

**Date:** 16 April 2023

**Title:** Death Row Inmates' Testimony – YoungHee by Elder Park HyoJin

**Text:** 1 Tim 1<sup>15</sup> This is a trustworthy saying, and everyone should accept it: "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners"—and I am the worst of them all. <sup>16</sup> But God had mercy on me so that Christ Jesus could use me as a prime example of his great patience with even the worst sinners. Then others will realize that they, too, can believe in him and receive eternal life.



## 1 Introduction

### 1.1 *Confucius Family and Prison Officer*

- This is a story of a Korean elder who is alive today and preaching the gospel. His name is Park HyoJin. I will call him Park. This testimony is from the 1990's during the Korean revival that swept over Korea.
- PARK was the eldest son in the lineage of a Confucist family – his entire family and clan was completely given over to ancestral worship in every detail over many generations. PARK studied all the related literature and practice from childhood. Park was completely given over to it.
- Park became a prison officer as an adult and began to go up the rank in the prison system. He had nothing but contempt for the prisoners - murderers, rapists, frauds, criminals - they were animals who deserved to be locked up, and deserved the death sentence.
- His daily life was dealing with maximum stress and trauma that take place in the prison system among these human beings the society has thrown out.

### 1.2 *Salvation comes to Park and the Prison*

- Park's wife became a devoted Christian women during the revival wave that visited Korea, and she began to bring her husband to church. Park too was radically saved, filled with the Holy Spirit in a presbyterian church. He renounced ancestral worship, which caused an uproar in his clan.
- His fellow prison officers were getting saved as well, and they were going to church together, sharing the gospel with other prison officers and the inmates, and praying together. His life now consisted of daily early morning prayer, Friday night watch, Sunday worship – and the grace of God poured into his daily life as a high ranking prison officer.
- Now the prison was no longer a warzone where he fought and hated the inmates. It became his pastorate where he and his fellow Christian officers became shepherds caring for the lost sheep among the most broken and rejected in the society.
- And prisoners began to get saved one by one, and wave of salvation came to the prisons in ways we do not experience outside.

### 1.3 *Inmates on Death Row*

- In particular when Park saw the power of God save and change the worst of the criminals on death row – those he thought were beyond redemption, the serial killers, family killers etc. I will tell just two of Park's stories of the death row inmates whose life and death had profound impact on him.

## **2 YoungHee – Murder of Husband & Attempted Murder of Mother-in-law**

### **2.1 Self-Hatred**

- YoungHee was a female prisoner on death row in the women's prison. She had hired a killer to murder her husband, and afterwards she tried to murder her mother-in-law multiple times, but instead was caught. By the time she was convicted and sentenced to death in the court of law, she loathed herself. Her life was no better than animal.
- And she became a massive problem in the women's prison. She tried to kill herself by biting off her tongue. She tried to slash her wrists. Countless times. She would scream and bang her head on the iron bars of her cell and into the concrete wall. She thought about nothing but how to kill herself. She caused so much trouble, that the prison officers left her cell door open, and watched her 24-7.

### **2.2 Salvation comes to YoungHee**

- There came a day when YoungHee became so tired, so spent – she had no more strength to kill herself or to scream and rant. She gave up on everything, and was slumped in one corner of her prison cell. And her eyes landed on a book in front of her. It was a Bible that her female prison officer gave her, in an attempt to calm down. But YoungHee had thrown it in the corner and hadn't even touched it.
- Now she just looked at the Bible for a long time, and without any thought just reached out and picked it up. The moment she touched the Bible, suddenly the desire for life began to well up in her – she suddenly wanted to live. She didn't even open the Bible or read it, but her heart was exploding with powerful desire for life, that drove out all thoughts of killing herself.
- YoungHee was shaking. And she opened the Bible, and began to read it. And every word made her weep and cry and she had no idea why. Now with a supernatural hunger stronger than wanting to finish her life, she wanted to know more about God in this Bible. And she read and read Bible – and she began to see even a filthy wicked sinner like herself who murdered her husband and tried to murder her mother-in-law, God forgives. She thought she would die from her heart exploding with God's love.
- She said, 'God loves me, God loves me!' And every time she came across the word 'LOVE' in the Bible, she collapsed on her face and wept and wept.
- She said to Park, 'Elder Park, God has given me a special gift. When I open my eyes in the morning, the first thing I do is to pray. Then I look for the worship song I want to sing from the hymn book. And one song would stand out.' Then from that moment all day long she would sing and worship God with the song, doing whatever duties she had to do in the prison. She would sing the song 200 times 300 times.
- She did this all day every day. And by the evening, the power of God's word in every verse, every note, the power of God's love and the anointing of the Spirit would pour into her and take hold of her being, and she felt she was almost floating in the air. She was laugh and cry with the joy of the Lord.

### **2.3 YoungHee's Execution**

- The hour of YoungHee's execution arrived one day. She was standing with the noose hanging from the ceiling behind her in the execution hall. In front of her were the prison officers and the judicial team etc overseeing her execution. Park was standing before them all as the supervisor over the entire process.
- The prison warden who is the head of the prison, confirmed YoungHee's name, date of birth, address and the place of her birth. He then asked her, 'Would you like to have a final religious service?' YoungHee said 'yes.'

