

Plea for Forgiveness and Reconciliation

I. Story of Fushun (撫順、囹圄)

I was born in 1956. That same year, about 1000 Japanese soldiers returned to Japan from Fushun Prison which was located in the Northeastern part of China. After Japan surrendered, a number of war courts were held in different countries, and many Japanese war criminals were tried and executed. The war courts conducted by America, Britain, Australia, Holland, Taiwan, France, Philippine, all together 971 were executed and 479 were given lifetime imprisonment. In the war court conducted by the People's Republic of China in 1956, no one was sentenced to death or to lifetime imprisonment. 1017 were found guilty but pardoned and immediately released. Such gracious treatment of the war criminals was unheard of.

Japanese invaded vast areas of China. We committed most atrocious and brutal crimes imaginable to unarmed Chinese civilians, women, children and even to babies. We were worse than animals. We were called Japanese "sons of Devil" and we were.

Many of the Fushun prisoners after their return to Japan, dedicated the rest of their lives for promoting the friendship between China and Japan, for publishing books and giving speeches to confess publicly what they did in China, to appeal to Japanese people never to engage in war and never to repeat the same mistake.

What changed these Japanese prisoners? About 600,000 Japanese soldiers and civilians were captured by the Soviet army at the end of the war. They were sent to the work camps in Siberia. Since the Soviet government only gave them very little food and clothing, many died of malnutrition and illnesses. In Siberia Japanese soldiers were treated as Japanese used to treat their prisoners of war in Asia.

After five years of forced labor in Siberia, about one thousand Japanese were transferred to China. They were handed over to the Chinese authority. Many thought they were going to be killed by Chinese because of what they did to them previously. On the train to China, Japanese received a delicious meal which they had not eaten for years. Some thought this was the last meal before execution.

Chinese prison staff treated the Japanese prisoners with kindness and love for 5 years in Fushun Prison. They fed them nutritious meals three times a day. The prisoners did not have to work. The sick received good medical treatments. For the first year or two, the Japanese soldiers were still arrogant and disrespectful to the Chinese prison staff and nurses. They still acted as if they were better than Chinese people.

The Chinese Communist Party had a policy in Fushun to treat the Japanese soldiers humanely. Japanese prisoners received much better food than the Chinese prison staff.

This was when Chinese people did not have enough to eat. Why not? Because Japanese army took all the food and destroyed the land. The prisoners could have second servings if they wished. Many staff thought there was something wrong. Many did not want to work in the camp to take care of Japanese. At first many thought this was the opportunity to take revenge on the Japanese soldiers and to give them what they deserved. One of the prison guards actually found among the prisoners, the soldier who killed his family members. He became so furious. Still he had to follow the party's command not to abuse them either physically or verbally. He was ready to quit. The director of the prison persuaded him that if he quit then these Japanese would pick up guns and invade China again. He assured him that what they were doing was to help the Japanese change so they would never become aggressors again. So he continued and persevered.

Gradually Japanese started to change their attitude. They knew in their heart that they did not deserve what they were receiving especially after what they have done to the Chinese people. Japanese started to show their appreciation and respect for the kindness of the Chinese. Japanese were trained to think that Japan was the divine nation and that they were a superior race and the rest of the people were inferior, but they started think differently. This experience in Fushun not only changed the Japanese prisoners but also the Chinese staff as they saw that their kindness was changing the Japanese prisoners. Their hatred toward Japanese was softened and they actually felt friendly toward them by the end of the five years. They became friends.

The Chinese officials and workers at Fushun prison practiced Ro 12:20f. "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good." They fed their enemies and treated them with kindness. By so doing they put burning coals on the heads of Japanese soldiers. At first Japanese did not know what to do but they gradually changed. Chinese people overcame evil with goodness in Fushun. You defeated and destroyed our prejudice, arrogance and malice not by force, brutal treatment, threat, or torture but by love, mercy and kindness. We tried to defeat you and control you with force, violence, threat and sword, but we could not.

The Chinese Communist party and the prison staff proved to the world that Ro 12:20f is true by practicing it on most hateful, prejudiced and hardheaded and hardhearted Japanese soldiers. All truth is God's truth. Even communism which denies God's existence, holds much truth, God's truth in it. Communists, Buddhists, Muslims, and even Japanese sons of Devil are created in the image of God the Creator. We are made of God's truth and love.

Gandhi, a Hindu practiced and proved to the world that Matt 5:39 is true: "If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also." He showed us the way of non-violent resistance. India defeated British Empire not by force or by weapon but by the teaching of Jesus. He inspired Martin Luther King Jr. and many others. In America, the African Americans won their civil rights not by violence but by the truth of the Bible. Our God is big and powerful. God's truth is big and powerful.

II. Story of Stephen Metcalf

A British man, Stephen Metcalf was a son of a missionary to China. During his teenage years he was in China when Japanese army was occupying many cities of China. He was a high school student, studying in a boarding school with other missionary children.

Japanese army wanted their school campus so they moved the school to another location and they were under Japanese control. Metcalf hated Japanese for what they did to them and what they did to Chinese people. In their Bible class they were studying the Sermon on the Mount. Their teacher who was a missionary asked what they thought of Jesus teaching: "love your enemies." (Matt 5:44) When they heard the word "enemy," Metcalf and his classmates automatically thought of Japanese soldiers and thought it was an idealistic teaching but not a practical one. He thought to love Japanese was impossible and that God surely did not expect them to do that.

