

“Wang Zhiming: a Living Stone”
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Fourth in a series about Modern Martyrs

Revelation 5:1-6; 6:9-11; 14:12-13

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I going to read from the Book of Revelation. It's the final book in our Bible. It completes things. It's about our future, and also about our present and our past. This final book shows us what's going on behind the scene of our everyday, what's really at stake in the flux and flow of both run-of-the-mill stuff and headline-making events. It reveals for us what we cannot otherwise see, what we would not otherwise understand, what we fail to notice unless God shows us.

I know that's strange to say about this Book of Revelation, that it helps us understand. It's weird. It describes scenes and paints word-pictures that are boggling, perplexing, confusing, stunning.

I know that. We're just dipping our toes into it briefly today. Let me just give you a one line summary of the whole Book. I'm terribly oversimplifying, but for today it's helpful. Ready?

“God wins.”

“Despite all we are seeing, experiencing and think we know, in our lives and in our world today, God wins.”

Before I read, let me tell another martyr story.¹

II

Wang Zhiming gave his final witness to Jesus on December 29, 1973.²

He was put on trial before a mass rally of 10,000 people.³

The verdicts and sentence were already decided.

¹ On the outside Westminster Abbey rise statues to 10 modern martyrs. These stand for thousands upon thousands who, during the last century, give their lives as witnesses to the good news of Jesus Christ. This summer we've been telling about some of these 10. Additionally, Judy Howse-Ward told about Kim Phuc, who as a child was horrendously (and famously) burned during the Vietnam War, but survived and became a Christian.

² Following the convention for Chinese names, *Wang* is his family name, and comes first. *Zhiming* is his given name.

³ This account was given by Wang Zhiming's son, Wang Zisheng. It is told in Liao Yiwu, [God Is Red: The Secret Story of How Christianity Survived and Flourished in Communist China](#), translated by Wenguang Huang, (Harper Collins: 2011). I've used excerpts posted online at maomeetstheapostlepaul.weebly.com/the-stories.html and churchintoronto.blogspot.com/2012/01/wang-zhiming-chinese-christian-martyr.html

He was made to stand in the middle of the stage. Rows of community leaders sat ready to denounce him. Former members of his congregation, carefully selected, were brought forward to testify against him.

Zhiming said nothing. His tongue had been slashed to keep him from speaking.

The leader announced: *"He has been sentenced to death; the execution will be carried out immediately."* Soldiers raised him in the air so everyone could see him. The crowd roared: *"Long live Chairman Mao!"*

They loaded him into a truck, and drove him away, and killed him.

When friends brought his body back to the village, his *"face looked peaceful, as if he were just taking a nap."*

He knew God wins.

III

I will get to the reading from Revelation. First, though, a bit more about Wang Zhiming and China.

He was born in 1907. It was a golden age of Chinese Christianity.⁴ Missionaries and evangelists were receiving great success. Zhiming lived in a southern province. His area was home to a large number of China's Christians.

Zhiming went to Christian schools, then taught in one. He chaired the local church council.

World War II devastated China. Then came the Communist Revolution. Mao Zedong's victory brought in a regime that was hostile to religion. The Communists saw Christianity in particular as a foreign influence that didn't belong in China, and a tool of imperialism that oppressed China. They sought to destroy Jesus' Church.

Just after the Communist's took power, Zhiming was ordained a minister.

He knew God wins.

He did not oppose the revolution. He signed an official statement supporting the new People's Republic and the Communist Party.⁵ But he resisted its official atheism. He refused to get caught up in the public frenzy of denouncing "enemies of the people." He said, *"My hands have baptized many converts, and should not be used for sinfulness."*

⁴ en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christianity_in_China.

⁵ Commonly called *The Three-Self Manifesto*. See en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Christian_Manifesto. Wang's support of this document is described here: [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wang_Zhiming_\(Christian\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wang_Zhiming_(Christian)).

