

North Korea, the unbearable

On 10-24-09, my "last" North Korea audio was posted on Sermonaudio. In June of 2012 my "last" words were placed in a book about North Korea. A good-bye kiss, relegating my work in North Korea to the distant past, and as I called it then, "a fond memory."

Did I really say "fond"? Actually the work of North Korean ministry is brutally painful, and for me resulted in a nervous breakdown. I must warn all those who contemplate such a ministry that the darkness there is so depressing that only those mentally fit, strong of body, and totally motivated by the love of Christ, dare take it on.

I was and still am lacking in all these areas. Yet it reappears, this North Korea. I speak of her still. I love her still. But when I love her too much, her love crushes me. I think of Moses' serpent that swallowed up all the other serpents. She is rude. She wants all of me, but if I allow it, she will destroy me. It is the risk of everyone who is truly engulfed in ministry. The zeal that can eat one up. A passion that is too much. A fire that burns all in its path.

This fire needs controlling. The control is the joy of the Lord. The joy of the Lord is our strength but was not given to us for our sakes only. When we become strong in this joy, we use that strength to bear the burden of the weak. Only in this way can we obey the writer to Hebrews when he tells us to remember prisoners as though bound with them. Only in this way can the prisoners themselves bear such a load.

At any rate, my work for North Korea seems not to be finished. I ask that you bear it with me by praying for this nation and especially the church that has been entrapped in such evil. In the future I hope to bring you specific names and places of the last 5 years. An update for my own records.

For starters, I have begun watching You Tube videos about NK again. Very little change. A Kim is in charge. The people serve in abject fear mixed with brainwashed feeble-mindedness. Essentially no contact with the rest of humanity. Subject to a religion stronger even than Islam or old Romanism. Unquestioning. Unwavering.

Poverty. Labor Camps that supply the muscle to the regime. Sadistic cruelty that cannot be described without revulsion. The showcase church. The showcase city where the favored live.

Crimes against humanity. Attention-getting moves by the dictator for media consumption. A crazy man in charge who has changed only in his tastes. From the movie collection and exotic foods and drinks of his father we move now to the likes of Dennis Rodman and company. But the truth is the same: The communist dictators and elite long for Western pleasures, while they allow their people to starve in Eastern obeisance.

No, no changes. Tourists are still taken to the 26th floor of that famous hotel, while all floors above and below are empty. In the hospitals are no patients. Factory doors are closed. In the villages, essentially no foods in the markets.

All day, songs and prayers directed to the Dear Leader, the Great Leader, and the god Kim Il Sung. He is everything. He knows everything. he is all wise. He is the provider. Ask questions, you die. And entire families of 2-3 generations will be executed or severely punished for your crime.

It all comes back. But it is not history. It is current events. It is happening. Romania, that I loved for so many years, finally got its release in 1989. I felt free from her then, though she still has many problems. North Korea is still in chains, begging us to do something.

Six of the most awful weeks of my life were spent in Seoul, South Korea, 2009. Here we had come to meet North Korean refugees, and record their stories. This we did. But with every story, the wound in my own soul grew deeper and more sensitive. Wounds from my own past were opened, and the pain became indescribable. I began to live in 24-7 anxiety. They called it post traumatic stress syndrome. Aka nervous breakdown. I was experiencing secondary pain. Their pain, mixed with my own.

I had asked for a way for this spoiled Westerner to relate to North Korean believers. The fear-filled lives they described to me matched what I was feeling, and was feeling more intensely every day. Lives lived in terror that at any moment the sword would fall.

Yes. Pyongyang "elite" could be asked to move to the "other" North Korea in a moment of weakness and failure to love the regime adequately. Villagers could be taken to forced labor camps by committing similar indiscretions. And once in the camps, daily horrors and the gradual loss of hope and life. I have described some of these awfulnesses in other articles available on this site, but cannot bear to speak of them now.

Is it any wonder that when I met these refugees they were very sick people? Out of North Korea, but North Korea not out of them. What I did not know was that their sickness is communicable. For many months after my return to the West, I too lived these nightmares.

That is why I had to say goodbye to the suffering church altogether for over two years. When I finally got back on board, and resumed a post at Voice of the Martyrs, it was at a safe distance from the North Korean situation. Essentially a desk job.

Months ago I left that position and began seeking ways to bless the persecuted in a more direct way. A missionary from our church has direct access to a jailed Eritrean pastor. I could send offerings. And then, then only, I began seeking a way to put funds into the hands of North Korean Christians. I have not found the way to do that yet, but by God's grace I will.

Where a man's treasure is, there is his heart. As my heart opened once more to their plight, I slowly began my investigations again. I have found that if on any one day I go too far with this, the pain returns in a way I cannot bear.

That's how I can refer to this nation as North Korea the unbearable, and that is why I pass this burden on to you. Oh! that a David could arise, face that evil Philistine Kim Jong Un head on, and say, How DARE you threaten God's people in this way! Or a Moses to point his

prophetic finger in Kim's face and end this crisis once and for all by simply uttering, Let God's people go!

The younger version of this old writer wanted to be that person. Do we not all fantasize being God's hero? Alas, the years and strength fail me, and I am reduced to a computer and a plea. Am I speaking to a David or a Moses? Who will be God's champion?

Pray with me, and give what you can, until he arises. By God's grace we will talk of this again.