

influence

Fasting – The Neglected Discipline

Week 6 of 11

Matthew 6:16 -18

Thousands of Chinese Christians were killed during the Boxer Rebellion—a nationwide effort to snuff out any foreign influences in China that were political, cultural, economic, or religious. Though the rebellion was relatively short, the intense persecution it started persisted for years—most notably under the later Communist leadership of Mao Zedong.

A Christian evangelist who called himself Epaphras was a young man during the early years of Chairman Mao's reign. He refused to sing the Communist Party songs, salute the Chairman's picture, or show his allegiance to any leader other than Christ.

Epaphras was soon arrested and sentenced to life in prison. A guard asked him why he was so happy all the time. Flashing his characteristic grin, Epaphras said, "Didn't the Lord tell me from the beginning to give up everything and carry the cross to follow him? This is the Lord's way. I am following him on the same path. Why should I be upset? Why should I complain? This is my biggest blessing."

Eleven years after Chairman Mao died, Epaphras, then 62, was surprised when prison officials agreed to set him free. He soon discovered the reason for his sudden release: "The court cheated me," he said, "by changing my record to show I had recanted my belief in Jesus."



northeast daily reading

June 19-20, 2010

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Epaphras went one step further to show how serious he was about not recanting—he fasted five days a week. Ever-smiling, he would say, "If I die from fasting and living under house arrest, then I die as a criminal just like my Lord Jesus Christ!"

After 15 years of fasting, Epaphras died at the age of 78, having made an emphatic, brave statement that true freedom is found in Christ alone. Believers all across China celebrated his life and mourned his death. (*The Cross: Jesus in China*, a DVD produced and distributed by The China Soul for Christ Foundation)

The week's daily reading will give us insight on how to fast, and give examples of situations in which others have fasted.

- DAY ONE – Matthew 6:16-18
- DAY TWO – Matthew 4:1-11
- DAY THREE – Luke 18:9-14
- DAY FOUR – Isaiah 58
- DAY FIVE – Acts 13:1-3

Memory Verse:

"When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show men they are fasting. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full."

(Matthew 6:16)



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