Then came the Cultural Revolution.⁶ It was about purging anything that was “capitalist,” or “foreign,” or “traditional.” A new society was being born, and the old had to be crushed. The Cultural Revolution lasted a decade, starting in 1966. It was terrible. Millions suffered harassment, humiliation, having their property seized, being forced to move, imprisonment, hard-labour, torture, and sometimes execution.

In 1969 (fifty years ago) they arrested Zhiming, his wife and three sons. His wife and two sons were released after many years. One son died in prison. Wang Zhiming was executed.

But he knew God wins.

IV

Now, finally, the reading from Revelation. The book tells of a series of visions. They were given to followers of Jesus who were experiencing persecution. Some had been martyred. God gave these visions through a man named John, himself a captive.

Please read the first Scripture selection by clicking here: [Revelation 5:1-6](#).

This scroll, it symbolizes God’s plan, God’s unfolding design for the world. The idea is that until the seven seals that bind it are opened and the scroll read, none of it can be known or even happen. But can anyone do this? Is anyone worthy?

Jesus is. Jesus is because he has self-given himself for the sake of the world. He is the powerful, majestic Lion, who is the sacrificed Lamb.

He begins opening the seals. Jumping ahead a bit . . .

Please read the next Scripture selection by clicking here: [Revelation 6:9-11](#).

This pictures those martyrs in that community, those who had been killed because of their witness to Jesus. They are crying out. The deaths of God’s people seem to mean that God has lost, that there is no hope. They are told to wait, trust and persevere. More martyrs will be joining them.

The evening before Wang Zhiming was killed, his family was allowed to visit him. Guards were listening, so he had to hide in his words what he wanted them to hear.

⁶ en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cultural_Revolution

*I haven't been able to reform my thinking. Since I cannot be changed, I am responsible for and deserve what I receive. But for all of you, don't follow me. Listen to what 'the above' tells you. . . .*⁷

How must he have felt, knowing his fate but not knowing theirs? Those terrible days in China seemed unending. Jesus' people were being battered and destroyed, by a foe that seemed "on top of the world."

But "*listen to what 'the above' tells you.*" Because God wins, it is not the end of the story, or our story, or the martyrs' story, or China's story.

V

A Christian teacher from along ago, named Tertullian, wrote this about Jesus' people being persecuted:

*We multiply whenever we are mown down by you.
The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church.*⁸

When Wang Zhiming was martyred, another seed was planted.

Since his death, and the end of the Cultural Revolution later, things have changed. Christians are still persecuted, but there are official churches that the government allows. There are also unofficial churches that meet in varying degrees of secrecy.

Admitting you are a Christian can cause you problems, so no one can be sure how many there are. The percent is small. Estimates range from 2% to 4% of China's population. But China's population is enormous. So even a small percent is a large number of people.

There are between 30 and 60 million Christians in China.⁹

Even after decades of persecution, some of it very harsh, and thousands of martyrs, Jesus' Church continues to grow in China. It is strong. It is confident.

⁷ [God is Red](http://maomeetstheapostlepaul.weebly.com/the-stories.html), 108-109. (maomeetstheapostlepaul.weebly.com/the-stories.html)

⁸ In his work *Apologeticus pro Christianis* (wikipedia.org/wiki/Apologeticus). The phrase can be translated variously; see en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Tertullian#Apologeticus_pro_Christianis.

⁹ Using China's current population of 1,386 million, and assuming Christians make up between 2-4% of the population. See en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christianity_in_China#Demographics_and_geography.

VI

The Communist government later rejected the Cultural Revolution. In 1980, it officially “rehabilitated” Wang Zhiming’s reputation. The next year, a memorial to him was built.

Words were carved into the base of his memorial. Listen to one last bit from Revelation.
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Please read the final Scripture selection by clicking here: [Revelation 14:12-13](#).

“They can rest from their labors, because their deeds follow them.”

Those are the words chosen to remember Wang Zhiming. Words he knew.

We remember these martyrs, not to glorify their deaths, but to celebrate the faith they had and showed even to death. More, we glorify and celebrate the One in whom they trusted.

God’s faithfulness to them is God’s faithfulness to us. So the trust of the martyrs is our trust.

God wins! So yours is the victory. Amen.