

PAUL HATTAWAY

exclusive interview



Paul Hattaway is Director of Asia Harvest, an inter-denominational Christian ministry working in various countries throughout Asia. His goal? He works alongside Asian church leaders, helping and equipping them to focus on reaching the lost. He wants to see effective churches planted among unreached people groups. Paul has also authored many books including: *The Heavenly Man*, *Back to Jerusalem*, *Peoples of the Buddhist World*, *Project Pearl* and *Operation China*.

HistoryMakers met with Paul in January 2008.

HM: When did you first realize the importance of Missions?

PH: I became a Christian when I was 19 in Australia. Three months later I went back to New Zealand to witness to my family. The only church within walking distance of my parents' house was a small Baptist church where for two weekends the speakers happened to be housechurch pastors from China who had spent 15-20 years in prison. I didn't know anything about Christianity at that time. I didn't know if everybody in China was a Christian or if nobody was. I had absolutely no clue.

'shovel human waste up to his chest in the cesspool'

The first pastor was Harry Lee. He began to unbutton his shirt

during the message, to reveal wounds and scars where they had tortured him in prison. A Chinese pastor named George Chen spoke the following week. He had been in prison for fifteen years, where, for most of his time, he had to shovel human waste up to his chest in the cesspool. He said that this was the best time because it was the only place the guards weren't watching because of the smell. He could sing and pray and he kept his sanity all those years by volunteering to shovel the human waste. So, as a new teenage believer sitting on the front row, my eyes were huge as I was trying to take in this form of Christianity. It totally changed me. That is

when I got a burden for missions and just weeks later I was in Hong Kong smuggling Bibles into China on a six week trip that has extended to 20 years!

HM: Out of all the Christians you have met and worked with in Asia, which group have inspired you the most?

PH: The Chinese housechurches. They're not perfect. God is still forming their character but there is a tremendous zeal and love of God which I've seen in other parts of the world too. Nevertheless, it is particularly concentrated in China. The passion the Chinese Christians have for Jesus is not because they are in some way intrinsically more Godly than the rest of us. Rather, the passion and wholehearted commitment of the Chinese believers has come about as God has orchestrated events in China that have

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brought about a tremendous revival and hunger for Him. Communism brought persecution and difficulties to the Church in China, and today many church leaders fear that if things become easier and persecution decreases then the Chinese Church may lose its fervour for the Lord. I haven't heard any Chinese believers pray for an end to persecution. In fact, some pray just the opposite – that persecution will continue to keep them on fire for God.

HM: What was your first encounter with Brother Yun like?

PH: I met Yun for the first time in the late 1980s. I didn't know who he was as we met on a mountain in Southern China. A Western missionary introduced us to a number of Chinese believers. I just remember something about a Brother 'somebody' who had fasted for 74 days in prison without food and water. It was all a blur to me and I didn't meet him again until the late nineties when we seemed to strike up a good relationship with each other right from the beginning.

We understand each other on a heart level. I felt like the Lord told me I should write his testimony in a book – but I only told my wife. God told Yun I should write it so that is how that connection began. I ended up writing his story and thankfully it has inspired a lot of people around the world.

HM: In order for you to write your new series of books on the history of the Chinese church 'Fire and Blood' you have conducted hundreds of hours of interviews and read over 1500 books. The first book in the series, entitled 'China's Book of Martyrs', was recently released. What impact would you like the book to have on believers?

'...be inspired and become more dedicated to Christ'

PH: I'd like all readers to be inspired by the testimonies.

In China's Book of Martyrs, I've tried not to make it gory but instead to focus on them as individuals and give family background and as many stories as I could find that were personal about them. **Not just heads being chopped off and blood spurting out and so on though there is some of that as well.** People will read it and be inspired and become more dedicated to Christ as those martyrs were.

Apart from that, I wanted to have an historical record of what's happened in China. **There was never one specific book just dealing with Chinese Christian Martyrs before.** They were the first two motivations. The third and main one was to get the same book done in Chinese for the Chinese Church – they don't know about their own martyrs as the information has been hidden from them through Communism. It's especially powerful for them to hear of the Westerners who laid their lives down for the sake of the gospel.

HM: Why do Christians in the west generally not display the same kind of passion and vision that the Chinese Christians do?

