahore, so that he would be “equipped for the ministry.” He graduated and was ordained, but in 1911 he had a change of heart. He handed back his preacher’s license and returned to the simple life of a *sadhu*.

The mysterious Tibet had attracted Singh since he was a young boy, and he made his first preaching trip there in 1908. In those days the only way to reach Tibet was on foot, across the highest mountain passes in the world. Each journey required a punishing trek of several weeks.

In 1912 Singh decided to preach the gospel for several months each summer in Tibet, Nepal, and areas



***A man from the Indian side of the Himalayas,
still waiting to hear the Gospel.***

along the Northern India border. He encountered much opposition in these dark places, and many attempts were made on his life. The methods of torture included being sewn into a wet yak skin and left in the sun to be squeezed to death as the skin tightened; being smothered with cloth filled with leeches and scorpions to sting him and suck his blood; and being tied to a tree overnight as bait for wild animals.

On one occasion Singh reached a Tibetan town called Razar. He was arrested for illegally entering the country, and the head lama sentenced him to death. Buddhists are forbidden to take life, so the lama had Singh cast into a well, and the iron cover locked until he had perished. The smell of the putrid water made the evangelist's soul recoil, for

"The bottom of the well was covered with dead men's bones and rotting flesh, and the stench was almost overwhelming. It was far worse than anything he had ever experienced before. He was in that well for two days and nights, and on the third day he heard a sound above. The cover of the well was being removed and then a rope was let down and a voice told him to take hold of it. As he breathed in [the fresh air] he felt himself strangely revived. But he was alone. There was no sign of his rescuer...."



A Tibetan lady in her finest dress.

The following day, back in the village, news reached the head lama that the sadhu who had been thrown down the well was out and about again preaching. Again Sundar was brought before him. How had he escaped, the head lama demanded, but all Sundar could tell him was what had happened, and that he had seen no one. Furiously the lama asserted that someone must have stolen the

key to the well, and ordered that a search be made for it. No one was more taken aback than he when it was eventually found on his own girdle.”⁴

By the early 1920s Singh's health was beginning to deteriorate from the hardships he had endured, even though he was only in his early 30s. He made another trip to Tibetan areas in 1923 and came back exhausted. For the next several years he continued to minister, refusing to belong to any denomination or to start one himself. During these years he turned his hand to writing books. These encountered great success, being translated into numerous languages. In 1927 he again attempted to enter Tibet, but was forced to return due to illness.

Finally, in June, 1929, he disappeared while inside Tibet and was never seen again. He had told friends of his intention to go back to the Mount Kailash area, and to possibly visit Razar, the town east of Lake Manasarowar where he had been thrown into the well years before. Singh had heard there were a few Christians living there, and he wanted to go and see if it were true. Just how he died remains a mystery, but rumors circulated that Singh had been put to death by enraged Buddhist monks.

Sadhu Sundar Singh's life was one of total commitment and sacrifice to the cause of Jesus Christ. The 'apostle with the bleeding feet' set a tremendous example for many other Christians to follow, and he remains widely respected among Asia's Christians to this day.

Notes

¹ John Woodbridge (ed.), *More than Conquerors: Portraits of Believers from all Walks of Life* (Chicago: Moody Bible Institute, 1992), 148.

² Cyril J. Davey, *The Story of Sadhu Sundar Singh* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1963), 32-33.

³ Woodbridge, *More than Conquerors*, 148.

⁴ Phyllis Thompson, *Sadhu Sundar Singh: A Biography of the Remarkable Indian Holy Man and Disciple of Jesus Christ* (Carlisle: OM Books, 1992), 75-76.

Note: This profile of Sadhu Sundar Singh has been adapted from Paul Hattaway's new book, *China's Book of Martyrs*. Please see our last newsletter about how to order it, or you can do so from our website: www.asiaharvest.org

