

Crowns on the Ice!

By Maria Maria #659 CM/FM 3465 8/03

Dear Family,

1. I'm excited about what the Lord has given me to share with you in this GN. Remember the story Dad told several times in the Letters about the Christians on the ice in Russia who were dying for their faith? Well, now the Lord has allowed those involved to tell their stories, to give us more insight into what really happened in this true-life account. These are real people, and they've opened their lives to us to teach us more about faith, holding on to our crowns, and running the race that is set before us.

2. As a refresher, here's one of Dad's accounts of the event, from the Letter "Fighters":

It was supposed to have happened in communist Russia during the early days when they were persecuting the Christians so badly. They put this bunch of Christians out on the ice naked to die because they wouldn't renounce their faith. The guards told them that, if any of them wanted to save themselves, all they had to do was run back to the guards and renounce their faith and they wouldn't have to die.

So they all froze and dropped one by one, till this last fellow finally couldn't take it. He saw all these other people dying and he was left alone, the last one, so he ran screaming across the ice toward the guards and said he couldn't stand it any longer, he'd deny his faith. But suddenly one soldier said, "Here, quick, take my uniform, take my gun, put them on!

"I'm going out there to die in your place! I was standing here watching and as each one dropped I saw a crown placed on his head! But just as the hand was coming down from Heaven to place a crown on your head, you ran! So here, take my uniform, my gun! I want to take your place--I want that crown!" (ML #551:130-132).

3. First Pietro introduces himself and tells his story. He's the Russian soldier who saw a crown being placed on the head of each Christian on the ice as they died, and said those famous words, "I want that crown!"--And got it! Then there's Franz, the one who denied his faith and forsook his crown. He didn't lose his salvation, but did lose much of his reward. He tells us his history, the intimate details of his life, why his faith was weak at the time, and what happened to him in the years following that day when he relinquished his crown to another.

4. To make the account even more interesting and fill in important details of what happened behind the scenes, Pietro's grandmother, Karinya, tells her side of the story. As you'll see, she was a mighty woman of faith and prayer! And if you've ever wondered what happened to the other Russian soldiers who were there on that freezing day out in the middle of nowhere, who witnessed this unforgettable event, don't miss Vladimir's account! His life, and that of his fellow soldier, Yuri, changed forever!

5. I don't want to say too much or give away the story, but I pray that these testimonies will encourage, inspire, and strengthen your faith. Jesus has a beautiful crown for each of us, and it's not just a crown we decide to take or leave when we're facing our earthly deaths or if we're called to martyrdom. It's a crown we decide we want every single day of our lives. It's a crown we've got to be willing to fight for, even if by faith alone. It's a crown we choose to sacrifice for, because we're convinced in our hearts that it's worth it and we know Jesus is counting on us.

6. We often picture a crown as being glamorous and golden and beautiful. But in everyday life it translates into hard work, sacrifice, dying daily, and taking up our crosses and serving Jesus no matter what. Holding on to our crowns is not a decision we make just once in our lives. Each and every day we've got to say, "Yes, I want my crown. I'm not going to deny my faith, but I'm going to give my all, whatever it takes!"--And sometimes it takes a lot; it's not always easy. We've got to decide each and every day to yield, to submit, and to fight for our crown, to keep doing God's will, His highest and best plan for us!

7. We've all got to fight for our crowns! It's dying daily and the continual choosing to take up our crosses to follow Jesus that translates into "that crown"! We may never see our crowns in a tangible form, so it doesn't just take fight, but faith as well, to hang on and not give up. But it's more than worth it! As Dad said: "There's no crown without a cross, no testimony without a test, no triumph without a trial, no victory without a battle, no rose without a thorn! Praise God, that's what you joined the army for--to fight and to win! It's worth it! It's worth every fight, every battle, every test, every trial! It's worth it all!" (ML

#551:133-134).