- So the pastor in charge and all the Christian prison officers present in the hall stood, surrounding her for worship service before she goes to her death. At the end of the service, the prison warden asked her, 'Is there anything you'd like to say as a final word and testament?' YoungHee said, 'yes.'
- She said, 'I pray that God's kingdom will come quickly on earth, so that there will be no more wicked sinners like myself, and there will be no more frightening executions like this. I will keep praying for this heaven. I thank you, Lord, for loving even a wicked sinner like me. My husband is dead, and when I go, my two children will be orphans. But I trust God who saved me, a wicked sinner, that He will care for my children and raise them up. So in peace and rest I'm going. In heaven I will be praying for you.'
- When she finished, everyone present in the room felt their hearts were being moved by an unknown power. The prison warden just kept nodding his head. Now everyone was back in their position. And only things left as for the prison warden to say, 'Please, carry out the execution.'
- So Park said his final goodbye to YoungHee, 'Sister YoungHee, be strong. We will meet again in heaven. Farewell for now.' Suddenly YoungHee said, 'Elder Park, will you pray for me for the last time, please?' So Park stood before her, closed his eyes, gathered his hands in front of him and began praying, 'Lord, here is your beloved daughter. Please pour out your grace and mercy over her as she enters Your Kingdom...'
- Then suddenly YoungHee interrupted him in a loud voice, 'Elder Park!' He stopped praying and opened his eyes, 'Yes, sister. Do you want to say something?' She asked, 'Please, lay your hand on my head and pray for me.'
- Elders in the conservative Presbyterian churches very rarely pray for people with laying on of hands. So Park looked at the pastor in charge in the hall, and the pastor gave him a nod of permission. So Park carefully put his hand on top of YoungHee's head, and began to pray again, 'Dear Lord God, please pour out your mercy over your beloved daughter YoungHee...'
- Suddenly for the first time in his entire life, there was this volcanic fire erupting in his heart, and a strong compelling like a voice commanded him, 'Turn around, turn around, turn around and pray...' The compelling was so strong all over his body, but he had no idea why. He kept his hand on YoungHee's head, and turned around to go and stand behind her. Previously, he was facing YoungHee and the noose behind her, with his back to his boss, his superiors, judicial team etc watching over the execution. Now Park was standing behind YoungHee with the noose behind him. And he was facing the execution team seated in their position.
- And he continued to pray, 'Dear Lord, please pour out Your grace upon this daughter...' And the volcanic fire in him that compelled him to turn around to face the people, exploded inside of him. He felt almost faint. He could not think of anything. But something was rising from his heart. Without thinking, he raised one hand into the air and prayed. He'd never prayed with such loud voice in his life nor with such boldness. It was no longer him who was praying. It was the Holy Spirit.
- 'Lord God, pour out Your grace upon this daughter. Her life will be snuffed out in this execution hall because of the terrible sin of murder she has committed. But rest of us seated here, who look dignified and respectable, but harbour evil, wickedness and filth in our hearts worse than our sister. Help us not to occupy these high seats to condemn and judge and kill YoungHee, but in this very hour of the living and the dead crossing path, make us know who is truly the bigger criminal, who is truly the more wicked prisoner on death row, and who is more deserving of the death sentence. Make us search our hearts today, O God.'
- Park could not stop himself. It was not a prayer he could ever devise or manufacture. When he was finished, he thought, 'O boy, I'm in trouble now. I've offended my boss. What would these men think,

these high officials way above me?' In the middle of prayer, he suddenly turned around and said to them 'you are the bigger criminal, you are the worse sinner, you deserve to be executed even more!'

- But when he opened his eyes, he saw the Spirit of God moving upon the officials who were seated. Every single one was weeping. The prosecutors. The head of the prison – the warden. The pastor, the catholic priest, even the Buddhist priest was weeping.
- YoungHee was led to the hanging noose, and the rope was put around her neck, and a white hood over her face. Only thing left was to press the button that will open the floor under YoungHee to open up and she would fall to her death by hanging. Suddenly someone began singing, 'Amazing grace how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me.' It was YoungHee, worshipping God with the noose around her neck.
- All the Christians in the execution hall began to sing with her. 'When we've been here ten thousand years, bright, shining as the sun...' And the floor beneath YoungHee opened with a big sound, and she fell and was gone.
- **Matt 9** <sup>12</sup> When Jesus heard *that*, He said to them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. <sup>13</sup> But go and learn what *this* means: 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice.' For I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance."
- The voice of God's love that redeemed YoungHee was heard all over the prison from that execution hall that day, and is echoing to this day even here among us.

### **3** Food for Thought

- A. Do you have a Bible verse or song that expresses your thankfulness to the Lord for saving you?
- B. Your thoughts on the Bible verses below?

**Matt 9** <sup>13b</sup> For I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance."

**1 Tim 1** <sup>15b</sup> "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners"—and I am the worst of them all. <sup>16</sup> But God had mercy on me so that Christ Jesus could use me as a prime example of his great patience with even the worst sinners. Then others will realize that they, too, can believe in him and receive eternal life.