

盼

Faith  
*in the*  
Wilderness

*Words of Exhortation  
from the Chinese Church*

---

*Edited by*

HANNAH NATION  
& SIMON LIU

*Foreword by*

TIMOTHY KELLER



KIRKDALE PRESS



*Faith in the Wilderness: Words of Exhortation from the Chinese Church*

Copyright 2022 Hannah Nation and Simon Liu

Kirkdale Press, an imprint of Lexham Press  
1313 Commercial St., Bellingham, WA 98225  
LexhamPress.com

You may use brief quotations from this resource in presentations, articles, and books. For all other uses, please write Lexham Press for permission. Email us at [permissions@lexhampress.com](mailto:permissions@lexhampress.com).

Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quotations are from the ESV® Bible (*The Holy Bible, English Standard Version*®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked (CUV) are from the Chinese Union Version. Public domain.

Scripture quotations marked (NIV) are from the Holy Bible, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

Print ISBN 9781683596042

Digital ISBN 9781683596059

Library of Congress Control Number 2021947076

Lexham Editorial: Deborah Keiser, Kara Roberts, Kelsey Matthews, Mandi Newell

Cover Design: Joshua Hunt, Brittany Schrock

Typesetting: Justin Marr

# Contents

Foreword.....	xix
Introduction.....	1
<i>A Church Acquainted with Suffering</i>	

## 破

### Meditations on Brokenness

落 Let Us Fall Into <i>the Hand of the Lord</i> .....	11
<i>Guo Muyun</i>	
命 A Deadly World .....	25
<i>Simon Liu</i>	
罪 Sin and Hell.....	37
<i>Yang Xibo</i>	

## 贖

### Meditations on Redemption

追 Why We Must Pursue Christ .....	61
<i>Brian Li</i>	
爱 True Love.....	77
<i>Victor Guo</i>	
属 Never Lost .....	93
<i>Chen Yi</i>	

天  
Meditations on  
Hope

炼	Test of Faith .....	105
	<i>Noah Wang</i>	
盼	Our Hope .....	121
	<i>San Shou</i>	
海	On <i>the</i> Other Side <i>of the</i> Sea.....	135
	<i>Paul Peng</i>	
	Author Bios .....	155
	Notes.....	157
	Glossary of Chinese Characters.....	161

## Foreword

**M**any Christians in the West are concerned that our secular societies are becoming more inhospitable to Christian faith and practice. We often feel persecuted. In no way do I want to minimize the headwinds we are now facing in the countries that formerly constituted Christendom. But to get desperately needed perspective, we must listen to the voices of believers in parts of the world where the opposition is much more pervasive and often takes the form of violence. This is the situation for Christians in large swaths of Asia—East, South, and West. They are indeed learning what the words of our Lord mean:

Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you. (Matthew 5:11–12 NIV)

Christians in the West seldom have had to test these important words of Jesus in the way our brothers and sisters in Asia have. Chinese Christians in particular have had reason in recent

years to rely on this promise of Jesus. There are at least four things to learn from these verses.

“BLESSED ARE YOU WHEN PEOPLE INSULT YOU.”

Not, “Blessed are you *if* people insult you.” Every beatitude is a characteristic of a Christian. Every Christian must be poor in spirit, or you are not a Christian; every Christian must hunger and thirst after righteousness, or you are not a Christian. This is the last of the Beatitudes, which means Jesus assumes that if you are a Christian, you will be persecuted. If you are living in any way consistently with Christianity, you will experience some kind of loss, some pushback, some opposition. (See 2 Timothy 3:12 for confirmation of this interpretation: “all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.”)

WE ARE ONLY BLESSED IF THE  
PERSECUTION IS “BECAUSE OF ME [JESUS].”

Not “because of *you*.” Peter says something similar in 1 Peter 4:15: “But let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler” (ESV). The word translated “meddler” is an amazing Greek word. It means to be a busybody or to be tactless. What Peter and Jesus are saying is, if you are talking about your Christian faith in a feckless way, a tactless way, an abrasive way, an insensitive way, a culturally inappropriate way, and people oppose you, don’t say, “I am being persecuted for Jesus’s sake!” No, you are being persecuted for *your* sake. If you are being obnoxious, the promise of blessedness doesn’t hold.

