

ESCAPE FROM CAMP 14 **Part 2**

Luke 4:16-21

Last Lord's Day, I introduced to the story of a young North Korean man named Shin Dong hyuk. He is the subject of a book entitled, *Escape From Camp 14*, which is what he did in 2005 at the age of 23. Shin escaped from the Kaechon slave-labor camp in which he had been born on November 19th, 1982. His story is amazing if for no other reason than that he endured life in that camp for those first 23 years. Life there, when compared to what most of us have known, had to be an almost "hell on earth." It's amazing too because of his daring, but harrowing, and almost unbelievable escape. The main reason, however, that I find Shin's story so amazing is because of its many parallels to the gospel message which is found in this book.

I hope many of you were able to recognize some of those parallels. I hope you were able to recognize what amazing blessings we have been given, not only to be born into a world where we do not have to face the harshness and deprivation and cruelty Shin experienced every day for almost the first 24 years of his life. I also hope you recognized the blessings you've been given in that you too have been able to escape the imprisonment or enslavement to this world of sin and death. For sure, for those who have not escaped, who have not availed themselves of that opportunity, made possible through the coming of Christ, their eternal future is going to be incredibly worse than anything Shin experienced in that camp!

This morning we will see how Shin's escape was made possible by someone who came from outside the camp, and in giving his life made it possible for that young man to escape. It is important to keep in mind that Shin was born into that world. For the first fifteen years or so of his life, that was the only world he knew. His was a world of miserable poverty, extreme cruelty and paralyzing fear. It was a world in which hope was almost non-existent, or limited to finding some way to get a little more food or a little less work. I am sure none of us can really relate to that world. Because of that I'm sure that it is hard for us to compare the escape we make from the world of sin and death with the escape Shin made from his world. But make no mistake about it, our predicament was just as dire, just as destructive, and just as hopeless.

I suspect many of the Jewish people who heard Jesus reading and teaching that day in His home synagogue in Nazareth found it hard to relate the implications that He was making.

- He said Isaiah's prophetic words were being fulfilled that day as he spoke about proclaiming the good news to the poor. Did they see themselves as poor?
- He spoke about proclaiming liberty to the captives. Did they see themselves as captives of anyone?
- He spoke about recovering the sight of the blind. Did they see themselves as blind? He spoke about setting free those who were oppressed. Did they see themselves as oppressed?

Maybe some of them did but we know from other conversations Jesus had with many of the Jews, they didn't think of themselves as being slaves of anyone. They didn't think of themselves as blind. As Matthew Henry, the Bible commentator once wrote, *"There are none so deaf as those that will not hear. None so blind as those that will not see."*

So for me, the challenge is to not be blinded by the so-called good life that I have been allowed to live; to not misunderstand the apparent freedom I live under. I have to keep from taking hold of that spirit-killing lukewarmness such as was true of the people of Laodicea, who said, *"I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind and naked!"* That was a mouthful wasn't it! They didn't know they were wretched. They didn't know they were pitiable. They didn't know they were poor and blind and naked!

But you see, for a long while, Shin didn't know he was so poor and wretched and pitiable. He didn't know because he didn't have anything to compare his life to. He didn't know because the world of camp 14 was all he knew, and if this world is all you know, even if it is this 21st century world in the United States, and because of the deceitfulness of sin, you may not realize that you truly are wretched, poor, blind and naked!

At the age of sixteen, Shin was assigned a job at the camp's pig farm. It was a blessing that even Shin understood. Most other young people were assigned to work in the coal mines which provided fuel for the camp and for other North Korean cities. Most who worked in the mines, died in the mines, and most did not work very long. He was told he was assigned to work at the ranch, and to work hard. He worked there from 1999 to 2003.

[read 1st three paragraphs, page 85].

For some reason that he never discovered, the job at the pig farm ended abruptly, and Shin was assigned to work in a garment factory. When a sewing machine broke, it was his job to carry it on his back to a repair room upstairs. Once, when he accidentally dropped a machine, he was summoned to the manager's office where the middle finger on his right hand was cut off. He was pressured to report any violations of the camp rules, and in 2004, a man was also assigned to work in the garment factory named Park. Shin was asked to get close to him, and find out if he had any secrets. Working side by side, many weeks went by with almost no conversation between the men at all. Then one day, Park asked Shin where he was from. Shin told him, he was from there, the camp. Park responded that he was Pyongyang. As that conversation continued, Shin learned that Park had once lived a privileged life. He had operated a Taikwondoe training center in Pyongyang, and that he trained many of the North Korean leaders. He had even once shook the hand of Kim Jong Il. He had been to places like Germany and Russia, places that Shin had never even heard of. He told Shin about South Korea, and China, information that proved to be helpful a year or so later when he escaped.

[read page 101, "much of what Park talked about..."]

And so began Shin's hopes for escape. Someone from outside the camp came into the camp and had told him about things that he had no idea even existed; things beyond his wildest imagination. Park told him about money, and telephones, and televisions. Shin began to think about another world, a better life, and he began to dare to dream. It changed him, gave him a new energy, a willingness to risk all for a chance to have that better life. They only had to make it happen, something that both Park and Shin desperately wanted.