8. Thank you, dear Family, for holding on to your crowns with all of your strength, might, and spirit! "Let us run with patience the race that is set before us; looking unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith!" (Heb.12:1-2).

With much love and great faith in each of you,
Mama

Introducing Pietro

9. (Pietro:) My name is Pietro. I lived in a small village near Petrograd*. My family were farmers, and from the time I was very little I can only remember hard times. When the crops grew they were often taken by corrupt princes and their men, and sometimes even by the czar's soldiers who controlled our area. (*At the onset of World War I in 1914, with Russia at war against Germany, the city of St. Petersburg [at that time the capital of Russia] changed its name from the Germanic form to the Russian form, Petrograd. Shortly thereafter, the city and name of Petrograd became intimately associated with the Russian Revolution, which began there in 1917. The city was renamed Leningrad after Lenin's death in 1924. After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, a citywide referendum voted to change the name back to the original St. Petersburg.)

10. Many were starving, and though we were able to hide enough of our crops to stay alive, things were always very hard. One day men came to our village promising to help us. My parents and my babushka [grandmother] who lived with us were very suspicious of them. They had heard many promises before, but they never came true. I was sixteen at the time, and to me the fiery words of these men carried hope. I was angry with the czar's people who pretended to be Christians but who cared little that we were always on the edge of starvation.

11. That night I told my parents and my babushka that I was going to join these men and try to bring equality to all Russians so there would be enough food to eat for everyone. My father became angry and forbade me to have anything to do with these men. He said they hated God and would only destroy our country. I pled with him to let me go and then became angry and demanded he let me go or I would run away and join them anyway. He stormed out of the house and my mother burst into tears and ran to her bedroom.

12. My babushka took me aside to her room. She looked into my eyes and said, "Pietro, I know you are a strong-willed man now and will do what you want. I am afraid for you. What your father says is true. No matter what these men say, they will never be able to bring good from it. They have denounced God as being part of the czar's corrupt ways, and though they look to help the poor, they will in the end bring far worse things upon us if they take over this country.

13. "If you will not heed my warning, then I ask you to promise me one thing. I want you to promise you will always keep at least a corner of your heart open. These men are dark and their darkness will cloud your soul. They will try to convince you that there is no God, that the purpose of religion is evil. But God is more than religion, and even if the czar has used the church to his own ends, these men are no better for seeking their own ends without God. But promise me that no matter what they say, you will always keep a corner of your heart open to hear God's voice if He should speak to you. For one day He will answer my prayers and prove to you that He is real, and that these men are evil."

Text box

14. (Jesus:) Pray for your loved ones who have left My service, that they will always keep their hearts open to Me and their ears attuned to the voice of My Spirit, because there will come a time when I will gather each of My wandering children unto Me again, when I will call them to serve Me once again in a special way. My voice will ring in their ears when the time is right, and My Words to them will be clear, as My Spirit is revived in the corners of their hearts that are protected and preserved through your prayers.

15. I thought she was crazy. I knew a lot about Jesus, having received salvation and instruction in the faith from her during my childhood years. But because I was young and rebellious at that time in my life, all I could picture Jesus as was someone hanging on the cross glaring at me in anger for my sins. So I promised that I would leave a place open if He ever spoke to me, though I never expected He would want anything to do with me, and I had other, brighter hopes to follow now. I was off to save Russia.

16. That night I packed a few things in a bundle and went to the camp these men had set up

on the edge of the village. I joined their small but growing band as they traveled from village to village. I listened to their words that promised everything good and wonderful. I winced whenever they blasphemed against God, but as time went on I winced less and less. I eventually found myself blaspheming Him and wondering why I had ever believed in such a ridiculous fairy tale.

17. As we reached Petrograd we were joined by many others, and soon we were a small army. Then came the bread riots and revolution in the streets of Petrograd, with some of the soldiers opening fire on the people before the army itself turned against the czar and joined our cause. Anger took control of me after that, and I enlisted in the reorganized forces of the army, now called the Red Army. The next few years of civil war that followed the revolution were a blur of passion and hatred against anything that was linked to the czar or his people. The rhetoric from our leaders became more fiery and more broad sweeping.

