

Persecution and the Underground Church in China

by Edgar Reich

Edgar Reich's sermon highlights the resilience and growth of the underground church in China amidst severe persecution and the power of faith in Christ.

Duration: 34:07

Scripture: Matthew 10:22, Matthew 28:19-20, Mark 16:17-18, Acts 2:4, Romans 12:1, 2 Timothy 3:12, Revelation 3:8

Topics: "Chinese Underground Church"

Description

In this sermon transcript, the speaker recounts a personal experience of being in a prison and witnessing executions. The speaker describes being with the police and witnessing the execution of a prisoner who claimed to have supernatural power. The speaker then shares their own experience of being punished by being hung in the air for four hours, during which they prayed and felt a connection to Jesus' suffering on the cross. Despite the mistreatment and potential execution, the speaker expresses love for the Lord and a desire to share the gospel with those who do not know Christ. Eventually, the speaker is released from prison after a few hours of interrogation.

Transcript

Thank you so much, my dear brother Blaine, and it's a joy and honor to be with you on the persecution prayer call tonight. Brother Blaine, you are an example to me as all of the prayer warriors who uphold the persecuted. Tonight, we will cover persecution in China and the underground church in China.

The Chinese church has faced many great waves of persecution during the last 115 years. Chinese pastors lamented that they had failed to prepare their churches for persecution. During the Boxer Rebellion in China, 236 Western missionaries were killed and became martyrs.

23,000 Chinese Christians were killed and became martyrs. The Boxer Rebellion or Boxer Uprising was an anti-foreign pro-nationalist movement in China between 1899 and 1901. It opposed foreign imperialism and Christians.

The over 23,000 Christians who gave their lives for Jesus watered the ground with their testimonies and their blood. Their lives while dying produced new growth in the following years. Later, missionaries were admitted again and the Chinese church grew.

The next great wave of persecution followed under the Cultural Revolution and Mao Zedong. Mao Zedong is also known as Chairman Mao, was born in December 1893 and died in September 1976. He was the founding father of the People's Republic of China in 1949 and governed until his death in 1976.

He adopted Marxism-Leninism-Communism and he became an early member of the Communist Party of China. Critics have labeled him a dictator whose administration oversaw systematic human rights abuses and whose rule is estimated to have caused the death of 40 to 70 million people, mainly through starvation, forced labor, and executions. Thousands of Christians were martyred and hundreds of thousands Christians were imprisoned and put into labor camps during his reign.

During each wave of persecution, the seeds of the gospel in China were planted anew with the blood of the martyrs. With persecution, the church in China is flourishing. Estimates of the number of Christians vary up to 100 million Christians.

How is that possible with such persecution? The answers are that persecution has helped them to lay down their lives for Christ. They are endued with the power of God. He resides in them and he is with them.

He leads them and they follow. Following Mao Zedong's death in 1976, the Chinese Communist Party took over. Persecution continued with martyrdom, imprisonment, and at times torture.

During Mao Zedong and in 1954, the Three-Self Patriotic Church was formed to promote a strategy of self-governance, self-support, and self-propagation and to remove foreign influences from the Chinese churches. This was to be an instrument for the communist government to infiltrate, subvert, and to control Christians in China. An attempt followed to eliminate all Christians and from 1966 to 1976, for 10 years, during the Cultural Revolution, all religious life in China was banned, including even the Three-Self churches.

During this period of time, the Chinese house church movement grew much. Chinese Christian worship was being driven underground for fear of persecution. To counter this growing trend of unregistered meetings, in 1979, the government officially restored the Three-Self church after 13 years of non-existence.

The purpose was the same as before, to spy, to control, and to deny certain parts of the Bible. Now here's a testimony from the beginning of the house church movement in China from a Chinese Christian brother. With intense persecution, people looked for God.

During that time, only two to five people could gather in house churches. They just met together in small groups and that became their meeting place. It looked like a spark of fire started by the Holy Spirit and it spread all over.

At that time, Satan scared us and did all kinds of things to try and stop us, but the revival grew. Today in China, we have almost 100 million believers. In this process, many people have carried a cross and been imprisoned and died, and Jesus Christ carried the cross.

The cross helped us confess our sin. The Lord put us in a situation like in Hebrews chapter 11 to carry our cross, and we have to carry our cross. We have to walk side by side with Jesus.

Because of that, the presence of the Lord is with us and gives us strength. We have desperate faith to follow Jesus Christ that allows the light of Jesus to live within us. I have been imprisoned several times.

Every day I prayed, oh Lord, before I experienced today, you have already walked through it. You have gone ahead of me to experience what I'm going to walk through. You know what will happen in my day, and you will take full responsibility.

First, when they arrest you, they try to convince you to give up your faith, and when you surrender to them, they will offer you an office in a position such as a community member or a position in the Three-Self Church. If you do not deny your faith and surrender to them, then they will attack you. First, they put you into a small place, a small cell.

They isolate you, and they let you starve to convince you. The first prison I was in was the size of this room, about 15 by 10 feet, and there were 40 prisoners in there, a small square for each prisoner. When we crossed one another, it was very close, and when we slept, we couldn't stretch out our legs.

When you wanted a drink, there was no water, and because I was a Christian, they appointed me to distribute water to everyone. But every day, we only had one cup of water, and this water was for you to brush your teeth, wash your face, and drink, and even do your laundry with that cup of water. Because of that, we did no laundry, and we had bugs in our clothes.

We only had two small bowls of noodles every day, and a small piece of bread. It was a very small piece. It was a special day or festival, then they would give you a bigger bowl of noodles.

There was no barber, so you had long hair and a long beard. One of the prisoners was Yue Guo, a minority person from northwestern China. He could not accomplish his work goal most of the time, so they asked him, why can't you finish your goal? Then, because he had long hair and a long beard, they just pulled out his hair in bunches.

The next time when he couldn't finish his goal, they pulled out twice as much, until his face was hurt, and harmed, and marred. They used a long stick to hit you every day. They would interrogate you and ask you questions.

If you don't answer them, or if your answer was not according to what they wanted, they would punish you. I said, I have nothing to say, because the Holy Spirit did not give me a word to share with you. And they said, how can you say words like this? You're against me.

So they bound me, but afterwards they said, no, we will bind you. We have found another kind of punishment. They had a gate.

They cuffed my hands in the back and then to the gate. When they opened the gate, my body hung in the air. My feet could not touch the ground for almost four hours.

During these four hours, I prayed to the Lord, and the Lord gave me feelings. I felt the Lord crucify himself on the cross to carry our sins. This is the reality.

He is the Son of God. He paid the price for us, and he allowed me to take part in his suffering. At that time in my conscience, I told myself, I love you truly, Lord.

I love you because you allowed me to experience your suffering. It is really only a little suffering I experienced, because the Lord will not give us more than we can carry. Another officer came to see me.

My hand was swollen. He touched my hand and said, why don't you just say a few words that make them happy? Why do you have to suffer? I had no strength to talk, and I heard a loud voice from far away that said, beat him up. Then I felt just like when Jesus was on the cross.

He said about them, forgive them because they don't know what they're doing. They don't know what they're doing. If they knew the faith we have, the Lord we have, they wouldn't do that.

Actually, I felt I owe them the gospel because they don't know Christ. I'm indebted to them because they don't know our Lord. After a few hours, they came to see me.

They didn't say any words. They just released me from the handcuffs. They brought me to another room.

I sat at a table with the officer face to face. He had a piece of paper and a pencil and he said, talk. I said, how can I say anything? Then he said, thank you.

He closed his book and walked away. He never questioned me again. Then they sentenced me to three years in the labor camp.

Actually, I was there over three years when they released me. When I was in the barbershop in the prison, the person who cut my hair, a spy said, we already have four people sentenced to death. You're one of them.

We will execute you. They put me in a place and outside my room, there was some clean water. So every day I washed myself and I took a bath.

Every time I heard an engine noise, I put on my clothes because I knew they were coming to execute me. I was ready. Every day I made this preparation.

