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JOHN & BETTY STAM



They Lived—and Died—for Christ

Betty Scott couldn't help but notice the tall, good-looking young man in the "Prayer Meeting for China" at Moody Bible Institute in 1930. Born Elizabeth Alden Scott (her middle name hinted of her famous *Mayflower* ancestors, John and Priscilla Alden), Betty had been raised in China by missionary parents, and her heart still called it home. But what was John Stam's interest in China?

A year younger than Betty Scott, John Stam had also been raised in a devout Christian home dedicated to missions—on the home front. His immigrant parents had founded the Star of Hope Mission in Paterson, New Jersey, where many of Paterson's poor found not only food and comfort, but also hope and forgiveness by trusting Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. The two young people found they had much in common: a zest for life, a love for people, a desire to serve God one hundred percent, and a call to missions. But even though they had fallen in love, Christ and His call on their lives came first. An official engagement would have to "wait and see."

Betty was accepted as a missionary candidate by China Inland Missions (CIM) and sailed for China in the fall of 1931. Graduating from Moody a year later, John was also accepted as a missionary candidate by CIM. Betty was waiting to meet him in Shanghai, China. *Now* they could move forward in serving God *together*.

But their year of engagement still meant separation. John plunged into language study in Anking, in southeast Anhwei Province, while Betty had been temporarily assigned to Fowyang, in northwest Anhwei Province. Both knew that a life in China would be full of uncertainties, not the least of which was an anti-Christian movement, fueled by Communist forces battling Nationalist forces, that threatened both Chinese Christians and foreign missionaries alike.

At last! A Western-style wedding in Shanghai on October 25, 1933, a honeymoon in Tsingtao, where Betty had grown up, and a temporary assignment to Suancheng under the oversight of veteran missionaries Mr. and Mrs. George Birch. Several walking mission trips in the mountainous province took them to outstations to encourage small groups of Chinese Christians. And then, on September 11, 1934, a child was born, Helen Priscilla Stam.

Baby Helen's young parents were thrilled to finally receive their assignment: to open a mission station in Tsingteh. Rumors were flying that Communist forces were advancing, but local magistrates promised protection for the foreigners. So with hearts full of praise, the young missionaries arrived in Tsingteh and began making friends with their Chinese neighbors.

The Stams had been in Tsingteh only a few weeks when the city was routed in a surprise attack by Communists on December 7, 1934. The following day, following a ten-mile march to Miaoshao, John and Betty Stam were executed with the sword. By a miracle of God's grace, baby Helen was spared . . . only the first of many miracles to sprout from these two "seeds" that fell into the ground and died.

PRAISE

Letters Home

It was hard to get into a good grump around John Stam. The fellow had the delightful ability—or annoying habit, depending on your point of view—to see God at work in the most difficult situation, and he had the nerve to praise God for the smallest blessing even when surrounded by hardship.

While his classmates at Moody Bible Institute in the early 1930s were grumbling about all the homework they had to do, John added several small jobs to his study load just to make ends meet. Instead of complaining, he wrote to his father, Peter Stam: *“The Lord has wonderfully shown himself to me as Jehovah-jireh [the Lord will provide]. . . . How I do thank Him for this past year! I would not have had it otherwise for all the ease of a bank balance.”*

John had already finished college when he decided to go to Moody Bible Institute to prepare for Christian service in China. Like any normal twenty-three-year-old, he hoped someday to meet “the girl of his dreams” . . . but probably wondered whether *any* girl would want to share a life of hardship on the mission field. He could hardly believe the goodness of God when he was introduced to Betty Scott, a sweet-faced girl with a friendly, outgoing nature who had grown up

in China as a “missionary kid” and had already been accepted by China Inland Mission. The only hitch: She was sailing for China in September of 1931—and he hadn’t even finished Moody yet, much less been accepted by CIM as a missionary!

He swallowed the urge to ask her to marry him and let her go. But he didn’t sulk. If *God* wanted them together, God would work it out.

When John finally learned that he had been accepted by CIM and would sail for China on the *Empress of Japan* in late summer of 1932, he finally wrote Betty the letter he had written a thousand times in his mind: Would she marry him so together they could serve God as husband and wife in China?

But he had received no reply by the time the *Empress* sailed. Naturally John was a little worried. Had Betty changed her mind?

But when the *Empress* pulled into Shanghai harbor, John was overjoyed to find Betty waiting to meet him. His letter had gone to the wrong address but had finally caught up to her. Not only that, but she had come to Shanghai to meet her parents, who were returning from furlough, but they had been delayed—so she was still there when John arrived. And her answer was . . . *yes*.

