

General Topics :: A Gathering Storm – Asian Christians Brace for Persecution

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Massive Persecution is Brewing Across Asia

“If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you. Remember what I told you: ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also.

They will treat you this way because of my name, for they do not know the one who sent me. If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not be guilty of sin; but now they have no excuse for their sin. Whoever hates me hates my Father as well” (John 15:18-23).

In terms of influence for the Gospel and where Asia Harvest invests the most resources, the three main countries we work in are China, India and Nepal.

Many Christians are unaware that in each of those countries, dark and foreboding storm clouds of persecution have been gathering on the horizon, and are now starting to break forth on the followers of Jesus Christ.

Thankfully, the Lord never hid the truth from His children. In the Gospels, including the above verses, Jesus told us to expect to suffer and be hated for being His disciples. That is the normal Christian life. For many centuries, believers understood that to be identified as a Christian equated to a death sentence, and the Church grew in leaps and bounds. In recent decades, however, a false gospel has arisen in the West, which has spread to Asia and around the world.

This false gospel teaches that if we follow Jesus we can expect great blessings, ever-increasing rewards in this life, and that we will be overwhelmed with happiness and good times, all because “God loves us so much.”

A number of years ago we were honored to write *The Heavenly Man*, which told the story of the intense suffering and endurance of a Chinese Christian named Brother Yun. Although multitudes of believers around the globe were deeply encouraged and strengthened in their faith after reading his testimony, others were angry and rejected it. One large American denomination, with thousands of churches, banned the book from their bookstores, because its message of faith amid persecution didn’t match their narrative that Christians are destined to only experience “success” in this life.

We know of many Christians who embraced this false message, and now their lives are ruined, swamped by sin, and they have grown disillusioned by the daily grind that comes from following Jesus in a sinful and demonized world.

The good news is that the Lord helped prepare us for suffering. He promised, “A time is coming and in fact has come when you will be scattered, each to your own home. You will leave me all alone. Yet I am not alone, for my Father is with me. I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.” (John 16:32-33).

Let’s take a brief look at some recent developments in Asia, and we ask you to pray for your brothers and sisters in each country. Please remember those in prison as if you were together with them in prison, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering” (Hebrews 13:3).

China

While many Christians around the world have believed the lie that persecution of Christians is something in China’s distant history, house church believers throughout the country continue to experience extreme hardship. Church leaders in some parts of China say that persecution is now the worst since the 1960s and 1970s.

The current wave of brutality against God’s people began about two years ago, when President Xi Jinping announced

his government was cracking down on religion. To start with, hundreds of foreign Christians who were living in China as students, teachers, businessmen and the like had their visas revoked. They were expelled permanently from the country, including more than 150 workers affiliated with one mission alone. Many of them were faithful believers who had served many years in China.

Last year, President Xi summoned a small group of prominent house church leaders to Beijing for a personal meeting. Although the contents of that meeting have been kept strictly confidential, within weeks severe persecution broke out against the unregistered house church movements throughout the country.

The attacks started as discrimination. At first, Christians were hassled, lost their jobs, or were blocked from entering university. As time progressed the heat has been turned up, and this year we have received reports of many church leaders and evangelists being bundled into unmarked vehicles, not to be seen again.

Various reports have reached us from China of harsh and widespread persecution. One tribal pastor in the remote mountains of southwest China was recently beaten to death for his faith.

Please pray God will continue to be glorified through His Church in China. For more than half a century the Holy Spirit has moved powerfully throughout the land, saving more than 100 million people and setting them apart for His glorious kingdom. The atheist Communist authorities have always hated the Church and wanted to destroy it, but the Lord Jesus has laughed at their plans and has gathered a huge harvest.

Please pray the harvest in China would continue to be gathered, until He who sits on the throne of heaven returns to wreak vengeance on the nations for their wicked deeds. All the wrath of men will amount to nothing in the end, as we all bow our knees before the King of Kings who declared,

“Why do the nations conspire and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth rise up and the rulers band together against the Lord and against his anointed, saying, ‘Let us break their chains and throw off their shackles.’ The One enthroned in heaven laughs; the Lord scoffs at them. He rebukes them in his anger and terrifies them in his wrath” (Psalm 2:1-5).