The teacher told the students that he felt the same way as they did at first. But he read the words followed the teaching, "love your enemies": "and pray for those who persecute you." The teacher encouraged the students to do that. The teacher said when you hate someone, you are the center of your thought. But when you pray, God is the center. And you cannot hate someone that God loves. Metcalf at first could not even pray for Japanese. But as he started to pray, his prayer changed and he was changed.

You may know Metcalf's teacher. His name was Eric Liddell. He was a gold medallist for 400 meter run in Paris Olympics of 1924. His story became a famous movie, "The Chariots of Fire." During the Japanese occupation, Liddell sold his gold medal in the black market and with the money, he fixed some of the sports equipments so that the students can enjoy sports even in the camp. Eric Liddell died of brain tumor in the camp. A couple of weeks before Liddell died he gave his running shoes to Metcalf. He wore those shoes when he carried Liddell's body to the tomb. He promised to God then that if God allowed him to come out of the camp alive, he would become a missionary to Japan to evangelize Japanese people. He kept the promise and came to Japan after the war and preached for over forty years. Metcalf said, "The best thing (Eric Liddell) gave me

was his baton of forgiveness. He taught me to love my enemies, the Japanese, and to pray for them."

Liddell taught Metcalf to pray. As he prayed, his attitude toward Japanese changed. He remembered that Jesus prayed for those who tortured him and humiliated him and who were nailing him to the cross: "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do." Metcalf thought Japanese did not know that they were doing. They did not know that every human being was created by God in his image. Japanese were also created by God and that they were hurting God when they were mistreating others.

III. God suffered with you

Before and during the war Japanese were trained to believe that their emperor was a living God. In the basic training of the Japanese Imperial Army they would beat you, hit you and kick you for no reason but break you until you become a robot to follow the command of your superiors without asking a question. They believed that when they obey the command of their superior, they were doing the Emperor's will or God's will. We were deceived by Devil and we became sons of Devil and did devilish things.

When you groaned and screamed with pain God heard you. When you cried God cried with you. He suffered with you with all the injustice, cruelty, and humiliation that we inflicted upon you. God saw every act of injustice and cruelty Japanese soldiers committed and tried to conceal. Only God knows how much you suffered because of us.

Gandhi said this: "When I despair, I remember that all through history the ways of truth and love have always won. There have been tyrants, and murderers, and for a time they can seem invincible, but in the end they always fall." Japan fell and so did Nazi Germany.

IV. Let us make the Lord's prayer our daily prayer

I have no right to ask for your forgiveness. I ask you to pray. There is a prayer in the Bible that teaches us to pray. It is the prayer that Jesus taught his disciples. It is called the Lord's Prayer but it is disciples' prayer.

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

When we put God first and in the center of our life then everything else falls in its proper place. If we do not, things fall apart. (Matt 6:33) Jesus taught his disciples to call God "Father." So this prayer is an invitation to us from the Father for an intimate relationship. This prayer begins with praise to God. We are not here to see how great we

can become but to know how great God is and to praise him and love him.

We pray “Your Kingdom come and your will be done.” Why do we pray this? Because we have rejected God’s rule and His will. Our world is corrupted and twisted because of Satan’s deception and of our sins. This prayer knows our pain, suffering and groaning. (Ro 8:22-23) This prayer longs for God’s order, justice, and healing.

This is a prayer of invitation to God to rule our lives as our King. How does God’s Kingdom expand? It expands by conquering us with his love. And we join his conquest as his soldiers. This prayer is a prayer of dedication. We dedicate our lives so that God can rule us. We dedicate ourselves to God who first dedicated himself for us.

Give us today our daily bread.

The first half of the prayer concerns God and his kingdom. That teaches us the purpose of our existence. Our aim is not to please ourselves but to please God and glorify Him. This is a prayer of trust: our declaration of dependence.

Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.

We live because of God’s forgiveness and by his grace. We receive so much mercy that we should be merciful to others. (Eph 4:32) The church cannot exist nor can we witness to the world without this kind of love for one another. John 13:34-35

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.

We acknowledge our weakness. We must know our enemy, the Devil. (1Pet 5:6-11) We also must know our ally. (Ro 8:31) If God is for us, who can be against us? We know our weakness but we also know that God can work powerfully through our weakness. (2Cor 12:10)

Prayer is not about letting God know what we want. It is about letting God do what he wants through us. This prayer is God’s daily invitation to live as his children. This is our invitation to God to rule our life and our heart. This is our daily prayer of dedication, our offering ourselves in his hands and for his service. This prayer allows God to mold us so we can become more and more like Jesus.

Let us learn to pray this prayer and live this prayer. God can mold and shape us through this prayer.

As a Japanese I am so ashamed for what we did to your people and I am so sorry. I have no right or reason to ask for your forgiveness. I can understand if you cannot forgive us. I will not ask you to give us a chance but to give God a chance to do a miracle:

His miraculous work of reconciliation and healing.

Father, make us one as your children.

Rule us and use us as your servants.

Give us grace to live and love one another.

We are weak. Protect us from Satan's deception and our own deception.

Father, heal the wounds of Chinese people and others. These are the wounds that we Japanese inflicted and the wounds go so deep. Reach your healing hands deeper, Lord, and touch and heal them with your love for your glory.

This we pray in the name of our crucified Savior Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen