

Nicolay

This story begins in the Second World War. The Russians were fighting against the Germans. Nicolay Yerofeyevich Boyko (1923-2005) was training to be a soldier. He was training to be in the Russian army. He did not finish his training. He was captured by the Germans. The Germans put him in a prison camp. The camp was in the German forest. There he had to gather sticks for the fire. He had been wounded in the leg. He hobbled about with a stick. He was injured and sick. That did not matter to the Germans. He was made to work very hard.

Something wonderful had happened to young Nicolay. It happened in that German prison camp. Your parents bring you up to know the Bible. Nicolay had never seen a Bible. Instead he was told that there was no God. "What can I do?" he thought in the prison, "there is no one to help me." One day he was gathering firewood. He found something strange under a bush. It was a little folded piece of paper. The paper was dirty. It was damp. He opened it carefully. On it was some writing. Nicolay was in Germany but the writing was in Russian. Russian was Nicolay's language. He began to read. On the paper were these words:

Our Father, which art in heaven,
Hallowed be thy Name.
Thy Kingdom come.
Thy will be done in earth,
As it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
As we forgive them that trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation,
But deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
The power, and the glory,
For ever and ever.
Amen.

Do you know those words? They are part of the Bible. They are the prayer Jesus gave to his disciples. We call this prayer, "The Lord's Prayer."

Nicolay trembled with joy. He cried. How happy he felt as he read the words! He read them over and over. He read them carefully. "A prisoner like me has a Father in Heaven," he thought. "This paper has not come here by accident. There is a God!"

Nicolay hid the paper carefully in his shirt pocket. He finished his work. He went back to the camp barracks. At once he learned the words off by heart. Now no one could take them away from him. He prayed the prayer every morning. He prayed it every evening. He thought hard about what the words meant.

Nicolay's life had been hard. It was going to be hard in the future. But now Nicolay had hope. Then the war ended. Nicolay was going home to the Ukraine. At this time the Ukraine was ruled by Russia. He had been caught by the Germans. He had been a prisoner of war. How he looked forward to freedom! But what was this? "You surrendered," said the Russian government. They were angry. "You had a weapon. Why did you not fight? You gave up! We will put you on trial." At his trial Nicolay explained what happened. The Germans had captured him before his training as a soldier was over. He had not yet been given a weapon. It made no difference. Now he was not freed. He was sent to a Russian prison.



Nicolay was treated cruelly in the Russian prison. God did not leave him. God provided him with a Bible. He read it all. Now he understood about Jesus the Saviour. He hid his Bible carefully from the guards. If they found it they would take it away. God sent other Christians to help him. He grew in his Christian life. He was sent to various prisons. He told the other prisoners about Jesus Christ. His prison sentence was a long one.

Then suddenly, something strange happened. He was supposed to be in prison for seven years more. He was called before the judge again. The judge said, "You may go free. You have worked hard in prison and there is nothing criminal in what you have done." Nicolay was free. He had been in Russian prisons for nearly nine years. Before that he was in a German prison for over three years. For the first time in his life he could go to church. He had not been able to be baptised. It was winter. That did not matter to Nicolay. The river was freezing. There was ice on it. There was snow on the bank. That did not matter to Nicolay. He was baptised in the cold river.

Nicolay went home. His home was called Voznesensk. It was in the Ukraine. He joined the church there. Nicolay and other young believers went off to different villages. They preached the gospel there. They took their musical instruments. They sang hymns. Sometimes they would walk ten miles to a village to preach. Often people came to know Jesus as their Saviour at these meetings. Nicolay got married. He found a job. He became a water and heating engineer. More and more people went to the churches. There were more young people to preach in the villages.

Then the old pastor at Voznesensk became blind. A new pastor came. He told the youngsters to stop their preaching. "Do not go out to the villages any more," he said. Sometimes a young person would ask to be baptised. That young person would get a visit. It was not a nice visit. It was a visit from the police. "You must give up this religion," the police officer would say. "We will punish you if you do not." Anyone under 18 years old was told, "You cannot come to church."

The Communist government did not like Christians. Christians are hard working. They obey all the good laws. That was not good enough for the communist government. "You must do everything we say," they said. "Only the government can say what people can read. You cannot make your Christian magazines. We make the laws, not God. There is no God."

The government set up its own church organisation. No churches were allowed if they did not join it. The organisation was set up to stop the churches getting bigger. Good pastors were taken away. Young people and children were not allowed at the services. If a church got bigger it was closed. Christians like Nicolay Boyko had to form their own churches. These churches were illegal. Their members were persecuted. They were put in prison. Nicolay was put in prison again too.



In 1988 a change happened in Russia. The Communist system broke down. There was a new government. Nicolay Boyko was released for the last time. Other Christians were set free too. Now he was free to serve the Lord as an evangelist again. On December 13th 1988, he returned to his family and his home church.