

The rats of Yodok.

I imagine that the rats of Yodok should be entered as an endangered species, for their numbers dwindle rapidly. The good news for us is that a solution has been found for over-population of rats, wherever they might be found. The solution is to starve the human population of the area to such a frightful degree that the desperate bipeds will value rats as fine cuisine.

I speak with bitterness and sarcasm of the plight, not of rats, but of Christians, in North Korea. Will anyone hear our plea? Will someone come to the aid of the people of North Korea? Especially those of the household of faith that we value so dearly?

Forgive me. I failed to tell you what is Yodok. Maybe you know?

I speak of a concentration camp, officially Kwan-li-so number 15, located an hour's drive northeast of Pyongyang, North Korea. One hour southeast of that capital is the world class city of Seoul, South Korea.

Yodok is surrounded by mountains, at one time hidden away from humanity's eyes. Mr. Kim in the big city still claims it is not there, as do all the puppets assisting his lies. Aerial surveillance and escaped prisoners tell us the truth.

The camp is divided into two parts. A revolutionary zone is reserved for those who tried to leave the heavenly regime, either physically or by radio. Perhaps they even dared to criticize the perfection of the Pyongyang government. They are handed a sentence, they serve it, they go. There were well under 20,000 prisoners in this section in the 1990's. Today, significantly more.

Part two was made for you and me. That is, our family members. The Christians. People associated with Japan or any others upon whom Pyongyang cannot rely are sent there too. Perhaps 6,000 Christian believers inhabit this place as I write, of the total 30,000 or more residents.

These prisoners are never released.

Never.

A few have escaped. Some who did were incredible artists, and have drawn for us the pictures that match up with the aerial photographs perfectly. They remember. Oh do they remember.

Those who in any way are associated with the "guilty" are sent to prison with them. All family members, to several generations. Thus the total control over the minds of the people. Some might be willing to go public with their faith or their feelings for their own sakes, but most are usually not willing to risk the welfare of grandchildren, babes in arms, or many-decades-old grandparents.

The housing accommodations: huts made of mud with straw roofs. Wooden planks are the floor. Sleeping is on a wooden bed made for 30-40 prisoners. There is no heat. North

Korean winters can easily go below zero. This translates into frostbite and swollen limbs, pneumonia, TB, and more. With no available medical treatment.

Wardrobe: You may be wearing the clothes of the last prisoner. Who died in them. Dead are buried naked. Your other clothing is a solid layer of dirt, gathered over the years. Very little opportunity to wash.

No need even to comment on the odor of that mud hut.

Toilets are community, one for every 200 prisoners. Toilet paper: dry leaves.

Much of North Korea's labor is performed by these slave prisoners. There are mines, plants, distilleries. There is agriculture and logging. There are no safety measures in place. Just get the work done. 4 a.m. to 8 p.m. is your shift. Unless your quota is not met.

After "dinner" it is class time. Reeducation. You obviously just need to hear the truth over and over. The truth about the Kims and Juche, that is. Can't meet quotas? Can't memorize instructions handed down by the Kims? Expect a beating, sleep deprivation or less food.

The children have their own version of school in the morning. You can imagine the subject matter. In the afternoon they are sent to work with the old people. Beatings all around for those who can't keep up. "Keep up" means carry heavy logs 12 times, lift 70 pound buckets of human waste 30 times. Primary aged children.

But we were speaking of rats. Food rations are 5-6 ounces of corn gruel 3 times a day. Or less. Obviously they need supplements. Not the kind in bottles that we take every morning, but the kind found on the ground. Rats, snakes, worms, insects. But woe be to the prisoner who is trying to fatten himself in this way. That's why these treats are eaten raw, and whole, and quickly.

Even so, 20% of the prisoners can die each year from malnutrition alone.

There is more. We both grow weary in the telling. The information is all online.

Scores of human rights organizations have banded together to protest, and demand the immediate closure of Yodok and all the other Korean camps. But they still stand.

Now, how can we obey Hebrews 13:3 in the light of such evil? "Remember the prisoners as though bound with them."

I don't believe God wants his people to start eating rats. But perhaps a fast is in order. Perhaps a cut-back of the number of church suppers and church lunches and church breakfasts and church snacks and...

It is good for Christians to share meals together. But we have taken it to extremes. We want all our creature comforts to follow us from the world into the church doors.

Will we have to put pictures of Yodok in our church kitchens to awaken people? Those 6,000 people are separated from us only geographically. Can we not enter their world just a little bit?

And let us beg the God of Heaven to intervene for these whose only crime is knowing Jesus.

*Some facts gained from Wikipedia.*