

Wherefore So Heavy, O My Soul?

Edward Caswall (1814–1878)

“Wherefore so heavy, O my soul,”
(Thus to myself I said)—
“Wherefore so heavy, O my soul,
And so disquieted?”

Hope thou in God; He still shall be
Thy glory and thy praise;
His saving grace shall comfort thee,
Through everlasting days.

His goodness made thee what thou art,
And yet will thee redeem;
Only be thou of a good heart,
And put thy trust in Him.”

ΤΩ ΚΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ

In the Nick of Time

Courage In Today's Fiery Furnace

Jon Pratt

God called Joshua to be courageous as he led the Israelites into the Promised Land (Josh 1:6–9). Joshua obeyed and enjoyed the fulfillment of God's promises (Josh 23:14). I want to highlight 279 modern day Joshuas. These are all pastors of “illegal” house churches in China. At the end of the letter each pastor signed his name and gave the name of his church. Here is a copy of the letter dated September 6, 2018. I will give some observations in next week's Nick, but for now please read and thank the Lord for these faithful servants of God.

A Declaration for the Sake of the Christian Faith

We are a group of Chinese Christians, chosen by the Most High God to be His humble servants, serving as pastors for Christian churches throughout various towns and cities.

We believe and are obligated to teach the world that the one true and living Triune God is the Creator of the universe, of the world, and of all people. All men should worship God and not any man or thing. We believe and are obligated to teach the world that all men, from national leaders to beggars and prisoners, have sinned. They will die once and then be judged in righteousness. Apart from the grace and redemption of God, all men would eternally perish. We believe and are obligated to teach the world that the crucified and risen Jesus is the only Head of the global church, the sole Savior of all mankind, and the everlasting Ruler and supreme Judge of the universe. To all who repent and believe in Him, God will give eternal life and an eternal Kingdom.

In September, 2017, the State Council issued the new “Regulations on the Administration of Religious Affairs” and began implementing these regulations in February, 2018. Ever since then, Christian churches across China have suffered varying degrees of persecution, contempt, and misunderstanding from government departments during public worship and religious practices, including various administrative measures that attempt to alter and distort the Christian faith. Some of these violent actions are unprecedented since the end of the Cultural Revolution. These include demolishing crosses on church buildings, violently removing expressions of faith like crosses and couplets hanging on Christians' homes, forcing and threat-



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ening churches to join religious organizations controlled by the government, forcing churches to hang the national flag or to sing secular songs praising the State and political parties, banning the children of Christians from entering churches and receiving religious education, and depriving churches and believers of the right to gather freely.

We believe that these unjust actions are an abuse of government power and have led to serious conflicts between political and religious parties in Chinese society. These actions infringe on the human freedoms of religion and conscience and violate the universal rule of law. We are obligated to announce bad news to the authorities and to all of society: God hates all attempts to suppress human souls and all acts of persecution against the Christian church, and He will condemn and judge them with righteous judgment.

But we are even more obligated to proclaim good news to the authorities and to all of society: Jesus, the only begotten Son of God, the Savior and King of mankind, in order to save us sinners was killed, was buried, and rose from the dead by the power of God, destroying the power of sin and death. In His love and compassion God has prepared forgiveness and salvation for all who are willing to believe in Jesus, including Chinese people. At any time, anyone can repent from any sin, turn to Christ, fear God, obtain eternal life, and bring great blessing from God upon his family and country.

For the sake of faith and conscience, for the spiritual benefits of the authorities in China and of society as a whole, and ultimately for the glory, holiness, and righteousness of God, we make the following declaration to the Chinese government and to all of society:

1. Christian churches in China believe unconditionally that the Bible is the Word and Revelation of God. It is the source and final authority of all righteousness, ethics, and salvation. If the will of any political party, the laws of any government, or the commands of any man directly violate the teachings of the Bible, harming men's souls and opposing the gospel proclaimed by the church, we are obligated to obey God rather than men, and we are obligated to teach all members of the church to do the same.

2. Christian churches in China are eager and determined to walk the path of the cross of Christ and are more than willing to imitate the older generation of saints who suffered and were martyred for their faith. We are willing and obligated under any circumstance to face all government persecution, misunderstanding, and violence with peace, patience, and compassion. For when churches refuse to obey evil laws, it does not stem from any political agenda; it does not stem from resentment or hostility; it stems from the demands of the gospel and from a love for Chinese society.

3. Christian churches in China are willing to obey authorities in China whom God has appointed and to respect the government's authority to

govern society and human conduct. We believe and are obligated to teach all believers in the church that the authority of the government is from God and that as long as the government does not overstep the boundaries of secular power laid out in the Bible and does not interfere with or violate anything related to faith or the soul, Christians are obligated to respect the authorities, to pray fervently for their benefit, and to pray earnestly for Chinese society. For the sake of the gospel, we are willing to suffer all external losses brought about by unfair law enforcement. Out of a love for our fellow citizens, we are willing to give up all of our earthly rights.

4. For this reason, we believe and are obligated to teach all believers that all true churches in China that belong to Christ must hold to the principle of the separation of church and state and must proclaim Christ as the sole head of the church. We declare that in matters of external conduct, churches are willing to accept lawful oversight by civil administration or other government departments as other social organizations do. But under no circumstances will we lead our churches to join a religious organization controlled by the government, to register with the religious administration department, or to accept any kind of affiliation. We also will not accept any "ban" or "fine" imposed on our churches due to our faith. For the sake of the gospel, we are prepared to bear all losses—even the loss of our freedom and of our lives.



This essay is by Jon Pratt, Vice President of Academics and Professor of New Testament at Central Baptist Theological Seminary. Not every one of the professors, students, or alumni of Central Seminary necessarily agrees with every opinion that it expresses.