When they wanted to execute someone, they would have some police in uniforms with white gloves and handcuffs. They took out those prisoners who never came back. One day, the uniformed police came with their white gloves, opened the gate and came into our room.

They called my name. I thought, this is the time of the Lord. So I got up and followed them out the gate.

There were two gates. I can see the outer gate. Eight police were with me.

I walked with the police to the room of the prison chief. Outside, they told me to squat on a rock. One soldier said it was his first time to execute a prisoner.

At the right side of the execution ground was a meeting room and the officers were holding a meeting. I talked to a prisoner and he said, no weapon can hurt me. I am with supernatural power.

After he said this, they executed him. They just shot him in the head and blood squirted everywhere. One of the officers said to me, what do you want to say? The days they executed prisoners, they had loudspeakers.

People came to watch the executions. He said, well, this group is waiting for you. What do you want to say? What do you have to say? I said, I have nothing to say.

I felt very sorry for him. I felt I owed him the gospel. But because I have no word to say, he came from his chair and grabbed my wrist.

Then he put his hand on my heart to see if it was still beating. He was very angry because he assumed I was going to be very scared. Then he sat down.

I experienced death. Every day we go through death to allow the death of Christ to live in our life. After a couple of times of this kind of imprisonment and death threats, they finally said, this man is real.

He's a real Christian. Thank you, Lord. Then they set this Christian free.

I was set free. This Christian Chinese man spoke to an open door group and said, may the Lord use you to cooperate with the house churches in China so we can expand and do our mission into the world. China has opened up.

In the 1940s, China had a gospel team who had a vision to bring the gospel from China to the northwest, then to the eastern world, then to Jerusalem. In 1984, we already sent our colleagues a few dozen to the northwest of China to spread the gospel among the minority. In the recent house church movement, a lot of churches are sending out missionaries to the northwest of China.

To obey God's word is to submit to Matthew 8 and to bring the gospel to the ends of the world, to bring the gospel in China, out of China, and into Jerusalem until the number is fulfilled. And when the church is prepared, then we can go to see Jesus. This kingdom belongs to the Lord, and the Lord will reign forever.

Until that time, the Lord will dry our tears. He will allow us to stay in front of the throne of God and receive his glory. The suffering that we have is only temporary.

In the future, we will see forever glory. In Romans 12, one is a scripture to encourage the church of China. Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God.

This is your spiritual act of worship. In 1995, many leaders from the house churches in China gathered together. We established a fellowship and network to coordinate and to harmonize with different churches with the need for Bibles and spiritual books.

I hope Open Doors organization can help us to train those leaders so we can carry on and bring the gospel. We have confidence in the commitment of Open Doors. May the Lord bless the ministry.

From the outside, the door of China seems closed, but we see doors are open. In the book of Revelation, the Lord said to the church of Philadelphia, because, brothers, you love one another, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut. Through this open door, we have to carry the cross of the Lord, and by faith, the door opens.

This door is always open. No one can close this door. In China, it is like that.

In North Korea, it is like that. May the Lord bless you all. Here are some other short testimonies.

This testimony illustrates the need for Bibles. A visiting pastor was asked to give a sermon. How long, he asked.

An hour? Oh no. Two hours? Oh no. How long, then, he asked.

Could you preach from early in the morning to late at night, please, he was asked. The people will stay. They are hungry for the Word of God.

Then the pastor realized that they did not have Bibles. Here's a testimony on the need of the Holy Spirit. The underground church relies upon and even expects that when the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ is declared, there will be verification at times with signs and wonders.

This dependence on the Holy Spirit to move, direct, guide, and verify the Gospel is biblical and needed in the church. It was not unusual for healings to occur in every village that the pioneers of the house church movement went into when they were driven all across China because of persecution. How much do we rely and truly depend on the Holy Spirit on a daily basis? Here's a testimony on their worship and joy.

The Chinese, when they worship, experience the presence of God in the midst of them. Tears of repentance or tears of joy are streaming down many, many faces. There is deep joy.

