

The House Church Movement in China

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In my quiet time this morning, I'd like to share with you something before we get started, I was reading a portion from Isaac Ambrose, "Looking Unto Jesus," and he said something that was pertinent to our time today. He said, I wrote this down on the hotel stationery to share it with you, he said, "Consider how short the time is that you have here in this world." Then he quoted the Apostle Paul from 1 Corinthians 7:29, "Because the time is short, therefore, let us use this world as not abusing it." The Puritans preached often on the brevity of life and the wise use of time.

I really believe that in the years to come we'll look back on this conference as a watershed event even though we are as one crying in the wilderness and a lone voice. But I think America is turning a corner and has turned a corner but it is my prayer that those of you within the sound of my voice will realize how short our time is, that the brevity of life faces us and how far we are into the end times. The spirit of antichrist is already in our midst and we need to realize that. It is my prayer that someone will be so gripped by eternity from being a part of this conference that they'll go all out for God in Christ.

I'd like to begin with the Word of God from the book of Exodus 8, beginning in verse 17,

"For Aaron stretched out his hand with his rod, and smote the dust of the earth, and it became lice in man, and in beast; all the dust of the land became lice throughout all the land of Egypt. And the magicians did so with their enchantments to bring forth lice, but they could not: so there were lice upon man, and upon beast. Then the magicians said unto Pharaoh, This is the finger of God."

I will stop there with those words, "This is the finger of God," because when you look at the underground Chinese church, all you can do is stand back in amazement and say, "This is the finger of God." Jesus Christ has built his church in China, man can't boast about it, no denomination can lay claim to it, it is the work of God. It is the finger of God.

Before we proceed, I feel I must give you a brief history of God's activity in China in regard to Protestant missions because it's vitally important to our subject today that we see God moving and working through his human instruments for the hearts of the Chinese and their souls. The first Protestant missionary to China was Robert Morrison. He arrived there in 1807 and he spent 12 years working on a Chinese translation of the

Bible and he completed it with his Chinese workers. He is greatly remembered by the Chinese for that. And that's the beginning of the planting of spiritual seed in Chinese soil.

It's important for us and our understanding to have just a brief idea of how the Chinese think. China was the center of the world, in fact, the Chinese word for China is "the middle country." Since they were the center of the world their borders were their own. They had a very isolationist policy. Outside were the foreigners and the barbarians. They called them "foreign devils." There was no need for other countries to assist China; they totally existed on their own. As a matter of fact, in the year of 1793, the Emperor of China sent a letter to King George III stating, "As your Ambassador can see for himself, we possess all things. I set no value on objects strange or ingenious and have no use for your country's manufactures."

China was a closed land to outsiders and became that way for a while but it changed when Britain saw trade potential of Chinese goods in Europe and what happened next is a black mark on British history because they found a way to do business with China through opium smuggling and that was the beginning of the rape of China by the West. Trading began between the two countries. British missions came to China and that really opened up between the years of 1839 and 1860 which was a time between the first and second opium wars.

British missionaries came with the gospel but they were only allowed entry through the offices of the British East India Company which was responsible for the opium smuggling. In the minds of the Chinese, all foreigners were foreign devils because of this illicit activity. Hudson Taylor lamented about this fact. He referenced this in a letter to a friend in 1856 and Taylor said, "Not less than 32,000 pounds of opium enter China every month at this port alone, the cost of which is about a quarter of a million sterling. The people have no love for foreigners."

China was blessed with many missionaries during the 19th century which was the great missionary movement. I will give you some examples of the top-notch caliber of men and women who were sent to China. William Burns was in the midst of revival in Scotland and he wrote to a friend at the time, "Perhaps you have heard of the wonderful things which the great God has been doing for us in Scotland. The God of love has visited us and poured out his life-giving Spirit upon the dead souls of men. In some places, you might see the solemn sight of hundreds weeping for their sins and seeking to give up their hearts to Jesus." Burns left Scotland at the height of revival to go to China as a missionary and he planted himself in obscurity for the next 20 years for the sake of the Chinese people and the sake of the gospel.