Their plan was simple. Shin knew the camp, Park knew the outside world. Shin would get them out of the camp, and if it came to that, Park would use his training in Taekwondo to overcome any guards who came between them and their escape. They would flee into China, where Park had an uncle who could provide them with a place to stay, and with money and help in getting to South Korea.

Their chance to escape came on January 2, 2005, when he and Park and other garment factory workers were sent to help clear the trees away from the electric fence that ran around the entire camp. This was higher up in the hills, and there was snow, and it was bitterly cold. Working together they noticed that the guards walked by every so often, but there was enough time between that they would be able to run and get past the fence which was just a few hundred yards away.

When the opportunity came, they took off, Park stumbled and fell but got up again and being in better condition than Shin was the first to reach the fence. Neither of them had known whether or not the fence would kill them, or just shock them, but Park was immediately electrocuted to death, his body falling on the barbed wires, pulling it down and creating just enough space for Shin to slide through on Park's smoking body. And thus, this man, who had come from outside the camp, literally became Shin's savior, giving his life and making it possible for Shin to escape. Now, obviously there are a lot of dis-similarities between what Park did, and what Christ did for us, but I hope you get the point.

What is the gospel? I think it was Michelle who send me that question just this last week. Is it just the message concerning the death, burial and resurrection of Christ, or is it the whole New Testament? That's an excellent question, and it is one that I wish all of us would spend more time thinking about. In truth, the gospel is both, but it is really more than both.

While the gospel is a message, it is not just a message. While the gospel contain information, it is more than information. Someone has said that the gospel contains facts that are to be believed, commands that are to be obeyed, and promises that are to be enjoyed. All of that is true, but still it is more. Just as this book, *Escape From Camp 14* is not just a book, not just a story, but an account about someone that really exists, and something that really happened, it is a message that can make a difference. Shin Dong hyuk is hoping that his story will alert the world to the existence of these slave camps within North Korea, and that if the world would act, possibly hundreds of thousands of lives might be saved.

God is hoping that His Son's story might be heard by every person in every city, in every nation in the world, and that all might be saved.

Of course, Park did not just come into camp 14; he was sent; it was a punishment for some supposed crime he had committed against the regime. Jesus came of His own will. Paul will tell the Christians in Philippi:

Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, 6) who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7) but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. 8) And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. 9) Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, 10) so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, (2:5-10).

Park did not come into camp 14 for the purpose of saving anybody, whereas the Bible declares that the Son of man came to seek and save the lost. The Hebrew writer (2:9) tells us, "*But we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.*"

Park doesn't provide a really good parallel to Christ as a savior, no one really could. But Shin, I think is a good parallel for all of us. Obviously not in the sense of the extreme brutal life he lived for the first twenty-three years of his life, but in the sense that he was in a world that was in fact a prison without any hope, without even any idea that there was something better.

That's where we are, although our prison may not look so bad. It looks like a nice home, nice clothes, plenty of good food, lots of things to do that are fun and interesting. But apart from the gospel, where does it all lead to? Rich man, poor man, PHD or high school dropout, hard worker or a fool, where does it end for all of these? It ends in the grave, doesn't it? And it ends in the grave because the wages of sin is death.

I know that I have been blessed with a really good life. I've enjoyed a decent standard of living, have a beautiful and wonderful wife, four children and their spouses that I'm proud to call mine, thirteen great-grandchildren, a nice home that John Habiger is making even nicer, two cars, three good meals a day. I've been afforded the opportunity to get a good education, to earn a livable salary, and live in the greatest nation on earth. I've enjoyed good health almost my whole life, and live in an age where medical as well as other marvels are almost taken for granted. A good life, but where does it all end? Well, unless Christ comes soon, this old body of mine will also end up in a grave somewhere.

But do you know what? That doesn't bother me. I'm not anxious about that because I've already escaped from my world of sin and death. That happened because someone came into this world to tell me about something better. He told me to not settle for this world, but to set

my aim higher, to set it for heaven. Not only did He come to tell me those things, He came to make that possible; to make it possible for me to get out of here alive as well. He did and He said that I can too. He said if I will just trust Him, if I will just believe in Him, and follow His lead, He would get me out of here, safely to a better place. And so, with His help, I'm on my way, because He is the way, the truth and the life. And as I go, I'm trying to let everyone else know that they too can escape this world of sin and death.

Camp 14 still exists today. It has been in existence for more than 50 years, and yet in all of that time, only one person born into that world has escaped. Everyone else remains in that prison. Will you remain in yours? If you are not a Christian, if you have not truly committed yourself to Christ as one of His disciples, then please understand, regardless of what it looks and feels like, you are in a prison camp and you are destined to die. When the internees of those camps died, or took their own life, they didn't go to a better place, as so many preachers like to say at funerals. As difficult to believe as it might seem, they went to a place that was even worse. Christ came to get you out of here, and keep you from going there.

If you want to escape your camp 14, will you come while we stand and sing!