

Today's Martyrs – Pastor Zhang Shaojie



Zhang Shaojie has led a fairly decent life as a Christian in the People's Republic of China. His family consisted of his elderly parents, two sisters, his wife Wang Fengrui, his daughter Zhang "Shanshan" Linxin, his daughter Zhang "Yunyun" Huixin and her husband Sun Zhulei, and his newborn granddaughter Sun "Jesse" Jiexi. Moreover, he was pastor of a legally sanctioned Protestant church in Nanle county, Henan province, and in that position has been loved and respected by his parishioners.

A year later he has begun a 12 year sentence in prison for fraud.

The problems for Zhang Shaojie and his church have their origins in the corruption of his local government. Many local governments have become covetous toward any real estate owned by Christians, whether by their churches or by themselves as individuals. The church led by Zhang Shaojie became just such an object of desire.

On November 16, 2013, Zhang met with local police at his church. They tied him up and later transferred him to a police station. Other events quickly followed over the next two days. His family funds were frozen. His sisters were detained. Other family members came under pressure. Yunyun received more than ten phone calls threatening to 'wipe out her family' if she continued to send reports of the arrests to the international media. His parents were hospitalized with hypertension. Parishioners went to the police station to find their pastor and 21 of them were arrested. The church building was closed.

After this initial persecution events moved more slowly. The Henan authorities concentrated on coercing false testimony from the 21 arrested parishioners against Pastor Zhang, and failed. His family and free parishioners continued to search for them. On December 21 Shanshan disappeared and was not released from detention until six days later. Pastor Zhang was transferred to the Puyang Municipal Detention center just before the Chinese New Year on January 31, 2014, where he spoke about the Gospel to two death-row inmates. Shanshan reported on February 18 that parishioners had discovered an illegal 'black jail' in an empty commercial building; when they entered the building they found evidence that it had held their friends and had been evacuated only hours before.

Yunyun decided to leave the country before her father's trial, which had been delayed due to legal technicalities and a change of legal representation. She arrived with her now 15 month old daughter at the U.S. Embassy in Beijing on April 24 to request a visa to enter the U.S. She was denied this, and desperately protested against

this decision. Embassy employees tried to physically remove her from the building, she tried to resist and banged her head on a doorframe. She was left semiconscious on the ground outside the Embassy with her baby daughter, and within two days was detained.

Pastor Zhang's trial restarted on April 29, 2014. Shanshan reported that her father appeared "dispirited" and "emaciated" at his court appearance that day. The outcome was of course pre-determined: on July 4, Pastor Zhang was convicted of fraud and sentenced to 12 years' imprisonment. Most of the 21 detained parishioners were then released since their usefulness was now over.

Ten days later the only good news of the entire episode was revealed: Yunyun had arrived in the United States with her husband and daughter. The Texas-based Christian ministry China Aid had activated a rescue of the family immediately after Pastor Zhang's sentencing due to fears that Yunyun's release from detention would be reversed. A Christian 'underground railroad' brought the family through China and into Southeast Asia, where a U.S. Embassy expedited their visas for entry to the U.S.

Sadly the story continued. Pastor Zhang's appeal was denied on August 21, and his younger sister Zhang Cuijuan was convicted of 'disrupting public order' and sentenced to one and a half years' imprisonment on September 9. The entire family had been ordered to vacate their home by October 26, 2014 so it could be auctioned to pay his fine, but they have resisted attempts at eviction. Shanshan was detained November 5-14, 2014, possibly to prevent her from appearing at the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation [APEC] meeting, which was attended by many world leaders.

So many people in this story have been so hurt and wounded. Many prayers can be said on their behalf. China as a nation also needs prayers. Months earlier the China Aid web site hosted a video of corrupt local officials and police attacking a People's Liberation Army building! The police beat and drove away the PLA soldiers and then the officials had the building demolished for their pet project. China appears to be much less stable than her authoritarian leaders believe it to be, and sadly history has shown that instability in China only leads to massive suffering. Pray always!

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