It is important for us today to look back and see the activity of God through men and women that he sent to China. Another man God used in China was C. T. Studd, who went with some fellow students from Cambridge; they were known as the Cambridge Seven. C. T. Studd was a top athlete of all Britain; he was number one cricketer; he was a household word; he was young; he was handsome; he was wealthy; he was famous. When he got converted, his entire outlook on life changed and he walked away from all

his fame and gave away all his wealth, every penny of his inheritance to the cause of Christ in missions. That would be the equivalent if, say, Bubba Watson today, the Master's golf champion, at the top of his game decided, if God got so hold of him, that he decided to leave golf at the peak of his career, give all his millions away and go to China and plant himself there for the rest of his life as a missionary. That's the extent that C. T. Studd did. That's the kind of difference between the vision of eternity and the lost that Christians had in those days as opposed to what we have here in the West in our day. It's hard for us to fathom a C. T. Studd and walking away from everything, from the life he had. When he was 53, he went to Africa, was separated from his wife for the next 18 years and he died there for the sake of souls.

God was at work through his human instruments. I mention this because China has been blessed through the years with thousands upon thousands of dedicated, sacrificial men and women who've planted their lives on Chinese soil for the Chinese soul. God has been busy in China building his church today but he planted it with seeds of sacrificial lives through the years.

Another man that comes to mind is Jonathan Goforth. Goforth saw real revival in China. I highly recommend his book "By My Spirit."

In the early 1900s, there were 63 Western missionary societies in China with around 3,400 missionaries and Western missionaries continued to settle into China until the terrible, bloody Boxer Rebellion of 1900 where 186 Protestant missionaries were martyred. I remember a chilling account of one missionary. She was a teen-age girl 15 years old and as she stood before the government official, she was pleading with him not to ban her family from China. She said, "We have done nothing but good to your people. We have brought medicine and aid and the gospel," and in the middle of her sentence, the man behind her took his sword and cut her head off at the neck.

When the Boxer Rebellion came, missionaries were butchered and by 1920, Chinese Christianity was so influenced by so much of the West that they had become almost Western in character. Their churches were Western ecclesiastical models planted on Chinese soil. Chinese leaders were solely dependent upon a Western administrator from a particular denomination. This was hurtful to the proud Chinese because it was a constant reminder to them that their country was weak, dependent and over-run by foreigners who told them what to do and how to do it.

In the period of 1920-1930 there was an anti-Christian movement that swept China and many Chinese Christians at this time, broke away from the traditional Western denominations and they formed their own independent groups. This was the beginning of the Chinese indigenization movement for the church in China. We can go back and look at it during that time period and by the 1940s, these independent Chinese Protestant groups had as many as 200,000 members. They wanted to get away from the Western influence of denominationalism and their dependence upon foreigners.

Out of this, grew the larger indigenous groups like the True Jesus Church, the Jesus Family and the Little Flock. I'm sure many of you are familiar with the Little Flock and the name of Watchman Nee; I'm sure you've read his books. Well, Watchman Nee founded the Little Flock in Shanghai in 1928. Nee was against the formalism and rituals of religious denominational tradition and by the early 1920s he joined forces with Leland Wang. Leland Wang was a powerful, mightily used individual of God in China. But Wang and Nee did not join forces because Wang believed in the ordination of pastors and Watchman Nee did not so they separated, they split. And Watchman Nee started his own church in Shanghai where he became the recognized leader of the local assemblies movement which has continually grown.

By the late 1940s, Watchman Nee oversaw the spread of these assemblies and he called his group the "Little Flock" and he asked them to follow the mandate in Scripture from Acts 4:32 which states, "And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common." Watchman Nee's congregation took that advice literally; they handed over their businesses; they handed over their material goods and gave them to the body of Christ. Nee had a vision to evangelize China in 15 years. He dispatched entire families throughout the provinces of China to evangelize there and begin local assemblies but his dream came to an end during the civil war of 1946-1949. Even so, by 1949, the Little Flock had grown to over 70,000 members. That's not bad for one man's vision. Watchman Nee was arrested in the 1950s for opposing the communist and the Three Self Church movement and he was put in prison. He died there in 1972. Today, the Little Flock is one of the largest underground church groups in China and it's estimated they have over 14 million members growing from 70,000 before his arrest to 14 million. Watchman Nee was literally the mustard seed that grew to a large tree.