They use poetry and song to express what is in their minds and hearts. They convey through song the beauty of Jesus. Their music reflects the innocence and joy of Christians as inspired by the Holy Spirit.

To look into their faces is like looking into heaven. Here's a testimony on God intervening during torture. Brother Yun shared, several guards grabbed my arms and forced me to stretch out my hand.

They took an electric baton and held it to my hand. In an instant I was stung with hundreds of volts of electricity like a sting of a scorpion or as if 1,000 arrows had pierced my heart. Feeling like I was about to pass out, I cried out, Lord have mercy on me.

Immediately the electric baton malfunctioned. The guard who knew I was a Christian became terrified and ran away. Here's a testimony on martyrdom.

Beloved, please know that most have to go through torture. I saw two corpses of those who died. One body was exposed to show the torture wounds.

Here's a testimony on repentance. A Chinese leader was tortured in prison and denied Christ. He was released.

Later he was seen walking back into prison together with his wife. He repented but knew it would cost him his freedom. It would cost him pain, torture, and even his life to follow Jesus.

But he could no longer deny his Lord. He was seen put back into prison. Now a Christian lady commented, how could he ever have denied Christ? I would never deny him.

Beloved, the type of torture reported by political prisoners, other faiths like Buddhists and Christians is severe at times. We cannot tell you all because you would not be able to bear it. I'll just mention some of the torture.

Torture methods are endless and include beatings and kicking, hanging from ceilings or doors or rails. Victims may be hit with pieces of wood or clubs from which nails are protruding. There may be contortion, breaking of limbs, and especially breaking of fingers.

There's electric shock treatment or water torture. There are burnings through glowing iron rods, objects inserted on the fingernails, breaking your eardrums, mutilation of body parts, suffocation with plastic bags, psychiatric and mental abuse. There are other worse things I cannot describe.

Martyrs of the past have endured the unthinkable. When God requires you or me to lay down our lives, God will enable us to endure. Here is their testimony on witnessing.

Chinese Christians say they meet in homes and barns and caves, in underground tunnels and in fields, hoping to avoid detection. Yet they are busy witnessing despite the threat to their lives. Chinese Christians say they're willing in the church in China to suffer for Christ as the normal cost of being a believer.

It is accepted as the will of God at times to suffer and to even expect severe persecution. The Chinese sisters and brothers ask us in North America, let us suppose you were being threatened with jail, beatings, and torture for proclaiming the gospel. Would you do it? Many of you might say yes.

Maybe ask you a question. Why don't you witness now when you have no persecution? What makes you think you will witness during persecution? Ask the Holy Spirit. He will give you power.

Here are excerpts of an interview between brothers Denny, Paul, and Ren. The question was, why is there continuous revival in China? Brother Paul responds, as I see it, there are two reasons. First, the church is busy fulfilling God's purposes for it here on earth.

That purpose is evangelism. As God's people do His work, He continues to pour out His Spirit upon them. This is a secret to ongoing revival.

The Chinese church has a powerful vision of the Great Commission. They believe it is the church's responsibility to preach the gospel to their generation. The second reason flows out of the first.

Because of their persistence in preaching the gospel, they are persecuted repeatedly. This persecution brings purifying and that brings more anointing. These two work together to create an atmosphere of revival.

Brother Ren added, there's another reason why they still have revival. The church leaders are careful to give the Holy Spirit His place in directing the work. They allow God's spirit-free course to move how and where He will.

They see the American church as one that is too organized. The leaders have a saying about revival that I feel is helpful. They call it, how to kill a revival.

Man wants to organize it to suit his understanding. Then after he has organized, he then secures himself a position in it. Once this is done, the spirit is briefed and slowly withdraws.

Then the revival becomes a history class and everyone talks about it in the past. Brother Denny asked, could you comment on the eschatology of the house churches? What is their end time theology? What is their end time thinking? Brother Paul responded, their theology is again very simple. They believe that Jesus Christ is coming again.

He's coming for his bride who has made herself ready. As far as the details of how all this will happen, there are some differences. These differences do not divide them.

