



Harvest Call

December 30, 2018

Out of Grace & Mercy: Persecution and Preservation

Over 100 members of Early Rain Covenant Church in Chengdu, China, were arrested starting on Sunday, December 9, through Monday, December 10. Authorities arrested pastors, elders, deacons, and congregants, at times using violent means. Some of those arrested have been released, others are being monitored closely, and still others have not been heard from and are have not been located.

The last elder of Early Rain Covenant Church to be arrested, wrote this letter to the church just a few hours before being found in his hideout and arrested. Beloved brothers, sisters, and fellow workers:

Thank the Lord! Just as the year 2018 is about to end God has given us a reward in the form of this large-scale persecution that arrived on December 9.

Since yesterday evening until noon today, over 100 pastors, elders, staff, brothers and sisters have been taken away. As of now we still do not know where they all are, and even if we did know it would be difficult for us to help them. But, thankfully, we know for certain that the Lord's loving face is shining upon them. They are within the gracious, sovereign providence of the Lord. He will be with them in the midst of their chains and trials.

The Apostle Peter says, *"Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you."* (1 Peter 4:12-14)

Beloved brothers and sisters, do you have joy? Are you rejoicing in the fact that you are suffering with Christ because of this church? Do you know that we are blessed? The Lord is bestowing on us poor people today treasures of glory from heaven! The Lord himself is bestowing on us weak people comfort from heaven! The Lord Jesus is shining on us blind people his great light. Those of us brothers and sisters standing on the front lines of the gospel war will earn great spiritual riches!

Thank the Lord for being with us in this trial. Thank the Lord for cultivating us according to his true Word! Thank the Lord for training us through these days of hardship! Thank

the Lord for sculpting us through today's persecution! May the Lord give us great joy and true hope and make us strong through reliance on him.

What these next two days or next few weeks hold we do not know. These days are in the hands of the Lord. Just as he turns the dew into frost and the rain into snow, just as he makes the fragrance of the plum blossom waft across the bitter cold, we are in the hands of the Lord. How wonderful it would be if, because of this suffering, we might be able to give off the sweet fragrance of the gospel!

Beloved brothers and sisters, I'm afraid this *"great persecution"* will become the status quo for us in the future. I don't know if you know this, but three years ago on December 9, persecution was officially unleashed against Living Stone Church in Guiyang. Police also went to the homes of those brothers and sisters one at a time. They would use multiple police officers and community workers to control just one person. Their small groups were also broken up one by one. How should we respond to these things in the days to come? According to the contingency plan prepared by our session of elders, there are a few things we must do.

1. Those elders who are still free must take up the responsibility of pastoring the whole church, waiting for the pastor and elders to be released. If Pastor Wang Yi is not released within 48 hours, those elders who are still free must lead the church down the next stretch according to the order decided on previously.
2. Regardless, Early Rain Covenant Church must not alter the statement of faith and the path of openness that it has proclaimed publicly in the past. And we will not alter our previous stance on the relationship between church and state (正教分立) or our beautiful spiritual inheritance from the Chinese house church of walking the path of the cross. We will not register with the Religious Affairs Bureau; much less will we join the Three-Self Church.

3. We will not easily relinquish our church building and retreat to our small groups. Regardless of who is leading the church, they must try to return to the church building that God has given us. Neither paper seals nor arrests should hinder our determination to worship in our church sanctuary. Unless all elders, preachers, and seminary students able to lead public worship and the preaching of God's word lose their freedom, we will not retreat to small groups. If we cannot enter the church building, we will rent another place. If there is no place indoors where we can worship, we will begin worshipping outdoors.

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4. Meeting in small groups is our last resort. If there is even a very small possibility of worshiping together as a whole church, we will not retreat to small groups. But if we must meet in small groups and encounter opposition while doing so, we are willing to pay an even greater price to bear witness to the great work of the gospel in our lives. We are willing to have 200, 300, or 500 people arrested and imprisoned. May the whole world know that we are joyfully willing to receive this persecution for the sake of our faith.

Beloved brothers and sisters, I am writing this letter in “*hiding*.” May you all be filled with joy in the gospel of Christ. May you welcome, filled with hope, the even heavier cross and more difficult lives that lie ahead of you. “*Christ is Lord. Grace is King. Bear the cross. Keep the faith.*” This is the vision Early Rain Covenant Church received from the Lord. May we all obtain it, cherish it, put it into practice, and live it out!

Loving you all,
Elder Yingqiang
December 10, 2018

Source: <http://www.chinapartnership.org>

Note: We have heard that Early Rain Covenant Church is a Reformed Church that has steadfastly taught the Heidelberg Catechism to their members and Covenant Children.