But it would be another evangelist by the name of John Sung whom God was pleased to send a mighty revival across China. This was really a lot of the planting of the church as we know it in China today. John Sung was a genius. He was hand-picked by God for a special task. He had a special anointing. Cripples would be healed in his services and the blind would receive sight. His ministry was of signs and wonders. Sung came to America in the 1920s to study academics here. He was such a genius, he earned a Ph.D. in about three years and had offers from all over the world to go teach nuclear physics but he felt led, his father was a pastor and he felt led to go into the ministry so he enrolled at Union Theological Seminary in New York and it was during this time that Watchman Nee became converted. He became born-again while he was a student in seminary and his conversion was so radical and so gripping and so startling to the liberal seminary professors that they had him institutionalized in a mental asylum for 193 days. That was John Sung's true seminary training for during those 193 days, he read through the Bible 44 times and God gave him a key word out of every chapter to use for the rest of his days in preaching the gospel of Christ.

One of the unique things about John Sung's ministry were the preaching bands that grew out of his evangelistic ministry. The preaching bands were hundreds and hundreds of Chinese lay-people who would go throughout the provinces carrying flags with a red

cross atop them and many of these lay preachers were woman whom God mightily used to spread the gospel across China. This was all going on before WWII.

There was much missionary activity until 1949 and 1952 when the communists came to power. But when they came to power, there were a lot of buildings that were confiscated. There were missionary complexes that were confiscated, schools that the government came in and there were Christian schools and the Chinese government confiscated these properties and they kicked all the Western missionaries out of the country. They were forced to leave. There was a cleansing of all Western denominational and cultural influence. It was a hard time for the missionaries that had to leave China but God was at work behind the scenes and what rose out of the ashes at this time was the indigenous house church movement.

It was reported that in 1949 there were between 100,000 and 150,000 Chinese Christians. Today it is said there are over 100 million believers in China but that's only a guesstimate for no one can accurately number the underground church. The government churches are registered and they are monitored. These are called the Three Self Churches. Three Self stands for self-governance, self-support and self-propagation. The communist Chinese government has spies in the Three Self Churches. They monitor every service and restrict the preaching. In a registered government church there can be no preaching on the resurrection of Christ, there can be no preaching on the return of Christ, there can be no mention of the Holy Spirit, there can be no evangelizing, no printing of Bibles, no handing out tracts. It's a message of a social gospel, kind of like some of the churches in our country.

On the other hand, the house church is unregistered and it is labeled illegal by the government. Christians who belong to the house church movement are considered enemies of the state. Secret police constantly search for them to arrest them, persecute them and imprison them. There have been three phases of the house church movement in China. The first phase occurred during the 1950s as a result of communism and because of the activities of the Three Self movement. Those Christian leaders who were unwilling to worship in the government churches left the Three Self Church and they had no other option but to meet in their homes.

The second phase occurred during the cultural revolution. The cultural revolution of 1966 was perhaps the worst time of persecution for the Chinese believers. All churches were closed down, Bibles were burned, believers were forced to renounce their faith or be put into labor camps, re-education camps, to re-educate them. Many died in these work camps; they were brutal.

The cultural revolution in China lasted ten years from 1966-1976 and it was such a great time of persecution it really has few parallels in the history of the Christian church when you look at it. That's how bad it was. Many Christian leaders in China during this time of persecution died in camps but also many of them say that this was a time when the institutional church really was birthed in China and it has spread like a prairie fire and it is still spreading like a fire.

Then phase three came about with the easing of restrictions after Chairman Mao and with that came the unprecedented explosion of the house church movement. To the world outside, it seemed as if Christianity had become extinct in China but God was building his church behind the scenes and what emerged was so astounding that all one could say was, "This is the Lord's doing. It is marvelous in our eyes." Jesus Christ was building through the fires of the persecution a New Testament church in China all for his glory.

It has been said that more than half of China's one billion plus population is under the age of 20, therefore, many of the underground churches are mostly comprised of young people and these young people are migrating out of the rural areas, they are going into the cities where the technology is and where jobs are and they're taking their faith with them so that is spreading the gospel into the larger cities in China.

The very nature of the underground persecuted church has strengthened the spiritual life of the church into a vital New Testament Christianity. I believe that when persecution comes to America, it will do the same for us. We'll see a similar phenomenon. American Christianity will pass from worldliness to a more vital brand of Christianity. It has been said that the church slumbers in times of prosperity and thrives during times of persecution and when you study church history, you will see that that is so. Look at England during the time of the Puritans when over 2,000 lost their livings and their pulpits on Saint Bart's Day but pick up a book by one of the Puritans today and it still has a holy fire attending it. When you lose your world as you know it, then all you have is Jesus Christ and he is enough. He is enough.