Another letter sailed home to Paterson, New Jersey, by return ship: *“I still cannot cease praising the Lord and wondering at His goodness in bringing Betty to Shanghai and keeping her there until I came! . . . To me it has been a wonderful illustration of the fact that when we do ‘seek first’ the kingdom of God, although our efforts may be blundering, He does faithfully add the ‘all things.’”*

John could hardly contain his joy after only two days of wedded bliss. He decided to write a letter to his parents *“on some typewriter around here, before our blessings pile up so high that I may forget some of them.”* The honeymoon was short-lived, however, and the young couple found themselves plunged once more into language study and sharing meals with the Birches, an older missionary couple in Suan-

cheng. Not exactly the privacy most newlyweds desire, but John wrote, "I do thank the Lord for bringing me to this [mission] station, for there are many fine Christians here. . . ."

A year later, John and Betty were settling into their first real mission assignment: the city of Tsingteh in the southeast corner of Anhwei Province. In spite of rumors of Communist aggression, in spite of the fact that twenty-seven Protestant missionaries had been killed in China in the past ten years (1924–1934), in spite of isolation—no cars, no telephones—John wrote to his parents, "We do praise the Lord for the privilege of being here." And on December 5, 1934: "Things are always happening otherwise than one expects . . . [but] The Lord helps us to be quite satisfied, whatever He sends our way."

Two days later that "satisfaction in the Lord" was put to the test. . . .



*Praise is not dependent on changing circumstances,
but knowing that in all circumstances, God is good.*

FROM GOD'S WORD:

The Lord is good to all. . . . Everything you have made will praise you (Psalm 145:9–10, NIV).

LET'S TALK ABOUT IT:

1. Why do you think John Stam was so ready to praise God for everything?
2. What is the hardest thing you have ever faced? Can you find something to praise God for in that situation?
3. Have you praised God today for anything? It's not too late.

TRUST

“We’re Going to Heaven”

Three-month-old Helen Priscilla giggled and splashed in the wooden bucket of warm water that served as her bathtub. “Look, John,” laughed Betty Stam, holding tight to her slippery daughter. “Helen thinks this is great fun.”

Loud knocking interrupted the early-morning bath time in the China Inland Mission house in Tsingteh, Anhwei Province. Betty heard her husband go to the door, followed by a babble of high-pitched voices in Chinese. “Hide! Hide!”

Wrapping baby Helen in a towel, Betty hurried into the main room. “John? What is it?”

John Stam turned to his wife, concern in his gray eyes. “Communist soldiers . . . they’ve captured the city. All means of escape have been cut off.”

Betty could hear people running and screaming in the street. She clutched the squirming baby to her chest. “We must pray—it is our only hope.”

The young missionary couple called their two frightened Chinese helpers and knelt in prayer. While they were still praying, soldiers in the uniforms of the Red Army burst into the house. The head soldier

demanded money and jewelry. While John tried to comply with their demands, Betty brought out a tray of hot tea and cakes and offered them to the soldiers. But the soldiers were angry at the small amount of money John was able to come up with. They tied John's hands and took him away; shortly they returned for Betty and the baby.

The soldiers allowed John to write a letter to China Inland Mission explaining their demand for \$20,000 in ransom. The letter was dated December 6, 1934, and ended with the words, "*... as for us, may God be glorified whether by life or by death.*"

Panic and chaos reigned in the city. The soldiers looted and killed many outright; others were taken captive. Six thousand strong, the Red Army evacuated the next morning, marching the captives over the mountains to their next destination: Miaosheo. John and Betty knew the Wang family, Christians in the town, but didn't dare contact them. But the local postmaster recognized them and cried out: "Where are you going?"

A slight smile crossed John's face. "I don't know where they're going," he called back, "but we're going to heaven!"

The second night of their captivity, the little missionary family was locked in a bedroom of the house of a rich man who had fled Miaosheo. John was tied to a bedpost, unable to move. Betty was left free to tend to the baby as best she could. Knowing that death could come at any moment, the newlyweds comforted each other. At least they were together. And nothing could happen unless God allowed it. Their greatest concern was little Helen. Oh, how they longed to protect her. But God knew. . . .

Dawn was barely breaking over the mountains when the soldiers marched back into the house. They ordered John and Betty to leave the baby and come with them. Quickly Betty bundled the baby warmly and laid her in the middle of the big bed. With a last tender look, her hands were bound and she was pushed after her husband.

The young couple was led through the streets as the soldiers

jeered the “foreigners” and called the townspeople to come witness their execution. A man they recognized—a believer—pushed out of the crowd and begged the soldiers to let them go. They ignored him and took the Stams to a hillside out of town. Again the man begged for their lives, this time on his knees. The soldiers laughed. “Are you a Christian, too?” they jeered. The man was promptly arrested and led away.