Presbytery of the Southwest

PSW Church of the Week

Mid-Cities OPC (MCPC), Bedford, TX - Rev.
Joseph Troutman

“So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was being built up. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it multiplied.” - Acts 9:31 ESV

Greetings from your Brothers and Sisters in Christ at Mid-Cities OPC. God continues to bless this congregation with visitors, new members and those with a generous heart and a love of stewardship. The church has seen courtships, marriages, births (multiple) and deaths. The marks of a maturing church are that it is widespread, it has unity, it

being built up in the Spirit and the fear of the Lord and is growing.

During the past thirteen years, since the first MCPC meeting, all these characteristics have been experienced in varying degrees. The body of Christ at MCPC continues to receive the proclamation of God’s Word each Sunday from the pulpit. Pastor Troutman’s preaching of the Word has been sound in biblical doctrine as well as edifying to the congregation. MCPC have been blessed with a peace and unity in the congregation; not to say there have not been bumps in the road; however, the Holy Spirit has been hovering over us enabling us to overcome these trails. MCPC have grown from seven to thirty-nine families with weekly attendance of 70-80 communicant and non-communicant members. Several members are currently struggling with health issues. MCPC covet your prayers. May God bless you and your families in the New Year and always.

Listening In and Sounding Out

Stewardship According to God

Stewardship has a long history. It’s a calling rooted in creation and should influence the way we live our life for the glory of God. It began in the Garden of Eden when God gave Adam and Eve dominion over His creation (Genesis 1:26-28).

Stewardship is a precious responsibility that we as Christians should cherish. What does it mean to you? For most church going individuals, it evokes thoughts of giving or financial campaigns. It is this and much more. Simply stated, stewardship is managing something that someone else gave you. God has called us to be good stewards.

In the New Testament, the word “*steward*” is rooted in the Greek word *oikonomos*, which means “*the manager of a household.*” If you were a steward in Ancient Greek culture, you were not the owner of the house. Instead you would have been the manager of the house and the household affairs. From making sure the home was clean to managing the finances and perhaps servants, you would have managed everything on behalf of the owner.

God is the creator of the universe and everything in it. There’s not one particle in the entire world that was not created by God. In Colossians, we read, “*For by Him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all*

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things were created through Him and for Him” (Colossians 1:15-16 ESV).

The foundation of stewardship is built upon this reality. Your life is on loan from God. He has given you your life to be a good steward for His glory and for your good. If we fail to bring honor to Him in all that we do, we have failed to be good stewards. Of those given much, much will be expected. We must use the gifts and talents the Lord has given us to proclaim His glory.

One of the greatest examples of stewardship is that of Joseph. After Joseph was brought to Egypt, the LORD made him a successful man. While Joseph was in the house of his Egyptian master, we read, *“So Joseph found favor in his sight and attended him, and he made him overseer of his house and put him in charge of all that he had.” (Genesis 39:4 ESV).*

God commands us not to love money and to be content with what we have (Hebrews 13:5). But He also commands us to work and take care of ourselves and family financially. In doing so, you will fight with the tension of providing for yourself and your family while facing the temptation to covet the belongs of others.

Regardless of your beliefs about tithing, one thing you cannot avoid is that God commands you to give generously. There will be times in your life when you may not be able to give as much as you like. But aim to steward your resources in such a way that you may be able to give more. For you, this may mean you need to cut back some of your expenses or pick up extra work to pay off debt that’s chewing up your income to be able to give.

As a steward of the resources God gives you, you will need to manage them in such a way that you can provide for the needs of others. Providing for others can include monetary gifts, food, and clothing, or just being hospitable with what you have. When it comes to helping others, God desires for you to take care of your family (1 Timothy 5:8), your church (Galatians 6:6; 1 Timothy 5:17-18), and those in need (Matthew 25:35-40). In the end, stewardship in the Bible boils down to this question: Who’s the Lord of your life? Are you or is the Lord? How do you know?

To help you examine yourself, ask yourself the following questions:

- Do you desire to seek the Lord?
- Do you long to read the Bible?
- Do you want to participate in the life of a local church?

- Do you follow the Lord as He has revealed Himself in the Bible?
- Do you work as if you are working for the Lord?

May God bless you as you continue to serve Him during your life here on earth.

Update and Prayer for Rev. Nick Lammé, Houston Harvey (Hurricane) Evangelist

I am very encouraged to see the Lord opening doors and allowing me to make new contacts and minister the gospel to hurting people. I anticipate that as I continue to work in this and perhaps other neighborhoods, the Lord will open even more doors and opportunities. I am very optimistic about this.