18. Once the war was over and the state and government had been reorganized, the focus shifted to purging out any who weren't loyal to the new system. Christians were considered czarists, and the Red Army and secret police began rounding them up from the villages and cities to be supposedly taken to camps, but I had heard that many were being executed as counter-revolutionaries. It was painful to know that such things were being done, but we were convinced that there was no other way to purge the land of the czarist influences and bring about the true utopia of a pure communist state.

19. I had not been involved with the actual execution of the Christians. I would help round them up and put them on trains to be sent away. It was easier that way to harden myself to what was going on. I no longer believed in God. I had been soaked in anger--anger against evil men who oppressed the poor, anger against God who would allow such things. I didn't want to believe in God, because if He was real I would have to be angry with Him, and if He was God, there was no way to fight Him. So I denounced Him like all the others. I chose to refuse to believe He even existed, and that those who believed in Him were only using it as a front to oppress the poor and keep control of my country. It all made so much sense and my reasoning justified what I was doing, searing my conscience till I could feel no mercy for anyone who stood in the way of our "freeing" of the masses.

20. I didn't have to do the "dirty work" and I felt better about it that way. But one winter night as we were loading up a trainload of Christians, Ubinov, my direct superior, came to me with papers ordering me to accompany the trainload of Christians to the north. I tried to get out of it, arguing that I was more needed here as there were still many counter-revolutionaries to find, but there was no way to disobey his order. Any disobedience would have meant arrest and almost certain death as a counter-revolutionary traitor myself.

21. A sick feeling surged through me as I boarded the train. The moans and whimpering of the children in the cattle cars pierced through the tough hide I'd built up. I couldn't help wondering if maybe all this had gone too far. So much of what I'd known growing up had been destroyed, and though we'd had such high ideals, so far those ideals had led to nothing but bloodshed and suffering. The poor were as bad off as ever, or worse, from what I'd heard whispered amongst the soldiers after receiving letters from their families.

22. I had never written my parents or babushka since joining the revolution. I couldn't. I wanted to believe they were all right and somehow untouched by the horrors of all that was happening. I couldn't bear to think they might still be considered Christians and taken away too. I didn't want to know, and chose to dream on that they were all right.

23. After two days of travel we came to a vast frozen lake. I had no idea why we were here. I had heard little of where the Christians were taken or what happened to them, though I had heard that many were executed while others were put in camps. The train stopped and the last cattle car was unhitched.

24. I was ordered to get off the train, and a small group of us, headed by an officer I'd never seen before, were to be left there while the train went on. Some of the soldiers said it was routine. There wasn't going to be enough room in the next camp for all of the prisoners, so they simply got rid of the extra ones. They would return the next day to pick us up and take the empty cattle car on to its next loading place.

25. Some of the soldiers laughed and joked about what was to happen, but others were silent and looked fearful. They opened the doors and began forcing the men, women, and children out into the snow and marched them down to the lake.

26. "Why are we doing this?" I asked the commander. "They'll die out here!"

27. "What should we do?" he barked back. "The cities are running out of food and these

Christians who are traitors are only eating the food that should be for the loyal ones. Mother Russia will be better off rid of such subversives. Now get to work and march them down to the lake!"

28. It made sense, but watching the children marching to their deaths seemed so wrong. I saw myself as a boy among them, and tears began to run down my face as they were forced to undress and walk out onto the ice to die. That's when that little corner of my heart came to life.

29. I watched them go forth, not screaming or pleading for mercy, but walking calmly, like their Savior, as lambs to the slaughter. I could see something on their faces which I'd never seen on anyone before. It was as though there was a light shining out of them. They held each other and began praising God for the faith He'd given them.