PERSECUTION BECAUSE OF JESUS  
RESULTS IN PRAISE FOR THE FATHER.

Here is one way to determine whether you are being persecuted for Jesus's sake or for your own sake:

You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot. You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven." (Matthew 5:13–16 NIV)

Some people will look at your life and faith and persecute you; others will look at that same life and will "praise your Father in heaven." Some non-Christians will respond with hostility, while others will be attracted by your life and persuaded by your testimony.

I propose that this is a great way to test ourselves. If we are *only* persecuted and few or no people are finding faith or being attracted to Jesus through us, then we are likely being persecuted for our tactlessness. If we are never persecuted, then we are likely compromising or being too quiet about our faith. But if *both* of those things are happening—if you are persecuted *and* your testimony is bearing fruit—you are in a sweet spot. Speaking the truth without love will only bring opposition; being loving without insisting on the truth is cowardice. One of the most worrisome

things about the church in the West is that we are not seeing much persecution *or* attraction, and surely that is an indictment.

WE CAN EXPERIENCE THE PROMISE OF  
BLESSEDNESS THROUGH MEDITATING ON JESUS.

Finally, how do we get the *blessedness* that Jesus says comes if you are persecuted for his sake?

That blessedness is a fascinating promise. It means the Holy Spirit will rest on you in a special way. It means his character will come into your life and be created, and it will shape you in a special way. It likely also means that you will see some people attracted to Jesus because of, not in spite of, the persecution.

But I suggest you not be passive, that you actively go in prayer to God during times of persecution to seek the joy, love, and courage you need. One way to do that is to meditate on Jesus in the following way.

Philippians 2 tells us that Jesus “emptied himself” of his glory. The King James Version translates these verses to say that Jesus, even though he was equal with the Father, “made himself of no reputation.” He had glory, and he had honor. He had the name, but he became rejected. He was shamed, humiliated—voluntarily. Crucifixion was not only a way to execute people. It was intentionally the most humiliating and ignominious death the Romans could come up with. Death on a cross was a dishonorable death. That means Jesus died in absolute shame so that you and I will not die in shame. We are going to have a name that lasts forever. Our names are written in heaven, inscribed in God’s book. We are going to live with honor and glory forever because Jesus experienced shame and humiliation.

Now if you take a little hit to your reputation, if you get persecuted a little bit, knowing what Jesus did for you, can you bear

that shame, knowing that he took the ultimate shame so that you could have the ultimate honor? Yes—if you meditate on Jesus’s humiliation, the blessedness that comes from that will help you to endure your own.

This is a sobering message. But look—it ends in joy. “Rejoice and be glad,” Jesus says. Why? “Because great is your reward in heaven.” Look at that hope and know that you have the name that will never perish. Know that you have an honor and a glory that will never fade.

---

This is a book about living as a Christian under suffering and trials. Persecution is one form of suffering we in the West associate with the Chinese house church, but for Chinese Christians, suffering is a complex and multifaceted issue. The pandemic has only complicated rather than simplified the pressures of the Chinese house church.

However, there is a note of this joy that runs throughout the testimonies and reflections in this volume. In early 2020, I witnessed this joy firsthand as thousands of Chinese house church Christians met in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. While they gathered to encourage one another with gospel hope in the face of growing persecution, cases of COVID-19 broke out across their cities back home. They returned to China not in fear but with bold hope, knowing their home abides in the heavenly city, which cannot be destroyed. Let us learn from the witness of our Chinese brothers and sisters so that we can stand fast all the better as we face trials wherever we live.

—Timothy Keller  
New York City  
July 2021

# 永

Since we have the same spirit of faith according to what has been written, “I believed, and so I spoke,” we also believe, and so we also speak, knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence. For it is all for your sake, so that as grace extends to more and more people it may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God.

So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.

For we know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

—2 *Corinthians* 4:13–5:1

# Introduction

## *A CHURCH ACQUAINTED WITH SUFFERING*

**F**or the majority of Western Christians, the topics of persecution and pandemic might seem disparate. On the one hand, pandemics have been long removed from our lived experience, so when it is discussed, *if* it is discussed, we categorize it under natural evil and the suffering we experience living in a broken world. On the other hand, persecution tends to be siloed from other topics of suffering, and neatly tucked into the great theological debates of church and state. According to our common categorizations, these two topics sit in separate corners of Western Christianity's bookshelf.

