

The Most Miserable Event in Hungnam Prison

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Excerpt

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The place that I was sent was the Hungnam prison. It was a Nitrogen Fertilizer factory. There I underwent hard compulsory labor. All prisoners must meet a daily quota. For 8 hours a day, we must fill 40 kilograms of Nitrogen fertilizer into bags and tie around them with strings. You tie inside the bag one time and tie around outside of the bag twice. Sometimes, you have to tie the bag four times. After we prepared the fertilizer bags, they were shipped out of the factory.

The job could not be done by one person. We were organized in teams of ten. Our responsibility was to fill 1,300 bags in 8 hours. We filled each bag with the fertilizer, lifted it on the scale for weighing, brought it down and pulled it over to load on the train. We worked in a very small area for filling the bag. So, we must pull it for 15, 20 or sometimes 30 meters in order to tie it and finish bagging. Then, we carried the bags over to the freight train cars. We must do this continuously. Otherwise, we would never have made the daily quota. As you push to work so hard, you get unbearably hot. You had to take off your shirts even in the middle of cold winter. This was the labor I had to undertake.

It was so hard, normal person could not survive more than 6 months. By the seventh month, they lost all their weight and looked like bones and skins. As you can see, the fatality rate is about 30% per year. So, within 3 years, most all prisoners will perish. You must have seen a picture or movie about the shocking images of Jewish prisoners in Hitler's death camp, right? It was the same as that.

I think about this time often. If you will become a Heavenly soldiers who can determine to overcome such situations and endure until the end for building God's Kingdom, the unification of the world is no problem. I wonder if you, young people will be such people.

In the Hungnam prison, I received a special award each year as a model prisoner. Under the harsh conditions of this prison, I followed the Heavenly regulations. It was very difficult. Every morning, I must keep the Heavenly orders.

If people in the general public do this job that the prisoners were forced to do, they work by their own volition, eating healthy meals and wearing proper clothing. In their case, no one would work more than 6 hours a day. Under such conditions, they can fill 65 to 70 bags per person a day. But, a prisoner must fill almost twice more — 130 bags per person a day. Prisoners must meet this quota without eating food. In order to eat rationed food, they work desperately at the risk of their life.

How miserable were the incidents I observed occurring under such conditions? What people longed for the most was food. There is nothing more precious in the world than food. You cannot understand this since you have never experienced it. You know, how precious food is — how precious a handful of rice is. At the moment of your death, you still desperately want food. Even if you are seriously ill, your desire for one piece of bread is so strong that you forget you are sick. Your only desire is for a bowl of rice.

Because of this desire, you go out to the factory in the morning even if you are sick. If you don't work, your ration will be reduced to a half. You get only half of the meal ration while others get the regular portion in the prison and cell where you stay. But, you get only a half. There is nothing more painful and sad than this. This is why the prisoner

went out for work only desiring to get the same quantity that others get, so as not to lose half of the his food — even if he dies. Then he worked and worked giving everything he had. After such hard work, he returned to the barracks. While he walked, he forgot everything including his hardships.

How did he forget? He is preoccupied by the thought, “Oh, once I return, my meal is waiting. A bowl full of grains waits for me. I can eat it.” He was totally unaware of his weak health — he is at the brink of death, while coming back to the barrack. Only desiring a bowl of grains, he received the food. Many men passed away while eating their meal, just right after they started eating. I saw a guy eating, and he just dropped his chop sticks. Then he was dead. Such phenomena occurred. As soon as other prisoners realized the man was dead, prisoners who sat near the man started fighting to get the leftover food on his plate. The prison was such a place. It was such a miserable place.

The Standard of Absolute Sincerity toward God

How hungry you become? Your stomach is completely empty. Everything is completely digested in the stomach. Yet, your stomach still functions to digest. Since it works, it generates heat. Then, your tongue gets hot. In the morning, if you hold your spit and pull it, it will extend like chewing gum. When facing death by starvation, your desire for bread and desire for one grain of rice, is the most real feeling of all feelings. What is serious? None is more serious than this feeling.

In such conditions, I meditated. I questioned myself if I could love God more than my physical desire for a piece of bread in this environment. I kept asking this question to myself. As a result, I decided to give a half of my daily ration to others in this environment. For three weeks, I shared a half of my meals with other prisoners. They were in shock. Why did I give a half of my food to them? I needed to teach them the fact that if they can eat even a half of the food ration, they could sustain their life. Therefore, I always felt that half of the food was given to me as a ration, and the other half was a blessing given by Heaven every day. Because it was grace, I ate with gratitude. With my gratitude for this half of the food, I could forget and let go of every hardship and suffering I faced. As proof, I always maintained my weight of 159 pounds in the prison. Man should not be influenced to the left and to the right by food.

On top of this, I volunteered to do the most difficult tasks among all tasks that were assigned to prisoners. I determined, saying to myself, “I will do the task that everyone in this prison hates the most.” I thought if I refused and retreated from it, Heaven’s suffering would begin. With this stance, I took responsibility for the task without stopping. Since I worked like this, I received the award there. Even today, I think that it was the best time of my life, because I could attend God, and always lived by His principles under the most miserable of situations.

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