

Shouwang Church Faces Increased Persecution

Shouwang Church in Beijing, China, has been getting quite a bit of attention lately. A quick Google search for the word "Christian" will reveal articles from the *New York Times*, the *Los Angeles Times* and even *Al Jazeera* about the beleaguered church's situation.

One of the largest unregistered churches in the country, with more than 1,000 members, Shouwang has had numerous run-ins with authorities, who have tried to prevent members from meeting.

Last week the landlord of the restaurant the church was using as a meeting place refused to renew the lease under pressure from the Chinese government. Without a building, Shouwang's pastor, Jin Tianming, and its leadership determined to meet in public. When they tried to pray in a public plaza, they were met by hundreds of police officers, who arrested as many as 169 church members, according to the *New York Times*.

While an event like this is upsetting for us to see, it's important that major Western news outlets are covering it and drawing attention to the underground church in China. Shouwang, which attracts many young professionals and academics in the capital city, is one of the brightest lights of a hidden, exploding population of Christians in the communist country. It's difficult to know exactly, but some estimates rate the number of Christians in the country at more than 100 million, making the revival in China one of the largest explosions of the gospel in the history of the world.

Chinese officials are doing what they can to quell the movement. In some areas Christians are allowed relative freedom. In others they are persecuted and jailed. In recent

weeks, the Chinese authorities have been cracking down much harder on their citizens, across the board.

Here's what they don't get: Christianity thrives under persecution.

I don't know what it is about persecution exactly, but throughout the history of our faith, times of persecution are often related to times of growth. It's one of the illogical miracles of God, but it's true. We, and our Chinese brothers and sisters, do not simply belong to a religion. Jesus Christ dwells in us, and this reality is made ever clearer the more we suffer for it. As James 1 says, persecution and trials produce perseverance. James even says that "the crown of life" will be given to those who persevere under trial (vs. 12). What these men and women, and others like them in many parts of the world, are going through makes their faith more fully realized.

Here in America, the situation is quite different. We face a subtler, trickier enemy that is more difficult to identify. We have distractions—quite a few of them—and they are a lot of fun. We have a culture that's changing from primarily Christian to primarily relativistic, with an enticing worldview that allows us to make up our own morals as we go along. We live busy lives filled with responsibilities and activities.

In some ways, the threats an American Christian man faces every day are tougher to fight than those the Chinese face. I'm not saying the people who were arrested yesterday aren't incredibly brave, faithful heroes of the faith. They are. What I'm saying is, they know who their enemy is and they can face them head on. What is hurting the cause of Christ in their country? The government—and they're fighting it. What is hurting the cause of Christ in America? Shifting worldviews, laziness, distractions, overwork. Those are tough things for your typical American man to identify and fight over the

course of a long workday.

But we have to fight them. Try to find ways to fight the things that keep your faith bogged down this week. Christians in China are fighting for their faith. We need to put up the same fight, but in a different context.