As you will discover reading this book, however, this is not the case in what is projected to soon be Christianity's largest church numerically. Within the theology and preaching of many of China's urban house churches, persecution and pandemic have become two sides of the same coin, two parallel points under one familiar topic—suffering. If you had the opportunity to hear a house church pastor preach today, you would likely

hear them discuss Christian suffering and you would have a fifty-fifty chance of them focusing on either suffering through persecution or suffering through the pandemic. Often, to your surprise and perhaps confusion, they would interchange these two topics.

Part of the reason for this is, of course, the current situation in China. In 2018, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) began to enforce new religious regulations, which led to increased political pressure and, at times, persecution against all religious practice in China, not only Christianity. This resulted in increased conflict between the authorities and China's house churches, who refused to submit to registration with China's officially sanctioned Protestant church, the Three-Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM).

But the last several years of struggle do not fully account for the rich theology of suffering being developed by China's urban house church pastors. They draw on decades of lived experiences of suffering, beginning with the birth of the house church movement, which witnessed thousands of professing Christians denounce their fellow Christians to the Communist Party for not complying with state regulations on religious worship. From the horrors of the Cultural Revolution (which embroiled all of urban Chinese society from top to bottom) to the economic reforms of the 1980s (which opened the floodgates of modernization and lifted millions of people out of poverty), the urban house church has grown against the backdrop of rampant corruption, alienation, and social decay.

And of course, these large-scale, national-level causes of suffering gloss over the more mundane, daily suffering Chinese Christians are familiar with: the struggling medical system,

environmental damage and pollution, the competition to succeed in a society of more than one billion people with no social safety nets, the one- and two-child policy systems, and a skyrocketing divorce rate, to name a few. If anyone is acquainted with the words, “The LORD is a stronghold for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble” (Psalm 9:9), it is surely the Chinese Christian.

Though there have been many important Chinese theologians both prior to the Communist revolution and within the churches of the TSPM since, today we are beginning to see the systemization of various streams of house church theology. In the particular stream represented in this book—urban, grace-centric, theologically trained—the topic of suffering is fundamentally rooted in the doctrine of the Christian’s union with Christ. These theologians pair the traditional, rural house church’s language of ‘walking the way of the cross’ with the historic, reformed doctrine of union with Christ. The result is an eschatological reimagining of Chinese Christianity’s overwhelmingly urban reality as vital for building God’s kingdom.

The theology of suffering represented by the sermons contained in this book has three aspects. First, it states that the Christian’s union with Christ reveals the broken state of the world. Humanity fell in the first Adam; in the second Adam, we have been buried with our Savior Jesus Christ and will be raised to life again. Yet, as we await our resurrection and the renewal of the world, we are made aware of the death and failure of our natural state. The living Christ united to our decaying humanity opens our eyes to the true state of ourselves and our world.

Second, their theology states that our union with Christ reveals the way of the cross. Those who follow Jesus, those who

are truly united to him, must suffer. This is made explicitly clear in Scripture: in being united to a suffering savior, you too will suffer. Though we are not told what suffering must look like, Jesus tells his followers that faith and repentance cause us to share the trials of his earthly life. We are not greater than our master; the church has no more rights than the bridegroom. We are one with him, and because his identity on earth was one of suffering, Christians, both individually and corporately, will participate in that suffering. To avoid walking the way of the cross is to avoid Christ himself.

Third, our union with Christ reveals eschatological reality. Just as becoming one with Christ reveals to us our brokenness and the way of the cross, so it also reveals to us that the kingdom is at hand. This moment in time is not the full picture; now is not all that there is. Christ is taking us somewhere; we are following him to the heavenly city. Yet Scripture describes the journey as painful, for the end times in which we find ourselves and in which the kingdom is proclaimed, include the revelation of God's judgments in order to bring many people to himself.

Perhaps the best analogy I have seen an urban house church pastor use to summarize the impact of our union with Christ is that of a car clutch. He writes, "When we use the clutch to put our lives in gear, that is the gear our lives will operate in." What we are united to determines who we are. Before the Christian repents and believes, she is united to the world, producing sin and death in her life. But once she is united with Christ, she participates in his life.