India

India, which in a few years is poised to overtake China as the world’s most populated country, has generally left Christians alone in the past, as they have been a tiny minority among countless millions of Hindus.

In the last twenty years, however, the situation has changed, with a rapidly increasing number of Christians causing alarm to the authorities. At the same, groups of fundamentalist Hindus have emerged, threatening to kill Christians and destroy the rise of Christianity. One of the most powerful of these groups is called the RSS. They are implicitly backed by the Indian government, and have published detailed plans of how to eliminate Christian communities, including sending Hindu doctors to sterilize Christian girls so that they will never be able to have children.

Please pray that the Living God would continue to be glorified throughout India through His redeemed children. Intercede so that Satan and his plans would come to nothing, but the Name of Jesus Christ will be lifted up over every people group in India.

Nepal

Nepal, the Himalayan kingdom sandwiched between the two giants of China and India, also recently launched a major crackdown. On August 8th, the parliament passed a new “anti-conversion” law which is obviously aimed at Christians, since hundreds of thousands of Nepalis have eagerly pressed into the kingdom of God in the last few decades. This has caused other religious leaders to fume with envy as sin-bound people experience the forgiveness and freedom of life in Jesus.

The new law carries a sentence of up to five years in prison for anyone caught influencing another person to change religions, while a second part of the vague legislation makes it an offence to “hurt the religious sentiment” of another person or community. This charge carries a two year prison sentence. Please pray for our brothers and sisters in Nepal.

Thousands of years ago another earthly ruler arrogantly stood up against God’s purposes, so for seven years the Lo

rd turned him into a cow! King Nebuchadnezzar finally learned a lesson that the leaders of China, India and Nepal will also need to learn. The humbled king declared,

“His dominion is an eternal dominion; his kingdom endures from generation to generation. All the peoples of the earth are regarded as nothing. He does as he pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth. No one can hold back his hand or say to him: ‘What have you done?’” (Daniel 4:34-35).

Our Response: Elijah or Jesus?

Over the years the Church in many parts of Asia has faced intense pressure and seasons of persecution. Believers in other parts of the world now feel similar storm clouds gathering on the horizon in their countries.

We have learned a few things about how to deal with intimidation and threats, which we hope you may find useful. First, it’s crucial not to give in to fear and anxiety, but to remain calm and focused on Jesus, daily meditating on the Word of God. Satan loves nothing more than to intimidate believers into a state of immobility.

Two men in the Bible were the targets of intimidation as evil-doers sought to stop their work. The way they responded could not have been more different. One man responded wrongly, while the other man responded how God wants us to.

Elijah was threatened by the wicked Queen Jezebel, who vowed to cut off his head. The prophet was terrified and fled into the desert, where he prayed that he might die. “I have had enough, Lord,” he said. “Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors” (1 Kings 19:4). A short time later he was instructed to anoint Elisha to succeed him in the ministry.

The second man who was the subject of attempted intimidation was the Lord Jesus. When He was told to be on guard because Herod wanted to kill him and stop His good works, Jesus responded with great boldness and without a hint of fear: “Go tell that fox, ‘I will keep on driving out demons and healing people today and tomorrow, and on the third day I will reach my goal.’” (Luke 13:32).

By God’s grace, the attitude of those we serve in China, India and Nepal will be the same as that demonstrated by the Lord. The Gospel must continue to go forward, because the sun is still up and there is much work to do! Jesus taught, “As long as it is day, we must do the works of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work” (John 9:4).

In the meantime we plan to keep marching forward with our vision securely fixed on Jesus Christ, as we continue to print and distribute tons of Bibles in many languages. By God’s grace and provision we will also continue to support as many evangelists among unreached people groups as we can.

We invite you to join us in helping the kingdom of God continue to advance throughout Asia.

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