30. Then as they began to fall one by one, I saw something beyond words. There was a light coming from somewhere high up in the sky, but at the same time very close to the ice, as if it was shining down on that particular spot. I knew it wasn't the sun, because the sun was behind us. As I watched one man, I saw a ring of light coming down toward him. As it descended, I saw it was a crown held by a pair of ghostly hands. I could see right through the hands! Moments after the crown was placed on the man's head, he fell to the ice. I saw other crowns descending, and more people dropping. I could tell exactly who was going to drop next by these crowns of light that were descending over each one. And when they dropped, I could still see a glowing image of them standing, tall and strong, floating upward with their hands held out toward the light.

31. In that moment I realized that all my babushka had told me was true. I knew Jesus was real, but even more, I saw Him not as an angry God who was out to make me suffer, but as a Being of Love--soft, warm, welcoming, and accepting.

32. There had been one man who'd been lagging behind the others and had been trying to persuade the other soldiers to let him stay with them, but they had mocked him and knocked him around a bit, then forced him onto the ice, telling him he could come back and join them if he denied he was a Christian and that God existed and declared he wanted to join the Bolshevik cause.

33. After several of the other Christians had fallen, and risen into the light, I turned my attention to this man, who was standing a little apart from most of the others. I knew he felt differently from them because he didn't seem as committed, nor as peaceful about meeting his fate. I was curious what would happen to him, because I did not feel at peace about meeting my fate either. So I began watching him more closely, waiting to see if he would receive a crown like the others. But then he turned and came running, screaming that he would join us, denounce anything, do anything, he just wanted to live.

34. At that moment, something changed in me. I looked at what I'd become. I looked at the other soldiers I was with, and I could see that they were filled with darkness. I hated myself at that moment for what I'd become. I hated them for the evil I saw in them. I knew in that moment that I belonged out there on the ice. I wanted to get that crown.

35. The soldiers were now mocking the man and telling him that there was no way they could bring him back unless he had a soldier's uniform, so unless one of the soldiers wanted to trade places with him and give him their uniform, there was no way he could get back on the train with them. I knew what I wanted and walked boldly to the commander who was talking to the man.

36. "He can have my uniform and gun!" I said. "I don't want it. I want to join the Christians on the ice. I saw what was going on out there! I saw crowns being placed on their heads as they went off to be with their Lord. I want that crown.

37. "It was coming down to you, you fool!" I said to the man. "And you ran right out from under it! I want to go out there and get your crown."

38. There was shocked silence as I took off my uniform and handed it to the man. I walked out onto the ice, and as I looked back I could see many of my comrades staring at me in shocked disbelief. Some had tears streaming down their faces, and the man who was now dressed in my uniform was huddled on the ground, weeping bitterly.

39. I knew then that I'd made the right choice. As I walked on I could see the bodies of those who had gone on before me, and as I approached them, a light began to surround me. I couldn't even feel the cold anymore, the ice and snow and biting wind, because the glow warmed me and made me feel so light--I felt as if I could fly.

40. I looked up and there in front of me was Jesus with His arms outstretched, holding the most beautiful crown I'd ever imagined. He wasn't the angry Jesus I had always envisioned, but the Jesus Who had spoken to that corner of my heart as I watched those Christians receive their reward--the

warm, caring, tender, and loving Jesus Who was now looking down at me with the most loving smile--a smile I knew I did not deserve.

Text box

41. (Jesus:) Everyone who receives Me and goes to Heaven receives a crown, but the rewards are different depending on the life lived on Earth, and it's impossible for you to clearly understand it all and grasp the spiritual differences. Suffice it to say that there are differences in rewards. Those who serve Me and love Me and give their all for Me receive greater rewards than those who just ask Me into their hearts and never lift a finger to help Me or others.

42. That began a life of wonders. I've spent most of my time in Heaven preparing to be a greeter, learning how to meet and guide the many who enter this realm and the ones who will arrive in the days and years ahead as the time of trouble begins--helping them to understand the many things they were never taught or were confused about or misunderstood.

