

BROTHER BAKHT SINGH—A SAINT OF GOD AN OVERVIEW OF HIS LIFE AND MINISTRY

**"If any man serve Me, him will my Father honor." John 12:26
". . . he being dead, yet speaketh." Hebrews 11:4b**

On Friday, September 22, 2000, the city of Hyderabad came to a stand still--the Hebron, Hermon compounds, all adjacent roads and the main road (Chikkadapalli) between Golconda Cross Roads and Narayanaguda Cemetery, were like a sea of saints, numbering according to some estimates, a quarter of a million (two and one half lakhs). Shops and offices were closed. Traffic was diverted. Police and law enforcement officers struggled in vain to control the wave of multitudes that participated in the funeral procession. It took about three hours for the procession to cover the distance of three kilometers from Hebron to the cemetery. The funeral procession turned out to be the largest gospel procession Hyderabad had ever witnessed, where the weeping saints inched forward holding Bibles and Scripture banners, singing and praising God. What a witness for Christ and Him crucified. It was not a typical funeral procession but it was a victory parade for Christ triumphant, in honor of His humble servant who served Him so faithfully for about 70 years. It seemed as though the Lord had accomplished so much even through the death of His beloved servant. The Lord was greatly glorified and magnified as an unprecedented throng of saints shook the city for Christ by proclaiming the gospel as they went. It was so awesome and glorious. People desiring to take a last glimpse of the casket containing the body of Bro. Bakht Singh climbed on trees, balconies and roofs of offices and houses along the three-kilometer stretch of Chikkadapalli Road. Hyderabad has never seen anything like it and probably never will. Even in church history a funeral procession of this magnitude has seldom occurred. The unusual occurrences in nature before and after his homecall reminded us that he was a man sent from God for the edification of His body and for His eternal glory. For example, just a few hours before he slept in Christ on Sunday, September 17th at 6:05 AM, there was an earthquake in and around Hyderabad coupled with continuous and unusual thundering and lightening. Lights were out and darkness blanketed the area for a while. Then on Friday, September 22nd, just before his funeral as the casket was being carried out from Hebron at about 11:30 AM while the sun was shining brightly, a rainbow circled the sun for a short time. As the rainbow disappeared, a shining ring, which looked like a "crown," appeared around the sun. Then suddenly scores and scores of pigeons flew over Hebron as the funeral procession proceeded to the cemetery.

People came from all over India and from around the world to pay their last homage and tribute to their spiritual father and saint of God, Bro. Bakht Singh. Weeping saints from across denominational barriers, languages, tribes and colors gathered together, praising God for every remembrance of this man of God who was indeed God's gift to the church of the Lord Jesus Christ world wide. News of his homecall spread like wildfire and over 600,000 came to pay their last tribute to him from Sunday, September 17th through Friday September 22nd. His passing away brought an end to an era. Future church historians may refer to this period as Bro. Bakht Singh's era.

What is the reason for such an outpouring of love, tears and honor for this simple man of God who began his ministry as an unknown itinerant preacher about 70 years ago in Colonial India? There are many reasons, but let me cite at least seven for this unprecedented honor showered upon him by God. His life and ministry exemplified the life and ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ as well as the Apostle Paul. John 12:24-26 says, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit. He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal. If any man serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there shall also my servant be: if any man serve me, him will my Father honor." Acts 20:24 says, "But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God."

- 1) He was a grain of wheat that was willing to fall into the ground and die.
- 2) He followed the footsteps of his Master.
- 3) He loved the Lord more than his own life.
- 4) He did not count his life dear unto himself.
- 5) He finished the race with joy.
- 6) He fulfilled the ministry, which he received from the Lord.
- 7) He demonstrated the grace of God by his life and example.

Brother Bakht Singh was the spiritual father of tens of thousands in Asia as well as a spiritual role model and inspiration to believers across the world. He was India's foremost evangelist, revivalist and indigenous church planter who founded churches based on New Testament principles. In many respects all the five gifts mentioned in Ephesians 4:11 were evident in him. "And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers." No other saint of God was used more mightily than this man of God to turn many to righteousness in India. No other man of God had been used of God to spiritually impact his generation more than Brother Bakht Singh. Being a man he too had his flaws and frailties, but his spiritual strengths far outweighed his human weaknesses. Like the Apostle Paul he could say, "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith." II Timothy 4:7

Brother Bakht Singh was born to Hindu parents in Punjab (which is now part of Pakistan). He was raised as a Sikh . After graduating from Punjab University he went to England as a student of Agricultural Engineering. Bakht Singh miraculously accepted Christ in 1929 while in the West. In 1933 following his studies he returned to Colonial India with a clear call from God to be a witness for Christ among his own people in India. The Lord received him for his ministry on three conditions:

1. Do not join any organizations— serve all equally.
2. Do not make your own plan. Let Me guide you and lead you every step of the way.
3. Do not make your needs known to any human being. Ask Me only and I shall provide for your needs.

Brother Bakht Singh agreed. He resolved to trust God to guide him through prayer alone in carrying out that purpose. In seeking to obey God's call in various parts of undivided India, he underwent many trials and testings, but God sustained him through them all. After serving as an itinerant evangelist for a few years in

Karachi and other parts of Punjab, God brought about a mighty revival through him in Martinpur (now part of Pakistan) and other places in Punjab. In 1937 he was a speaker at the Sialkot Convention, which was primarily organized by the Presbyterian Church and other major denominations. He spoke from Luke 24:5 "Why seek ye the living among the dead?" His preaching electrified the participants and organizers alike, both clergy and laity. In the words of Dr. J. Edwin Orr, British Church Historian, "Brother Bakht Singh is an Indian equivalent of the greater Western evangelists, as skillful as Finney and as direct as Moody. He is a first-class Bible teacher of the order of Campbell Morgan or Graham Scroggie."

Soon Bakht Singh became a household name among Protestant Christians throughout India. News of his extraordinary life and ministry flashed across the world through missionary magazines and newsletters. He was one of the most sought after young evangelists in India at that time. In one month alone he received more than 400 invitations from all over India. In 1938 he went to Madras and then on to Kerala and other parts of South India. Tens of thousands turned to Christ.

"The arrival of Bakht Singh turned the churches of Madras upside down. . . Crowds gathered in the open air, as many as 12,000 on one occasion to hear this man of God. Many seriously ill were healed when Bakht Singh prayed for them, even deaf and dumb began to hear and speak." – Dave Hunt, author and writer

Whenever the church – the Body of the Lord Jesus Christ -- goes through spiritual decline, the Lord who is the Head of the church raises up His chosen vessels to bring back spiritual vitality. Bro. Bakht Singh was such a vessel chosen by God to bring back the glory of God in the Body of Christ throughout the world. Even though many turned to Christ through his preaching, they were not being disciplined or built up spiritually by the lukewarm denominational churches. He fasted and prayed and sought the Lord's mind to do His will at any cost to remedy the problem. The Lord then led him and some of his co-workers to spend all night in prayer seeking His will for the future ministry.

After a time of fasting and prayer the Lord led him and his coworkers to establish a local church to fulfill the four-fold purposes of the church on the basis of Acts 2:42. These principles can be applied in any country in any culture without compromising the revealed Word of God. The four-fold purposes of the church are:

- 1) To show forth Christ's fullness (Eph 1:22-23)
- 2) To show forth Christ's unity – the unity of all believers (Eph 2:14-19)
- 3) To show forth His wisdom (Eph 3:9- 11)
- 4) To show forth His glory (Eph 3:21) and (Acts 2:42)—"And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers."

The first church was established in Madras, Tamilnadu, called Jehovah Shammah on July 12, 1941 and the Lord began to multiply these churches across Andhra Pradesh and other parts of India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Australia and other parts of the world, now numbering into the thousands. Indeed Brother Bakht Singh can be called the father of the indigenous churches of India and abroad.

The center of his ministry moved from Madras to Hyderabad.

Brother Bakht Singh and some of his coworkers moved to Elim, Hyderabad on September 25, 1950. In the mid 1950's the Lord provided new facilities to house the local

and extra local church ministry. He called the new place Hebron. The work of the Lord grew and multiplied. From the 1950's to the 1970's the local churches established by Brother Bakht Singh and his coworkers were the fastest growing local churches in India. These churches grew both qualitatively and quantitatively trying to show forth the four-fold purposes of the church.

Ministry Overseas

In the year 1946 Brother Bakht Singh left India for ministry in Europe, UK, USA and Canada. The Lord used him mightily in every place, particularly at the Inter Varsity students' missions conference (now known as Urbana Convention) in Toronto, Canada, where he was one of the plenary speakers. Among those who attended the conference was Jim Elliott who was martyred in Ecuador in the 1950's along with four of his fellow American missionaries. In the 1950's Brother Bakht Singh ministered in Australia, various parts of Asia, Africa and the United States of America. Wherever he went the Lord used him to spread His fragrance. He was indeed a breath of fresh air in the midst of lukewarm churches and Christians who had a form of godliness yet denying the power thereof.

In Australia through his ministry the Lord constrained some believers to gather together on the basis of Acts 2:42. There are now several Assemblies, particularly in the Sydney area still gathering together as a result of Brother Bakht Singh's ministry there in the 1950's and 60's.

In 1969-70 Dr. Bob Finley of International Students Inc. invited Brother Bakht Singh to speak at the Indigenous Missions Institute which was held in Washington, DC. The main purpose of the Institute was to give the returning Christian international students and scholars the vision of the New Testament church based on the New Testament principles already practiced by Brother Bakht Singh. During those years he also traveled extensively in various parts of the United States and Canada ministering in churches of different denominations. In 1969 and 1970 during his visit to the United States, he also spent time with us in Syracuse, New York, and encouraged us to start a local church based on Acts 2:42. In 1970 the Lord constrained us to start International Assembly which still continues today. In 1974, following his visit to Lausanne Congress on World Evangelism in Lausanne, Switzerland, Brother Bakht Singh visited various parts of Europe, the United Kingdom, and the United States. During that visit he advised me to hold a Holy Convocation in Syracuse, New York. The Lord led us to have the first Holy Convocation on October 18-22, 1974. The Lord blessed it so richly for the blessing of all who attended. The Lord enabled us to continue the Convocation until 1983. Brother Bakht Singh and his senior fellow workers came year after year for these Holy Convocations. We discontinued the Holy Convocation for some years and started again from 1993 onwards.

On his way back from the United States Brother Bakht Singh used to visit the UK and Europe, particularly France and the Middle East. Brother Bakht Singh shared with Brother E. Verborne and his fellow workers in France the importance of having a Holy Convocation to build up the Body of Christ. After much prayer Brother Verborne and his fellow saints were constrained by the Lord to start a Holy Convocation in Sarcelles, France in 1977?????. The Lord used these Holy Convocations to edify the scattered believers from various parts of Europe, the Middle East and other places.

The Lord used Brother Bakht Singh as His chosen vessel to enrich and enhance the spiritual life of many around the world. He ministered Christ and the vision of the Church. Many asked him the secret of his spiritual life, as he was very unique in many areas of his life. Let me share at least a few.

- 1) His total dependence upon the living God.
- 2) He accepted the Bible as the Word of God and encouraged every believer to have his or her own Bible and to live in total obedience to the revealed Word of God. His insight into the Word of God and his photographic memory of the Scriptures are legendary. According to Robert Finley, President of Christian Aid Mission, " I have never seen a man who has a greater knowledge and understanding of the Bible than Bakht Singh. All our Western preachers and teachers seem to be children before this great man of God, Bakht Singh of India." During Brother Bakht Singh's visit to England in 1965 Dr. Martin Lloyd- Jones, the famed expositor and Bible teacher and Rev. Keith Samuel, one of the speakers at Keswick Convention met with Brother Bakht Singh. I was present at the meeting. They spent several hours with Brother Bakht Singh asking him questions from the Word of God. Brother Bakht Singh's answers challenged and surprised these men. Then Martin Lloyd-Jones asked Brother Bakht Singh how he got such insight into and knowledge of the Word of God. To that Brother Bakht Singh answered simply by reading and meditating on the Word of God upon His knees. Most of his life, until he became sick, he read the Bible upon his knees and meditated upon it for hours. The Holy Spirit of God revealed wondrous things out of His Word to him.
- 3) He sought and did God's will at any cost.
- 4) He had a passion for God and compassion for souls.
- 5) He discovered and practiced Biblical worship and encouraged all the saints both male and female to worship the Lord in spirit and in truth.
- 6) He encouraged fellowship among saints by introducing the love feast.
- 7) One of his greatest contributions was the annual Holy Convocations. The first Holy Convocation was held in Jehovah Shammah in Madras in December 1941, which lasted for 19 days. These Holy Convocations have been one of the hallmarks of Brother Bakht Singh's work and ministry. Norman Grubb, who was the International Director of World Evangelization Crusade, had this to say about his visit to the Holy Convocation in Hyderabad, "To us Westerners, the most striking part of the whole work with Brother Bakht Singh are the Holy Convocations held annually at Hyderabad. . . Brother Bakht Singh puts on these Holy Convocations yearly where several thousand people are massed together in close quarters and all fed by the Lord for a week with no appeals to men. . . here is an Indian proving God."
- 8) Indigenization of New Testament principles in the local churches. After visiting Hyderabad in the 1950's, Norman Grubb had this to say, "But in all my ministry experience I think these churches on their New Testament foundations are the nearest I have seen to a replica of the early church and a pattern for the birth and growth of the young churches in all the countries which we used to talk about as the mission fields." (Once Caught, No Escape by Norman Grubb).

- 9) The life of faith. Brother Bakht Singh was a man of faith. He trusted the Lord for all his needs throughout his life. The Lord honored his faith and not only provided for his needs and for the ministry but also used him mightily to challenge the people of God about the importance of trusting God for their needs.
- 10) The gospel processions testifying of Christ. During his gospel campaigns in every place he went, he held gospel processions going around the city/town turning them upside down for Christ. But the largest of all the gospel processions was the one that followed his casket to the cemetery where hundreds of thousands marched before and after the casket singing and praising God. Even though he died, his work and ministry follow him.
- 11) Life of prayer. Brother Bakht Singh was a man of prayer. He spent hours upon his knees in communion with the Lord seeking the Lord's mind regarding His will concerning the work and ministry. Therefore, the Lord also honored him and blessed him beyond any human understanding. This is one of the reasons why the Lord has used him so mightily for the edification of His Body and for the extension of His glorious kingdom both in India and abroad.

Even though he is dead yet he still speaks. We are richer for having known him and having been taught by him. The work that the Lord began through His servant and his early coworkers, such as Brother Fred Flack, Brother Raymond Golsworthy, Brother John Carter, Brother Dorairaj, Brother Rajamani and several others, may not only continue, but be multiplied till the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. Let us rededicate ourselves to carry out his teachings and his vision so that local churches based on the New Testament pattern may be raised up all over the world for the edification of His Body and for His eternal glory.

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