The one who belongs to Christ is united with Christ and is part of the heavenly kingdom of Christ. The one

who does not belong to Christ, the one who has become deeply ensnared in this world because he has no share in Christ, will ultimately become deeply ensnared in hell. We do not want to face the vicissitudes of life, but we must take up our crosses and be united to the Lord. In our temporary home in this world, we must learn how to use the 'clutch' and separate ourselves from evil, so that we do not separate ourselves from the good we should not separate from, and are consequently cast into hell forever.<sup>1</sup>

We see suffering manifest in our lives from the old nature which is passing away, and we see suffering manifest in our lives from the world's rejection of Christ. But our hope is in where we are going.

In these dark times, let us set aside our relentless efforts to forget death and ignore suffering, and let us hear something about walking with Jesus that we have been missing. We descendants of Christendom fear cultural marginalization, but let us remember that those on the margins often preach the gospel more boldly, fearlessly, and humbly than those at the center, for they have nothing to lose and no stakeholders to upset. Marginalized themselves, the house churches understand Christ's care for the weak and suffering, and rejoice at preaching the good news to anyone who has ears to hear. As the Chinese house church knows, our hope is not in princes and power, but rather in the Savior who unites us to himself, his death and resurrection. Our strength is in bearing his cross, and our joy is in his suffering.

In January 2020, thousands of people from across Asia, Oceania, and North America arrived in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia,

for a convention on the topic of gospel and culture, focusing specifically on the theme of building the heavenly kingdom on earth. Over the course of the week leading up to the start of the convention, the topic of suffering became even more poignant and important—a pandemic broke out in Wuhan, China. As the city was locked down, followed by a progression of China's urban centers ordered to follow suit, a sober reality set in—about half of the convention's participants from China were unable to travel.

In response, Chinese leaders at the convention made a bold decision and chose to livestream the entire convention so that those under lockdown in China could have access. To do so incurred certain risks, as many of the speakers were mainland Chinese house church pastors themselves. In the decision-making process, these Chinese house church leaders chose a motto which would be repeated often over the following days and weeks: "Let the light shine in the darkness." And as a result, tens of thousands of Chinese Christians tuned in, far more than had registered to attend in the first place.

When the convention ended, the Chinese delegation was blown away by the numbers of people who had participated through streaming. Now they faced returning to a country entering national lockdown and a full-blown pandemic. They made a decision before returning to China: they would continue preaching online, without regard for the security risks it would involve.

Since then, a network of preachers has been holding public evangelistic meetings by livestream and anyone is welcome to join. This book is a collection of wisdom preached during these meetings, translated and edited for English-speaking readers.

If we want revival in our communities, then let us learn from those currently being revived.

Hannah Nation

2021



破

Meditations *on*  
Brokenness

But David's heart struck him after he had numbered the people. And David said to the LORD, "I have sinned greatly in what I have done. But now, O LORD, please take away the iniquity of your servant, for I have done very foolishly." And when David arose in the morning, the word of the LORD came to the prophet Gad, David's seer, saying, "Go and say to David, 'Thus says the LORD, Three things I offer you. Choose one of them, that I may do it to you.' " So Gad came to David and told him, and said to him, "Shall three years of famine come to you in your land? Or will you flee three months before your foes while they pursue you? Or shall there be three days' pestilence in your land? Now consider, and decide what answer I shall return to him who sent me." Then David said to Gad, "I am in great distress. Let us fall into the hand of the LORD, for his mercy is great; but let me not fall into the hand of man."

So the LORD sent a pestilence on Israel from the morning until the appointed time. And there died of the people from Dan to Beersheba 70,000 men. And when the angel stretched out his hand toward Jerusalem to destroy it, the LORD relented from the calamity and said to the angel who was working destruction among the people, "It is enough; now stay your hand." And the angel of the LORD was by the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite. Then David spoke to the LORD when he saw the angel who was striking the people, and said, "Behold, I have sinned, and I have done wickedly. But these sheep, what have they done? Please let your hand be against me and against my father's house."

And Gad came that day to David and said to him, "Go up, raise an altar to the LORD on the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite." So David went up at Gad's word, as the LORD commanded.