

Christians Pray for 'New China' on Anniversary of Historic Massacre



Twenty years after the Chinese government-run People's Liberation Army opened-fire on thousands of unarmed student protestors and allowed armored tanks to roll over the crowds, killing hundreds, Christians are praying for a "new" China to emerge that respects democracy and religious freedom.

Tonight Christian leaders from the U.S. and China are gathering in Washington, D.C., for a prayer service aimed at remembering the victims of the June 4, 1989, massacre.

"China is at a crossroad," said Bob Fu, an organizer of the prayer vigil and founder of China Aid, a Texas-based ministry that advocates for religious liberty in China. "We pray in unity that the international community will choose to stand in true solidarity with China's freedom pursuers without any wavering so that a God-fearing, human rights- and dignity-respecting new China will emerge as a blessing to the whole world in the 21st century."

Attendees, including Barrett Duke of the Southern Baptist Convention Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, will also pray that current and past Chinese officials would acknowledge the bloodshed that occurred, repent, commemorate the victims and compensate their families.

The two-hour service begins at 7 p.m. (EDT) and will be broadcast on Voice of China News. Chinese house church pastors will also participate via Skype and will pray for freedom of religion in the communist nation.

Although the Tiananmen Square massacre evokes painful memories, Chinese Christians credit it with the growth of the underground church movement, which some estimate to have as many as 80 million members.

Prior to the massacre, during which thousands of students participating in a 50-day protest for democracy were killed, Christianity had spread slowly through out the countryside mostly among uneducated people.

"Following the massacre, many educated people abandoned their trust in the Communist system and searched for other answers," said Paul Hattaway, director of Asia Harvest, which supports China's underground church movement. "This led to thousands of university students accepting Christ in the months following the massacre. Others who had not been touched by the gospel opened their hearts to the message of salvation. Today there are countless Christians in China among university graduates, professors, businessmen and women, entrepreneurs."

Since 1989, Fu said the Christian Chinese population has gained 20 times the number of followers.

"When the so-called 'people's' army started shooting its own people then that dream and that anticipation [of a perfect country and government] was broken," Fu told *Charisma*. "So many said we gain heaven after losing the earth, and when hundreds of [weapon]less and peaceful [people] were killed by its own government, how much hope can you have for a temporary system structure or party without looking up to heaven to seek God's help and the renewal in Christ Jesus?"

David Aikman, former Beijing bureau chief for *Time* magazine and author of *Jesus in Beijing*, said Tiananmen Square taught the Chinese church that its hope is in God, not government, and that awareness is now one of its strengths.

"A change of political institution is not enough to get a country moving in the right direction," Aikman told *Charisma*.

“You have to have a moral revolution at the heart of it, and I think that’s a very healthy sign.”