Now that I have covered the history of mission activity in China through that introduction, I'd like to introduce this next segment with the following story. There was an American pastor who had the privilege to go to a rural underground church in China and preach. He preached for about four hours non-stop. He was amazed that the Chinese were taking notes from every word that dropped from his lips but what startled him when he stopped preaching, the Chinese listeners began to sing softly. They sang, "We don't listen to sermons. We don't listen to sermons." And this disturbed this American preacher. He thought to himself, "What do they mean, they don't listen to sermons? I've been preaching for four hours. What are they talking about?" Then they finished their song. They sang, "We don't listen to sermons. We live the sermons. We live the sermons." That's the dynamic of the Chinese church that separates them from us today. They live the sermons. They are really doers of the Word unlike many of us here in the West who just give lip-service to God.

Persecution is coming to America and to deny it is to have your head buried in the sand. The apostolic church was hotly persecuted and it thrived during that time of persecution. To be a Christian in the time of the early church meant to renounce everything for Christ. You were asked to answer a call of allegiance and publicly say, "Caesar is lord." The Christians back then would not deny Christ by saying, "Caesar is lord." Rather they would say, "Jesus is Lord," and in doing so, they were thrown to the lions and the bears. I stood in the Coliseum in Rome many years ago and it was such a solemn thing all I could

do was stand there and weep and remember all the thousands and thousands that were butchered there while a barbarous populace applauded their deaths.

To be a Christian in those days, to take the name of Christ, meant something. Your home would be ransacked, your family dissolved, your skin torn with whips, your very life poured out as a sacrificial offering to the Lord whom you claimed to serve. Like I said, to be a Christian back then meant something. You stood against a Christ-hating society that hated all who bore his name and claimed to be his followers. So the ancient church was ready to die for Christ by publicly proclaiming, "Jesus is Lord."

I wonder if persecution came to us in the West today how many would be willing to stand up and say, "Jesus is Lord." How many would stand up knowing that if they said that, they may lose their home, they may lose their family, they may face imprisonment? When persecution comes to America, the chaff will be separated from the wheat.

I will now comment on the underground Chinese church movement in more detail. I can make no comparisons between the Chinese culture and the American culture or the Chinese church or the American church, they are too different. They are vastly different for different reasons. To compare them is an exercise in futility. So I won't even go there but I will describe the Chinese underground church and the Chinese culture and perhaps you can see the dissimilarities between the two.

What I will share with you during this segment of my message, was special information given to me from a friend of mine who is Chinese and for the last 20 years, just about every year, he has gone back to China and spent a great deal of time in the rural underground church. He spent time in churches where no Westerner has ever been allowed. In fact, even a Tony Lambert would not have access to the churches that my friend has been at. So, the information that he has given to me to give to you today will be helpful to us in our understanding of the house church movement so we can better prepare our hearts for the coming persecution that will come to America in the coming days.

There is no accurate way to properly number the church in China since the rural church is unregistered and underground. The aboveground church is run by the government and it is called the Three Self Church as I've mentioned. It is a church sanctioned by the Chinese government and the message from its pulpits is severely compromised. I can't underline that enough. I know that you see books and magazines of how many people are going to the aboveground church, the government church, but it's a very compromised message. Those churches promote nationalism, patriotism and communism. Members of the communist party sit in the congregation and observe the sermon so that nothing spiritual or life-transforming is ever preached. On the other hand, the rural church has to go underground to hide from the government, to avoid arrest and imprisonment with their New Testament message of the cross of Christ and the Holy Spirit.

The underground church service has an average time of around 8-10 hours, if you can believe that. The Chinese love to sit and listen to the Word of God. I know that's hard for

us to comprehend here in the West. We can barely make it an hour without our stomachs grumbling and our minds going to our favorite restaurant. But the Chinese, all they want is the Word and the God of the Word. This is a distinction of the Chinese underground church. They really love the Word of God and love to hear it preached. They will sit for hours upon hours listening to the Word even if they've heard it before, they'll take copious notes and they'll weep over it and it will really soak into them like a sponge. They hunger for the Word of God more than real food.

I know this is hard for us to appreciate or understand here in the West where we have a dozen Bibles in our homes and hardly ever read them. The Chinese have a simple child-like faith. All they have is their Bible. They are walking Bibles because they have memorized much of it. It is not uncommon for a Chinese believer to have memorized the four gospels in their entirety. They have memorized the book of Proverbs. Many of them have memorized all the epistles.