43. I would enjoy greeting some of the children of David as they come home. Welcoming parties for you are special, fun greetings, often with parades and "unique" celebrations. You don't need to go through long adjustment periods because in so many ways you are already very much at home in the realm of the spirit through your frequent communications with the Lord and your spirit helpers. You are familiar with the ways of Heaven through heavenly thought power and the keys to the Kingdom and learning to become one with Jesus like no others on Earth!

44. So if you like, please feel free to ask me to be on your welcoming committee. I'm sure the Lord will be happy to oblige and I guarantee your party will be memorable!

Text box

45. (Jesus:) The honor and rewards of Heaven given to My brides who serve Me with their whole lives, hearts and spirits while on Earth are beyond description. All of those in Heaven who witness the arrival of one of My faithful servants, one of My children of David, know that that child of David is honored by Me in a very special way; there is no denying it.

46. There is great respect and honor given to those who come through the gates of Heaven after having served Me long and well while on Earth, so much so that you will feel shocked and humbled by it--not in an embarrassed sort of way, but you will be in a state of awe, and speechless because of what you will see and feel and know at that very moment.

47. It took some time here for me to learn and grow. But the Lord always had time and would often walk with me and lovingly explain so many things. I feel so unworthy of His love and care, but that only seems to make Him want to pour it on all the more. I'm certainly in the class of, "To whom much has been forgiven, the same loves much" (Luke 7:47). What seemed so absolute to me in those few short years I had on Earth was in reality so foolish. I was so sure I was right, but it just goes to show how wrong I was when I chose to only see what I wanted to see.

48. By the way, if anyone needs a spirit helper, especially there in Russia, but anywhere really, I'd love to share the wisdom I've learned to help you have the conviction and dedication to hang on and not faint as that crown is just about to descend for you. *(End of message.)*

Text box

49. (Jesus:) The crown of reward is yours, and it's always yours unless you give it away. You often feel like it's just a vapor, and nothing tangible or real, perhaps even a figment of your imagination, but in the spirit it's a treasure to be sought after and held on to at all costs.

50. Just as I opened the veil between Heaven and Earth and allowed Pietro to see the true value of the crowns of reward, so I can help you to see things in the spirit. You may not see a physical, tangible crown as he did, but I will help you to know as surely as he knew, through seeing with your eyes of faith, that your crown is something you must hold on to no matter how high the price, how great the sacrifice, or how grueling the fight.

Introducing Franz

51. (Franz:) I know the first thing you're thinking is, "Hey, who ever heard of a Russian named Franz?" Well, believe it or not, there were many Germans who had settled in Russia in those

days, especially in the east and north. My parents had settled in Petrograd before the war.

52. Under the czarina, Germans had been welcomed into Russia and we had become quite prosperous. [Note: Alexandra, wife of Czar Nicholas II, was German--the daughter of a German Grand Duke and a granddaughter of Queen Victoria.] We were at times shunned by the Russians because we were Lutherans, and those of the Orthodox Church were not happy to have us there. Still, they were afraid of the czarina who favored us and they didn't dare persecute us openly.

53. We lived in a tense sort of peace. My parents were very active in their faith and had won many friends among the Russians, who were so steeped in their idols and icons that Christ had pretty much become a minor part of their religion. We had many freedoms and a simplicity that appealed to those who were tired of the oppression of the Orthodox Church. Compared to the children of David, we had a very long way to go, of course, but we were sincere in our faith.

54. I'd had good training in the Word of God as I grew up. Life was very easy for me. I had many friends and hopes of a good position, perhaps even in the court of the czar someday. But as I reached my late teens, I could see that all was not right both with Russia and with my faith.

55. I loved the parties and the grandeur of the rich and had lost that simplicity and vision of doing something significant regarding my faith. It was there and I believed, but why waste my time on faith when there was so much fun to be had? I was young, and fun went with youth. I could think about things like religion when I was too old to enjoy the pleasures of youth.