The strongest point of this theology has to do with evangelism. They believe the gospel must be preached among all nations and then shall the end come. They get this from Matthew 24 14.

Because of this belief, they have strong convictions about evangelism. They believe that if you are not actively busy preaching to others, you're hindering the second coming of Christ and you need to repent. Brother Denny, for my last question, let's talk a little about the leaders of this movement.

It would be hard to give much formal training to the leaders. How can the church thrive? Can you explain some of the preparation of the leaders? Brother Wren, most of the top leaders are very poor. The strongest point of their character is love.

They pour out their lives for the persecuted sheep in China, both in labors and by subjecting themselves to the dangers of imprisonment. One wrong move and they sit in a prison cell for five or ten years. This is love as many in America have never known.

They train them in three major areas. Let me state them briefly. One, they teach them how to be a disciple of Jesus Christ and walk with him daily.

Number two, then from that walk, they must learn how to witness for Christ in a dangerous, hostile environment. Number three, they teach them how to die daily and how to do this really. These are very important because of the persecutions leaders face and also we teach them how to escape the police when they're caught and how to escape from prison if God says run.

The word of God is very important to these leaders. They have memorized and internalized many chapters of the Bible. They cannot carry the Bible around in their hands, so they must make sure that they can carry one in their heart.

The fire of the Holy Ghost is also very important in ministry. These men are constantly being empowered by the Holy Spirit. This is leadership in China and this is how the church spreads so rapidly.

Beloved, persecution is certain. It is told to us by the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God himself. John 15 20 says, remember the word that I said unto you, the servant is not greater than his Lord.

If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you. We can believe what Jesus says and we can rely on it. Also in the United States of America, persecution is certain.

Second Timothy 3 12 says, yea, in all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution. The question is, why don't we suffer persecution? Will you and I be witnessing now and during persecution? David Wilkerson's key thought is this. When the Spirit fell upon Jesus' disciples, they became fearless.

As they went forth to the temple to witness, the Holy Ghost made their words cutting, convicting, their swords piercing the heart. They preached the gospel with power and authority because they had Holy Ghost fire within them. And the Holy Spirit will help you.

Am I witnessing now every day when I'm not under persecution? Am I living daily like the Chinese man in prison? He said that every day he made himself ready to die. This man died his earthly death before his tormentors came. He was ready.

Yet he loved and he felt he owed the gospel to the man who was going to shoot him. He said, I felt very sorry for him. I felt I owed him the gospel.

Every day we go through death to allow the death of Christ to live in our life. He lived the scripture which says, for me to live is Christ and to die is gain. Brothers and sisters carry the cross in China where many are imprisoned, beaten, tortured, and some even put to death.

They say the cross helps us to confess our sins and to be right with Jesus. To carry our cross, we have to walk side by side with Jesus to give testimony of his love for salvation. We can test the truth in us by how much we love others and by how often we witness each day.

The Lord bless you, dear sisters and brothers. Let us pray. Heavenly Father, my heart is burned.

Father, it's overwhelmed again. I don't have the words to pray because these Christians ought to be praying for us and me, not praying for them, Lord. Father, I thank you so much for their witness.

I thank you so much for their testimony. I thank you so much for their living sacrifice. They are burning on the altar and yet they present their bodies as a living sacrifice that you can use them for your glory and for your honor.

Father, I pray that you would make me like that, Lord. I pray that you would help us in America and in Canada to become living sacrifices. And then, Lord, I pray for my sisters and brothers in China because you said we ought to pray for the body where there's hurting going on in the body of Christ.

We are to reach out and, Lord, we reach out to our sisters and brothers that you would continue to endure them mightily with your Holy Spirit power. Give them the power to witness. Give them more love.

Give them more faith. Give them even more joy than they have displayed to us, Father. Use them mightily for your glory.

Lift up your glorious name through them and even if they must shed their life's blood, let it bring forth many more new lives for your glory and for your honor. And so I thank you, Father, for their testimony. Bless each one of them who gave this testimony, Lord.

Be with the church in China and revere yourself with my power and in glory. And I ask this in Christ's holy name. Amen.

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