So, they are not only literate of their Bible but they take their Bible literally as well. They believe the whale swallowed Jonah. They believe in the virgin birth of Christ. They believe in the miracles of the Bible. They believe the God of the Bible and that he can do big things and he does big things because of their strong belief and faith.

The underground church in Chinese is basically a New Testament church. There are no titles among them. No one is called doctor. No one is called pastor. They call each other brother and sister. They don't use titles. They feel titles divide. What they do is defined by function or gifts, not title. Some may be gifted as a teacher, so they'll teach. Some may be gifted in hospitality, so their gifts are used that way. Their gift makes room for them to serve in that capacity. To them the church is a filial entity. Every member is essential. They see their church as a family, a true body of Christ. They are on fire Christians with a real vital walk with the Lord Jesus Christ. There are no denominations in the underground church. You won't find any Baptists. You won't find any Methodists. You won't find any Presbyterians. You won't find any denomination. They just prefer to be called followers of Christ. That's what they call each other, followers of Christ.

It reminds me of George Whitfield. One time he was preaching in Boston and he looked up and he said, "Father Abraham, have you any Baptists up there?" And Father Abraham said, "No, no Baptists up here." "Father Abraham, are there any Methodists up there?" "No, no Methodists up here." "Father Abraham, any Presbyterians up there?" "No, all we have up here are blood-bought believers, followers of the Lamb."

One of the tragic things that has happened to the Chinese church and we need to hear this because we go there with good intentions, but one of the things that has harmed them is the Western influence whereby Christians in the West come to help by giving Bibles and money but they bring their denominational influences with them. This has hurt the Chinese. They do not want our denominations. They just want the Holy Spirit. They are offended when a Westerner is allowed to come into a rural church and that person tries to influence them with their denomination. It has not been good for the Chinese for they do not want those entanglements.

You see, Jesus Christ has built his church in China and there is no other explanation for it. Unlike America where we pretty much build our own church through our denominational money and man-power but in China God has built his church there by Holy Ghost power. It is estimated today in China that there are over 20,000 new believers every day. Some estimates are as high as 27,000 so God has not ceased working in China. He's working more and more as I speak. It's incredible but God is still expanding his church there.

In the rural underground church in China no one has any seminary training. Their dependence is upon the Holy Spirit to teach them and because there are no denominations, there is no hierarchy. There is no division between clergy and laity. All are workers. All are members of the priesthood of believers.

Listen friends, in the underground church in China the Holy Spirit has little impediment or obstruction. The Chinese believer counts the cost of being a Christian, there is no easy believism there. It's not uncommon when a person is saved that that person's entire family comes to Christ just because of the new vitality that is seen in that person. The whole family will follow the Lord. This is especially true in the rural Chinese church. The rural underground church is comprised of believers who have counted the cost of following a crucified Savior. They know that suffering and persecution is part and parcel of following the Lamb. We speak of the exchanged life here in the West, the Chinese live such an exchanged life that they don't keep any part of it.

The Holy Spirit teaches them and they are channels, not a reservoir. They don't keep it selfishly to themselves. They let it flow out to others all the time. The Holy Spirit has complete freedom to work through the believer. They have lost everything, their homes, their families, they've been imprisoned, they've been beaten, they've been starved. All they want is Christ's presence, that's what they long for. This is the key to understanding the indigenous house church in China. All they want is Jesus. They just want Jesus. They live in an atmosphere of Christ and eternity. They live in a minute-by-minute and moment-by-moment faith that puts us to shame.

As far as the church services, there is no set time in which they meet. This is determined by circumstance. Persecution is something they constantly face so as the secret police have informants in every village, they have to keep changing the location of the meetings so not to be discovered. Usually they meet at an odd hour, perhaps at 10 o'clock in the evening in a barn, on a farm or an empty building. A typical rural house church will meet around 10 o'clock that way and they will arrive in shifts so not to attract attention. If the secret police come, they already have a prepared safe place, a safe room, where the believers can be hid.

The house church Christians are extremely close-knit. Nothing is hidden between them. Transparency is a necessity. This is mainly a cultural issue as there is no term or word for privacy in the Chinese language. When you eat, you all sit at the same round table and eat out of the same bowl with chopsticks. There is a wonderful sense of being open this way.