PH: Well I'm a western Christian, so I speak for myself. To be honest, I don't believe we display that kind of passion because we don't have to. It is as simple as that. Being a Christian in the West does not carry the same threat of persecution. We might be discriminated against if we're a genuine believer in our workplace or at school but we're not physically persecuted. If we can have a more comfortable life we tend to take it because it's nice to the flesh. Usually, when someone is forced out on the edge through their circumstances and surroundings, it pushes and drives them to be more zealous for God and for the kingdom. Before the arrival of Communism and the subsequent persecution, the Church in China was much like the Church in other parts of the world now. The pressure Christians were forced to live under resulted in a sifting. Many believers abandoned their faith, but many more became serious, wholehearted disciples of Christ. Revival has resulted. So it's not a cultural or ethnic thing, it's **more about the circumstances.**

HM: How can we develop the same kind of passion?

'they wake up every morning and decide to carry the cross'

PH: You won't get a fire and passion for God's kingdom by

sitting around waiting for it. If you start preaching the gospel around your own country, proclaiming the truth, you too will soon experience real persecution. Passion for Christ comes to those who have taken up the cross and followed Him. The Bible promises that those who live a Godly life for Christ Jesus will be persecuted. It doesn't say in one particular country or time. So if we're not persecuted we have to ask **are we really living a Godly life in Christ Jesus?** Are we really preaching the Gospel? I believe that in England if you really started preaching the Gospel, you would get persecuted pretty quickly. That's the difference. Conversely in China, the believers don't necessarily have to experience persecution – it's **a choice.** If they want to, they could just relax, go to a government church and have no persecution. They would probably still go to heaven.

The Chinese housechurch Christians are persecuted by choice.

They choose to be persecuted because they wake up every morning and decide to carry the cross and take the hard road and not sit back, relax and take it easy. There are millions in China who have no persecution but there are millions more who choose to preach the gospel zealously and obey the Great Commission and they are hunted like animals. You too, regardless of where you live, also face a daily choice of whether you will live as God commands, or whether you will take it easy and accept the status quo.

HM: In view of the Great Commission, what must the western church do to make a bigger impact on the mission field? Should we send more missionaries, what kind of numbers would it need in order to bring completion?

PH: Basically it's not about numbers. It's about each individual follower of Christ doing what God has told them to do. **The Bible says that all believers are to go into the whole world and preach the gospel to every creature.** That doesn't just mean a certain ethnic group has to go or Christians have to go from a certain country. It means that all believers have to obey and follow him. Wherever that is, whether it's Scotland, London or Siberia. It depends where God sends you. If you go where He is not sending you – you won't be very effective.

The bigger problem is that believers need to follow Christ and hear His voice. In Isaiah 30:21 it says 'Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you, saying, **"This is the way; walk in it"** That is the key. It is not about us asking 'do we need to send 500,000 missionaries in the next 20 years'. It is about you following Jesus with all your heart and are you doing what He told you to do? If you focus too much on the big picture then you lose sight of the small picture. I get asked all the time, should I go here or should I go there, would I be more effective if I went to China? I can't answer, because I'm not God. Every Christian has to find out from God what He wants them to do.

Some people get frustrated because it is sometimes easier to ask

"This is the way; walk in it"

another person than to seek the Lord for His will and direction. **Each Christian has to go where God is telling them to go.** You see it with the Apostle Paul in Acts. He didn't just make his own schedule; the Holy Spirit directed him. Conversely, it doesn't mean we just sit in our home waiting for some great spiritual revelation to drop on you. I knew an Australian Christian who always made hints that he wanted to be involved in missions, but he never went anywhere. One day he went in his bedroom, locked the door and prayed and said 'God if you want me to be a missionary overseas then turn the light on and then I will know it's a sign! Nothing happened and he was much happier because he didn't have to go anywhere!

Does your life belong to you or does it belong to God? Is He the boss or are you the boss? Unfortunately most Christians, if the truth be told, are the boss of their own lives. We have our own desires, plans and money-making schemes – and God is a secondary part of that. Lots of people pray 'these are my plans, please bless them' instead of 'show me your will and I'm willing to go anywhere and do anything'. If we pray that prayer then God knows if we really mean it or not. If He sees you do, then look out, you'll be going somewhere soon and usually amazing things happen. **Go, and God will show you where to go and what to do.** It's an imperative command. Not a request or an idea – it's a command. So every person, including everyone who reads this article, will be judged on whether we obeyed the command or not.

To find out more about Asia Harvest and the Chinese church, go to www.asiaharvest.org For more information on short-term opportunities to serve in Asia, e-mail historymakers@asialink.org.uk