

## Reverend Hyeon Soo Lim's Address to the Congregation

*[First public address to his congregation at the Light Presbyterian Church on Sunday, August 13th, 2017. He will follow this with an unscripted benediction.]*

I am so grateful that God has allowed me to be here with everyone here today. I want to earnestly thank Prime Minister Trudeau for helping in my return home. I also extend a very special thanks to Special Advisor Daniel Jean and the delegation for securing my release. In addition, thank you to Minister Freeland, former Minister Dion, Senator Yonah Martin and all the incredible staff in Ottawa. I also want to thank the Swedish Government for being Canada's protecting power in North Korea, and for playing a critical role in my release.

I am grateful for my church community. I'm indebted to all the churches in Canada, the United States and in Korea--the many friends around the world who have prayed daily for two years and seven months, until the moment I was released and returned home. Through those prayers and the efforts of all involved, I finally came home yesterday, landing at 10 a.m. on Canadian soil. It still feels like a dream. Truly, this is all by the grace of God.

I was sentenced to death by North Korea but the sentence was commuted to life of hard labour. That too, was God's grace, and gave me tremendous peace.

From that moment, there were days of overwhelming loneliness. From the first day of my detainment until the day I was released, I ate 2,757 meals in isolation by myself. It was difficult to see when and how the entire ordeal would end. But this isolation also gave me the opportunity to spend an extended time of solitude with God.

During the winter, I had to dig holes that measured one metre wide and one metre deep. The ground was frozen. The mud was so hard that it took two days to dig one hole. It was incredibly challenging. My upper body was sweating; my fingers and toes were frostbitten. I also worked inside a coal storage facility, breaking apart frozen coal.

In the spring and the summer, I worked outside, eight hours a day, in the scorching sun. One year of this difficult labour took a toll on my body and I was admitted to the hospital for two months. There would be three other occasions where I would be admitted to the hospital in serious condition.

During my time there, I read over one hundred books on North Korea and began to grasp and gain a deeper understanding of the 70 year history that formed the nation. I also read the Bible in both English and Korean five times and memorized over 700 Bible verses. I worshipped alone for 130 Sundays.

While I was laboring, I prayed without ceasing. I will share more details with you later.

There were many difficult moments but it was during these times that God gave me the strength endure and persevere. There were moments of discouragement, resentment, and grumbling but that soon changed into courage, joy, and thanksgiving. I learned to fully accept all of this as a form of God's love and discipline to make me stronger. By God's perfect and sovereign timing, I was released, returned home and here with you today.

*[...to will close with the Benediction.]*