While it the move from Costa Rica was not easy, nor as smooth as I had hoped, I am now settled into our home. My family will be joining me in January. I am traveling to Costa Rica for Christmas and will return on January 3rd with my son, Alex. His sisters and Rosie will follow a week later.

The help that Revs. Sumpter and York have provided to me since my arrival has been invaluable. Nevertheless, there is one thing that concerns me, and that is the lack of a site-coordinator in Houston. Not having a man on the ground to handle the deaconal needs has already shown itself to be a problem.

It is my opinion that without a man to do that work, I will not be able to effectively carry out the work to which I have been called. I need to say this now, because if this does not change, down the road, we will see the effects of not having a deaconal site coordinator. It is possible for Scott O. to do this work, and should he be willing, I think that is something we should seriously take into consideration, and sooner rather than later. I would be very grateful if this could be taken care of soon.

The challenges in the Houston Harvey affected neighborhoods are great—deep financial burdens, hopelessness about maybe never returning to some normalcy, and lasting marital stress.

At a recent (Dec. 22) Open House in Memorial Hills, the Homeowners Association gave us free rental and a great deal of support about using their community center. The goal has been to meet as many people as possible, show hospitality, and help residents get to know us. And it has been excellent—we had around 30 people come the Open House, most of whom were first-time new friends. Praying with people, stopping in to visit and read Scripture, and to

leave gospel-based literature has proven effective. First and foremost, we want people to know the Lord whom we know and love. He alone is our hope.

PRAYERS:

- For Lynne V., a widow and her son, her son-in-law and her two grandchildren in the loss of their mother this year to Cancer. Pray that the Lord would comfort these people and that he would also allow me to further minister to them in their need.
- For the family S. and their living situation. Also for their marriage that has been strained because of the prolonged nature of their difficulties.
- For the Open House in the Memorial Hills neighborhood this Saturday, Dec. 22nd, that the Lord will open new doors and avenues for the gospel in this area.
- For me, that the Lord would direct me to those he wants to call to himself and we would see the lost come to Christ.
- For my travels to Costa Rica over Christmas and for my family as they prepare to join me in the US.

In Christ,
Rev. Nicholas Lammé

Discipling through Catechization

Does God really govern the affairs of men? Does he really govern the events of my life? When I ask myself these questions, I am reminded of this proposition set out in the Shorter Catechism by the Westminster Assembly in 1647: *“God’s works of providence are his most holy, wise, and powerful preserving and governing all his creatures and all their actions.”*

Although often I have to work to embrace its comforting truth, the proposition itself comes automatically to my mind. It comes automatically because at an early age, I was instructed in the Shorter Catechism and I memorized the answers to its questions, word-for-word.

That God preserves and governs all his creatures and all their actions is not automatic merely for my having memorized the words; I recognize its truth worked out inescapably in history. I recognize it to some degree in the larger history of mankind, but I recognize it particularly in my own life when I stop to reflect on my past.

When I am discouraged about my station in life I am reminded that I did not just happen. I recognize that just as God has preserved his people in history and carried on his

purposes through them, he has done that through my family and, now, me. Why am I where I am? Where did I come from? We can trace God’s work in the formation and growth of the General Synod of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church in America and the Reformation truths expressed in the faith of that Church and passed from one generation to the next in one Scots-Irish family.

Memorizing the Shorter Catechism was not an easy task. When I complained, my mother reminded me that my Great Grandmother had memorized the questions and answers of the Larger Catechism, word-for-word. She must have been quite a woman. How did their grandson wind up in Newton County, Georgia, and how did their great-great-great-great grandson wind up memorizing a seventeenth century British catechism in twentieth century Jackson, Mississippi? Would you believe that it started in 1557, when Protestant leaders in Scotland bound themselves together in a solemn covenant to stand for reformation of the church and state against the pro-Catholic policies of the Scottish regent Mary of Guise?

Presbyterians did not appear on the scene in Scotland in the 1560’s by accident, and I did not memorize the Westminster Shorter Catechism in the 1970’s by accident.

Source: Submitted by a prayer partner!

PRAYERS:

- For continued faithfulness in steadfast teaching of Covenant children the Catechisms of the Reformed faith.

Tribute to Rev. Glen T. Black

Request for prayer of thanksgiving for the Lord's gift to the church of the Rev. Glenn Black 95 years ago today: http://opc.org/today.html?history_id=1295

The churches of the Presbytery of the Southwest are much indebted to Rev. Black’s lifetime of service.

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To receive this newsletter, or to send prayer requests,
please contact: clerk@southaustinpres.org
Phone: +1 (512) 900-1654