

Would You Give Your Life for a Life?

One of the best illustrations on the subject of **substitution** begins with the story of two **missionaries** to China. John and Betty Stams headed for China in the early 1930s. Both were deeply committed believers. They met at Moody Bible Institute and fell in love. Betty, the daughter of missionary parents, had spent most of her early years in China. John was committed to Jesus without reserve. Both he and Betty were determined to serve **Christ** at any cost. Soon baby Helen was born.

Shortly after arriving in China and finding a place to live and work in Tsingteh, in China's southern Anhwei province, the community was overrun with communist Chinese soldiers. They arrested John and Betty, accused them of crimes against the Chinese people, and began the process of demanding money from their commissioning missionary organization. When the payment was denied, John, Betty and baby Helen were sentenced to death. They were to be marched to a small town about 12 miles away and there would be **executed**, in spite of the fact they had committed no crime.

As the march was about to begin, baby Helen began to cry. Immediately one of the soldiers suggested she be killed to prevent distraction of the march. Upon hearing the notion, an elderly Christian Chinese farmer stepped forward and protested the child had done nothing worthy of death. One of the soldiers who evidently understood the concept of substitution suggested the farmer's life for the child's. The man agreed, and moments later he lay dead on the ground. A substitution had taken place.

The Stams eventually arrived at their destination. Soon John and Betty were marched out to a place called Eagle Hill. There, John was forced to his knees and beheaded. Immediately

Betty, too, entered the presence of **Jesus**. It is a sad story to say the least but maybe not so sad when we understand what really happened.

John and Betty's commitment to Christ was so strong that **martyrdom** meant little to them in view of eternity. If martyrdom was what it would take to fulfill God's plan for the salvation of mankind, so be it. But little Helen was not touched. Everyone who knew the story of the farmer knew that nobody could touch that baby. If a single soldier had dared to so do, he most certainly would have been harshly handled.

Like me, you may wonder why such things befall the **Christian**. Today I believe John and Betty could not be happier now that they know the results of their commitment. When news reached the China Inland Mission organization – the one that sent the Stams – and when eventually the story got out, incredible things began to happen. Gifts to the **ministry** increased dramatically. Then, amazingly, large numbers of young people began to volunteer to take John and Betty's place. Today I am unaware of any estimate to the size of the group that eventually went to the foreign field because of these two dedicated young people, but I believe it was significant.

Helen? She was rescued by a Christian Chinese man who saw to it that she be returned to the United States, where she was raised by grandparents.

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