

Amid Torture, He Cried, 'Lord, If You Take Me, Make Me a Martyr'

Yu Jie grew up in China, where his father was an engineer and Communist Party member. Yu's wife became a Christian in 2001 and was baptized. She then began a small Bible study in their home. Two years later, Yu came to faith in Christ and was baptized on Christmas Eve.

On December 10, 2010, he was kidnapped by the secret police and taken to the outskirts of Beijing. There he was beaten and tortured for hours. His fingers were broken one by one. For days his wife was under house arrest and did not know if he was alive or dead. God spared his life because he had greater plans for him.

On January 11, 2012, Yu and his family were led out of China to Washington, DC, where he writes on behalf of the oppressed Chinese people. He is now the best-selling author of more than thirty books and has been awarded the Civil Courage Prize by the Train Foundation. He was the first Chinese person to win the award.

Writing for the latest edition of *First Things*, Yu explains the astounding rise of Christianity in China. When the Communist Party came to power in 1949, Chinese Christians numbered half a million. Now they are estimated conservatively to number more than sixty million. If current trends continue, by 2030 China will be the largest Christian nation in the world.

What explains this remarkable growth?

According to Yu, the Cultural Revolution that began in 1966 and the Tiananmen Square massacre of 1989 led to the deaths of

countless innocent people. As a result, "The people's belief in Marxism-Leninism and Maoism was destroyed." In Yu's estimation, "These events opened up a great spiritual void, and the Chinese began searching for a new faith."

This search is bringing unprecedented numbers to Christ. When I was in Beijing a few years ago, I witnessed firsthand the explosive growth and dynamic strength of the Chinese church. The more Christians are oppressed, the more they turn to Christ. As Yu notes, "One of the phrases I have heard most often among them is: 'The greater the persecution, the greater the revival.'"

These can be discouraging days for Christians in America. Evangelicals increasingly say it's becoming more difficult for them in the U.S. By contrast, a growing number of nonreligious people say it's getting easier for them in America. But when we compare the moral trajectory of our culture to the oppression faced by so many Christians around the world, we must say with the writer of Hebrews, "You have not yet resisted to bloodshed while striving against sin" (Heb. 12:4).

Persecution against believers is escalating around the world. Every five minutes, a Christian is martyred for his or her faith. Today is a good day to pray for our persecuted sisters and brothers. And it is a good day to pray for the same courage they manifest in following Jesus.

When Yu Jie was being tortured by the Chinese secret police, before he lost consciousness he prayed, "Lord, if you take me, then make me a martyr. I am not worthy, but I am willing."