It was over in a few moments. John was pushed to his knees; a sword flashed. Betty fell to her knees beside him. The sword again whistled through the air.

The soldiers thought that was the end of that. They left two hated foreigners crumpled in the dirt. But John and Betty Stam were already meeting their Savior in heaven . . . and their testimony was swelling like a tidal wave across the world.



*Trust in God's sovereignty can bring peace
even in the face of death.*

FROM GOD'S WORD:

I trust in God. I will not be afraid. What can people do to me? (Psalm 56:11, NCV).

LET'S TALK ABOUT IT:

1. What did John and Betty Stam know about death that their captors didn't know?
2. Why can we trust God even when our lives are in danger?
3. How can you develop the kind of trust in God that results in peace, not panic?

VICTORY

Baby in a Rice Basket

The Red Army pulled out of Miaosheo and camped about three miles away. Under cover of darkness a little group of Chinese Christian refugees crept back into town to the home of the Wangs. The house had been looted, but that was the least of the Wangs' concerns. While in the hills they had heard a rumor that two foreigners, a husband and wife, had been executed by the Communists. That had to be their American friends, John and Betty Stam from Tsingteh! But . . . was the rumor true? And what about their baby girl?

Evangelist Lo spoke up. "I will see what I can find out." Leaving his wife and little son at the Wangs', Lo made his way around the town, quietly asking questions. The frightened people hurried on or pretended not to hear. Maybe the army had left spies in the town.

Lo was just about to give up his search when an old woman pulled on his sleeve. "I heard a baby cry," she whispered in his ear. "Up there." And she pointed to a big deserted house.

The house had been ransacked. Lo searched room after room, but all he found were signs that the Red Army had bunked there. He listened. All was still. With heavy heart, he turned to leave. And then he heard it.

The muffled wail of a tiny baby.

He followed the sound. There in the middle of a big bed lay a small sleeping bag. Inside was a very angry baby, waving her little fist. Hardly daring to breathe, the Chinese evangelist picked up the baby and held her close. He was holding a miracle.

Inside the bag Lo found evidence of a mother's love: a clean gown, several diapers, and two five-dollar bills pinned to the clothes.

But where were Helen Priscilla's parents? A few more questions, and Lo came upon the scene of the tragedy just outside the town—two bodies still lying in a pool of their own blood. The baby had been alone on the bed for a day and a half.

Hurrying back to the Wangs with his precious bundle, Lo reported all he had seen. Plans were quickly made: The Wangs would find a way to bury the bodies of John and Betty Stam; Lo and his wife would try to smuggle the baby to safety.

Using the money Betty Stam had pinned to the baby clothes, Lo found a man willing to carry two large rice baskets over the mountains. Inside one was the Los' four-year-old son, sick from exposure and dehydration. Inside the other was tiny Helen Priscilla Stam.

In villages along the way, Mrs. Lo found Chinese women willing to nurse the motherless child for a small fee. Finally in a larger town they were able to buy a tin of Lactogen, a nursing formula. Now Mrs. Lo was able to put baby Helen on a regular feeding schedule.

Five days later Mr. and Mrs. Lo stumbled into the yard of the China Inland Mission house in Suancheng. Mr. Birch, an American missionary, opened the door. Mrs. Lo handed him the bundle in her arms. "This is all we have left," she said brokenly.

Confused, Mr. Birch uncovered the face of the sleeping child. His eyes widened. Only a month or so earlier, he had dedicated Helen Priscilla to God in a special Sunday service when John and Betty Stam stopped in Suancheng on their way to their mission in Tsingteh. Overcome with both grief and joy, he wept.

Helen Priscilla Stam was taken to a hospital, where she was pronounced in perfect health, then delivered safely to her missionary grandparents, Dr. and Mrs. C. E. Scott. After hearing the news of John and Betty's death, her other grandparents in New Jersey received a telegram from a friend: "*Remember, you gave John to God, not to China.*"

Jesus said, "Unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds" (John 12:24, NIV). Hearing about the martyrdom of John and Betty Stam during a memorial service at Moody Bible Institute, seven hundred students stood to their feet to give their lives to missionary service.



Victory knows that nothing can separate us from the love of God, and even death can result in new life.

FROM GOD'S WORD:

Death, where is your victory? Death, where is your pain? . . . But we thank God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 15:55, NCV).

LET'S TALK ABOUT IT:

1. How did John and Betty Stam experience victory even though they were killed by the Communists?
2. What do you think the telegram to John's parents meant: "*Remember, you gave John to God, not to China*"?
3. What does "victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" mean to you?