There are no hidden sins there because everyone in the assembly knows you better than your own family members know you. You cannot hide anything from them. It's almost like communal living. Jesus said, "Who are my mother and brothers?" Well, in China, the church is a family and that's the way it is. Not like in America where everybody kind of keeps to themselves and keeps matters private.

The structure of each church is determined by function and reliance upon the Holy Spirit, not on bankers and lawyers like we do in the West. If a Westerner is invited to attend a rural underground church there is a general understanding that that Westerner is there to learn, not to pontificate over them or run roughshod over them. My friend told me about this: a rural church in China finally allowed a Western preacher to come in and this man was very arrogant and he wouldn't listen to the warnings of the Chinese brethren who told him to preach more softly. He kept preaching in a louder and louder and louder voice and totally disregarded them and ran all over them until finally the secret police came and invaded the meeting. They had to throw people into trapdoors. My friend, himself, was thrown into a rice paddy. He had to stay there for 45 minutes and when he emerged, he lost his shoe and never could find it.

It's because of such bad experiences that many rural churches do not let foreigners in at all. Because the government churches are registered and the house church is unregistered, the house church is labeled illegal by the government. So, the rural church owns no buildings. They only meet in homes with no set time and no official pastor. They are just all servants of God. Many Chinese believers are up at 5 in the morning and on their faces weeping tears of repentance before the Lord until the concrete floor is soaked with their tears. They hunger and thirst for righteousness and the presence of Christ is in their midst through the Holy Spirit in a large way. Since their services often last 8-10 hours, they break it up with preaching and singing and prayer.

In the West, our churches have pageantry and methodologies. The Chinese have power and the presence of God. Very patiently do the Chinese wait on the Lord in prayer. They will not move one inch without inspiration and leading of the Holy Spirit. Here in the West, we have various committees that make the decisions in our churches for us but in China, it is all decided by the Holy Spirit. The church is not run by man there but by God through his Spirit.

In China, the house church there is an uncompromised church and to have an uncompromised love for God and for each other you need to understand that, they love each other for Christ's command. They literally will die for each other unlike in the West where there is a limit to how much we'll do for a fellow Christian. When they pray, they travail until they prevail with God and get an answer to their prayers because they believe God is a God who hears prayers and answers prayers. They live in that kind of life all the time. It's common for them to pray all night, pray and groan and intercede and wrestle with God until they get a victory. They believe in prayer and the God who hears and answers that prayer.

This is a matter too, they are very sensitive to demon possession and demon oppression. They believe this was not done away with in Bible times. After services, they line up and there is prayer for healing and deliverance of demonic activity. My friend was in a rural house church and a demon-possessed girl was brought in and placed before him and he was asked to pray over her and he prayed for a very long time and as he was praying, he said that she vomited up this fluid six times before it was a yellow fluid. It came up six times before she was delivered of the demons. The Chinese are very sensitive to the Holy Spirit and walk close with God and can discern demons in someone. They fast for a few days before they do a deliverance in the name of Jesus. They could walk right into this room and look you in the face and tell you if there is any demonic activity in your life. That's pretty unsettling, isn't it?

Here are some things we can learn from the house church in China. The Chinese church is basically a composite of the church in the book of Acts. They have returned to the apostolic model. We need to do the same. Our man-made traditions obstruct the work of the Holy Spirit and obstruct the original. We in the West are more concerned with form rather than function, ritual more than spiritual. We are trapped in our rituals and our traditions of men. They are free to serve Christ because they have no entanglements as we do. The house church is indigenous and no denomination or mission board controls it and, therefore, it has more freedom.

To be armed with this knowledge of the church in China is to be prepared here in the West to see how the church in China has suffered and is suffering, is to better equip ourselves mentally, emotionally and spiritually for the coming persecution. To walk closely with God now means to be better prepared then when persecution comes our faith will be tested. I will say this, when persecution comes to America and the West, as a believer, the only ones who will get through are those who have a close walk with God and a vital daily faith and a strong prayer life and a reliance upon the Holy Spirit. If you do not have that kind of life now, don't expect to get it magically when persecution comes. You will fall. You will fail. Satan will have his way with you. You must prepare yourself now. It's only your strong faith and vital prayer life that will get you through that time.

So, how can we prepare ourselves for the coming persecution in our country? I have a few suggestions which I hope will be helpful. Begin to memorize as much Scripture as you can. If you go to jail, you won't have a Bible sitting there; there will be no Gideon Bible there. Bibles will be taken away. Your cell phone will be taken away from you. All you will have is your memory and if your memory isn't full of Scripture, you'll be in pretty bad shape.

I highly recommend reading the book "The Heavenly Man" by Brother Yun. I have learned much from that book. It showed me a lot about what he went through, what he had to rely on, Scripture, to get him through those hard times. He would not have made it any other way.

Prepare for the persecution by choosing a safe house or a safe room to meet to avoid detection. Pick a place in your community, pick a place on your property where you can hide and hide other believers from the authorities, where you can meet undetected and hold services. Be prepared to change the meeting location at a moment's notice to avoid detection by authorities. You may wish to attend the meetings by arriving at night and staggering the times of your arrival so that a large group doesn't show up at once. You may wish to arrive by bicycle so you can hide your bike in the bushes. If you choose to drive, you may want to carpool and park several blocks away so not to draw attention to yourself. Hey, I know this sounds crazy to us now but if tremendous persecution comes to America, this will be sound advice.

Get a passport for every member of your family. If you are forced to leave this country, if you don't have a passport, how will you get out? How will you get your children out? God is a global God. He may move you to Germany during that time to be a witness for him, to another country. You'd better be prepared to be on the go for God when he decides to move you.

Be prepared for anything. Prepare your heart for the coming persecution through a complete reliance upon the Holy Spirit in all things. Live in the center of the will of God now so you will be able to survive in the center of his will then. When persecution comes, we must pay attention to the warning in Hebrews, "Harden not your hearts as in the provocation." We must be careful, saints, when trials come in the time of persecution not to grumble, not to harden our hearts when we lose everything. I cannot stress the importance of that because that will do damage to the cause of Christ. We must heed the admonition of Scripture while it is called today, harden not your hearts.

We must keep looking at him through the fire of persecution. That is critically important, too. Our eyes must be on Jesus throughout. Be prepared mentally and this is going to be so hard for us here in the West who have accumulated so much through the years and through our lives. Listen, dear friends, those of you, everyone listening to me within the sound of my voice, be prepared mentally to lose everything you have materially: your home, your savings, your vehicles, everything. All may be confiscated as an enemy of the state. Be prepared to see your loved ones suffer pain, estrangement, loneliness and want. Be prepared mentally for hardships.

2 Timothy says to endure hardship as a good soldier. A soldier gets accustomed to sleeping on the hard ground with no pillow. Jesus said, "Foxes have holes, birds of the air have nests but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head." Be prepared to live in hard, harsh conditions. Think of Corrie ten Boom in that German concentration camp where she saw her father die, her sister die. She didn't have anything. She didn't have anything but Christ and one day it was so hard for her, she said, "Jesus, I can't do it anymore," and he said, "Sister, dear one, dear child, look down at your hand." And she looked at her hand and holding her hand was a nail-pierced hand and that got her through.

That will get you through times that we can't even imagine. God was with her in her trial and God will be with you in your trial, friend. He will see you through as in Philippians

3:10, "That I may know him and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made comformable unto his death." You must ask yourself the searching question about your own faith in Christ, Are you willing to experience the fellowship of his sufferings in the days ahead? The Lord Jesus told Ananias about the Apostle Paul, "Go thy way for he is a chosen vessel unto me to bear my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel for I will show him how great things he must suffer for my names' sake."

Dear friend, you must ask yourself this, Am I willing to suffer great things for my Savior who suffered so greatly for me? Will I bear his name boldly and proclaim him or will I deny him in that day? And then we have the last part of Philippians 3:10, "being made conformable unto his death." Are we willing to die for Jesus? Here's an even harder question, Would you be willing to watch your loved ones die? Would you be willing to watch your children die? During the Boxer Rebellion in China several of the martyred missionary families had to watch their children be butchered right before their eyes before they, themselves, were put to death. How real is our Christianity and how close is our walk with God if we were to face such a similar situation?

Persecution comes in many forms. George Whitfield, the great French evangelist, saw great persecution in his day and it came in many forms. He was lambasted on the stage; they called him Dr. Squintum because of the squint in his eye. They put on very profane and lewd plays about Whitfield. He was ridiculed in the press. Some of his greatest persecution, it was mentioned earlier at this podium, it came from the religious leaders of his day. Bishop Lavington of England was one of his greatest persecutors and Alexander Garden, in Charleston, South Carolina was his worst one in America.

Whitfield preached in more fields outside of London and had rotten eggs thrown at him. The children that sat by the feet of his pulpit received those eggs for him. Pieces of dead cats were thrown at Whitfield. In one town, he was beaten severely with a cane by a madman and one time, while he was preaching in Ireland, he was approached by a mob and they stoned him, almost killing him. He took a large wound to his head. One day, several years later while Whitfield was touring America, he was introduced to a pastor from Ireland and Whitfield removed his beaver cap and leaned over and said, "Here, sir, is the wound I received for preaching Christ in your country."

So, Whitfield faced all kinds of persecution in his day. What will it be like in our day? I don't know how bad the persecution is going to be when it comes to America, nobody knows. Only God knows. Some of you think persecution means being slandered by nonbelievers. Some of you think persecution means you lose your job because of your faith in Christ. Some of you think persecution means you lose your home or you're thrown in jail because of your testimony and witness. It may be some of these, it may be all of these, but it may get so hot here, friends, that we may face losing our lives.

Are we prepared mentally for that? Are we prepared emotionally for that? Are we prepared spiritually for that? I don't believe we are. I don't believe we are and I'll tell you why: the church by-and-large in America today is asleep and she sleeps the sleep of

death. If the church in America is not roused from her slumber, she will be taken wholly surprised by the coming persecution. Listen friends, the church in America is so soundly asleep that only two things will awaken her: only a Holy Ghost revival can awaken her or a hell popping persecution will awaken her. One of the two.

A week ago, I was holed up in a hotel room with my dear friend, Richard Roberts, and we were talking about revival and the state of the church in America today and I looked him in the eye and I said, "Brother, there is one thing that I can't get over as I look at our country and I look at our church, there is one thing that I lie awake at night thinking about and it grieves me all day long." He said, "What's that?" I said, "It's this, it's the sleepy-headed pastor who refuses to get his people and realize the great need of the hour and sit in sackcloth and ashes in the sanctuary of his church crying out to God in real tears of brokenness and repentance over the sins of America and the corporate sins of the church." He looked at me and he said that that was startling to him too. It really mystifies me that we can be this late in the times we live in and the church snores and slumbers in the face of what's all around us.

If you are a pastor and you are within the sound of my voice and you have heard this message and the other messages of this conference and you do not heed the warnings and do not act on them, I feel sorry for you. If you fail to recognize the danger and urgency of the times in which we live, if you do not rouse your people to pray and lay hold of God in holy desperation, I feel sorry for your people for having such a sleepy shepherd. And if you are a believer and you've been confronted with this message and hear the other messages at this conference and you do not prepare your hearts and do not prepare your families in the days ahead, I feel sorry for you for what faces you in the coming days.

All of us speaking at this conference have strong convictions and believe that persecution is coming to the church in America. We have come here to warn you of the things to come. We are not prophets. We cannot look into the future. But we can read the signs around us. Just pick up a newspaper if you don't believe the climate of hostility towards Christians is growing worse every day in this country that we live in.

Listen friends, my Bible says, "The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Let us therefore cast off the works of darkness and let us put on the armor of light." The hour is late, friends, the time is urgent. We should all be on our faces crying out to God to have mercy on America right now. Right now. To delay is deadly. Perhaps God in his mercy will send a mighty revival to America to prepare the church for the coming persecution or perhaps revival will emerge out of the ashes of persecution when it comes to America. But either way, God will get the glory. God will get the glory.

America needs revival. The church in America needs revival. There is still hope for America if we seek out in desperate prayer. I hope this message has been of some help to you today.

Let us pray.

O God, have mercy upon us. Father, have mercy upon America. Forgive us, Great God, for our national sins. Forgive us, Almighty Father, for the corporate sins of your church. Forgive us for our laziness in prayer. Forgive us for our spiritual bankruptcy and impoverishment. O God, I can look and see what's coming around the corner to this land and I pray, Lord, in your wrath, remember mercy. In your wrath, remember mercy. And I pray, O Lord, that you awaken your bride, that you rouse her from her slumber, that you awaken her, O God, and bring a mighty revival and an outpouring of your effusions of grace upon her now. In your mercy, Lord, I pray for that. You've sent revival in times before terrible times, Lord. You sent a mighty awakening to America before the Civil War through the great prayer revival of the businessman's revival of 1858. You saved literally tens of thousands of young men before they died on the battlefields of this land. You are the God that does such things. I pray you move as you have moved in former times for our day, for your glory and for your dear names' sake and your dear precious Son's sake, the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.