

Sang Ik Choi, the First Unification Church Missionary - Part 10

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Members are witnessing in front of Shibuya station, 1962.

Leaving the Prison

I raised my right hand to wave good-bye and wished everyone well. I left Tanaka a final message during break time, to believe in me. I met Captain Kim and the secretary at factory number 2, feeling many emotions. The three of us greeted the prison general affairs director and section chief together. Inwardly, I absolutely did not want to thank them, and as a child of God, thought, "I regret having been incarcerated by you." I wanted to maintain my dignity.

We came to the solitary cells in building 15. I was put in cell 12, a principled number. I recalled when I first came here, I was put in solitary. I was returning through the same path, a course of restoration to go back where I came from. I closed my eyes to pray, had dinner, and went to bed at 7:00pm. Under the covers, I thought about what to do after the discharge, how to complete my mission, etc., one thought after another. I prayed until 10:00pm then went to sleep. I prayed, "Father, I will spend my last night here."

February 18 - I woke up for my midnight prayer and prayed. Then I waited for dawn. As usual my thoughts rushed to the future, and I thought and thought about how I could gain honor for Heavenly Father and my trinity. The day began to dawn, and the siren announcing the hope of my release rang loud and clear. I had my last breakfast here with thrill in my heart. I only had to wait now for the security to come and escort me. I heard they would come right after breakfast but they were late. The handyman said they were delayed by immigration matters so that couldn't be helped.

Finally around 9:30am, the education section asked for Choi, saying there would be an interview with a minister. It was Rev. Hayashi, who promised he would come when I was to leave. As he was busy, we talked briefly about my parole and parted.

I returned to a solitary cell, and after a while, someone from the security section actually came saying we would be released for serving full term. The three of us took each step with excitement. My joy was greater than the others. We received our official notice of discharge from the general affairs chief, took off the blue uniform of bitter sorrow that we had had to wear from four months ten days before, and I changed into the suit that Mr. Jeon sent me from our homeland. This day, this time, was now a reality. My heart danced as I put on a wristwatch that Mr. Song had sent me, with a white shirt, and I became a new member of society. Full of joy and smiles, in high spirits, I cried out in my heart, Heavenly Father, Lord, brothers, look at me! Next, I was to receive the 30,000 yen sent, via the accounting section and my work payment of 114 yen, but these were still not handed directly to me, but with an immigration officer.

The immigration officer was standing next to me already. It felt as if my joy was taken away again. This is what they call "out of the frying pan and into the fire." They said the train was coming, so we went to the front gate. The iron doors of the front gate opened to set us free! It was the 130th day. We were in a hurry, and without being able to take time to savor the release, we rushed to the station.

It was to our second place of difficulty. We thought we would be handcuffed by immigration as soon as we left prison, to be sent to Shimonoseki, but they acted as gentlemen and didn't handcuff us. We were escorted as free men by the two officers, and hurried to the station. I only thought about escaping. If we arrived at Shimonoseki, I would be sent back to Korea, and my goal would be thwarted. I wanted to escape. If I thought of my mission, I had to; yet I had no money. The officer had all of it, and as my hair was short, the chances of an escape succeeding were low. As I walked, I tried to think calmly. We arrived at Yuda station, but the train had already left.

We had two hours to wait until the next train so went to a cafeteria at the station, and had my first white rice and noodles outside of prison. How comforting it was, the flavor of the tea... Everything was like paradise. Having left prison, it seemed I didn't have that much of an appetite for what I longed for there. There was a lot of time, so we went into a café in town. I wanted so much to feel the freedom of walking about town. There was a nice café called the Den'en Café, so we went in and ordered a coffee. It was a quiet, modern place, completely different from Korea. I quickly wrote a letter to Mr. Jeon. I was in a rush; I could hardly taste the coffee.

It was time to return to the station, and we started off towards Shimonoseki. The train was moving. I was struggling. Oh, I wanted to be free, to go to Tokyo. The train was headed in the opposite direction of my heart. I couldn't stand it. I wanted to jump off the moving train. Death was not the issue, the point was to fulfill the mission. However, without money, the chances of success were low. I bit my tongue and gave up that idea. But the closer we got to Shimonoseki, the more I struggled. I couldn't stand more time in detention. At Shimonoseki station I thought, "All right, I'm going to escape, whatever happens." But knowing it wouldn't work, I couldn't do it.

We arrived at the immigration office by jeep. We went to the detention house again via the office. Here we go again. I was given one cell. It was a dirty tatami room. There were about ten dirty blankets for bedding, the facilities were worse than prison. But we had our freedom, so that difference was like night and day. I met other Koreans there, which made me nostalgic, but they actually didn't give me such a good impression. Dinner came, the side dishes were good but the main dish was smaller than the smaller meals at the prison. We were free in the room, and talked till about 11:00pm. I went to sleep as I felt hungry. I got back the copies of the Lord's sermons which I hadn't read in a while, but as my heart felt unstable, I couldn't read.

Suffering course from when I was freed until we held the first Sunday service

February 19 - It was a day of freedom for Satan's children, but for a child of God, it was the second period of hardship as the time had not yet come. When I left Yamaguchi Prison, I felt my course was like Jacob suffering in Laban's satanic world. I wanted to restore something, and when I left prison, an inmate friend in the same ward named Masaru Ueno had come to see me, so I took the name, Masaru [meaning 'to win'], as one who had won over the first period of hardship by faith. It was like Jacob, who succeeded in fulfilling a heavenly condition and received the name Israel from the angel.

Although we were released on the 18th, the second period of a suffering course was before me, being held in detention again. Heaven's sorrow rather than mine, but until time was ripe, it couldn't be helped.

We spent day one, and it was now day two. I was beginning to get a sense of the place. Then it was day three. I couldn't idly spend the day any longer. I must plan various things. I should first make official my discharge plans... around noon, we, the crew members of the ship Mibok were made to apply for a return voyage to Korea. They urged us to prepare things as quickly as possible and return to Korea. I couldn't sit still all day, so I wrote a letter to Rev. Hiraide in Tokyo. As we weren't doing anything, my body was getting sluggish. I wanted to shape up, but we had been tense all this time, and Satan's temptation to rest another day came. I went to bed about 11:00pm.

February 22 - It was the first Sunday since my second course of hardship began. After eating, I started reading the collected sermons, and read one called, "Significance of a trinity and one who brings joy to the Heavenly Father." I felt strength rise at reading the Lord's words which I hadn't in a while. I felt a firm resolve to become a loyal subject who could truly feel the Father's will as my heart. After reading it, I wanted to sing holy songs, and sang a new, Completed Testament holy song that I recalled. Oh, for the first time in several months, my heart was full, and I sang from my heart. Hot tears came. Later, I quietly faced the west, and prayed. I was reminded of the Sunday services at the Kyeongseong [Seoul] Church. I felt even greater strength, and pledged loyalty to Father and the Lord.