Text box

56. (Jesus:) Living for the "now" is always so much easier than living for the eternal. You are earthbound, in weak and frail human bodies, and it's hard to see past your present circumstances. You want to have fun, you want immediate recognition, and you want to enjoy the "now."

57. But blessed are those who live and work and invest in the eternal world of tomorrow through serving Me, loving Me, and living for Me. It's a work that doesn't always reap immediate or noticeable results, but it's a work you're building that will last forever, that you will be proud of for eternity, an endless legacy of love and giving that you will never regret.

58. I could see the poverty growing in the streets. The people were becoming more and more desperate. I felt the twinge of conviction that I should be doing something about it, but then another party would come up and it was soon forgotten. Despite my parents' many admonitions, I began to gradually slip away, bit by bit, from the commitments of my faith. I did not stay to listen when my father read the Bible to our family. I stopped praying. I found reasons to skip the simple services our family would hold with other German believers. And by the time I was a few years older, I had all but forgotten about my faith and the place that God was supposed to hold in my life.

59. Then came the trouble. It had been brewing for years but I had been blind to it, ignoring the signs and warnings, caught up in my own selfish existence and decadent lifestyle. When change came, it happened so quickly that I hardly realized what was happening. Within months my life went from parties and balls, from drunken revelry with my friends and sex with my girlfriends, to the czar being swept from power and then one government after another stepping in. The wealth we had enjoyed was ripped away from us, and we were forced to move into a small apartment, bringing with us little more than the clothes on our backs.

60. At first I was angry with God that He'd spoiled everything. But after several talks with my father, who had a lot of wisdom in dealing with me, I began to see my part in the problem. I began to go back to the Word I had known as a child, but things were spinning out of control so quickly that there was little time to try to rebuild my faith before that fateful day.

61. We'd heard that they were rounding up the Germans, especially the Christian ones, and were openly accusing them of being subversives and German spies. Many of the Lutherans in the far north had rebelled against the Bolsheviks and there had been massacres before the Bolsheviks were driven out of the Baltic states. The Bolsheviks were now venting their anger on those within their grasp in Russia, and we knew it was only a matter of time before they would come for us.

62. There was no way to escape, as we were well known and had been prominent in the church and in the foreign community. The night before they rounded us up, my father had tried to get me out of the country through some people he thought he could trust, but they turned us in and I was caught before I could leave the city. They took me to prison, and through others who were brought there I heard that my parents had also been taken prisoner.

63. We were packed into crowded cells and I felt like the Christians in Rome must have felt as they waited to be fed to the lions. I tried to pray, but the guilt and condemnation for all the time I'd wasted on foolish things would overwhelm me, and then fear would overwhelm me till I would finally find some respite in sleep for a while. I couldn't remember much of the Word I'd learned as a child, though at times it would come back to me like a ray of light in this utter blackness that was engulfing me.

Text box

64. (Jesus:) In times of darkness, I will be your guiding light. Invest your time wisely now. Treasure My words and hide them deep in your heart. Strengthen your connection with Me today. Then, when the time comes that your survival utterly depends on these things, they will come alive like never before.

65. Some things you do today in blind obedience to Me, and you don't understand the reasons for it all. In time, and when you need it most, that which is dormant in your heart today will erupt like a volcano of peace and comfort, warming you from the depths of your soul, causing you to glow and be empowered with My Spirit! Not only will you be comforted and guided personally, but you'll be able to lead and encourage others in times of great tribulation and adversity.

66. I wanted to live! I wanted to begin again, but there was no starting over. It was too late to snap my fingers or pull out some gold and make everything right. The true gold that would have helped me through this crisis I had squandered and cast away for the carnal gold that was now also gone. I kept telling myself that this would all get straightened out and they would release us soon and we could get back to living again. I swore that when I got out I would strive like never before to regain my love for the Word and my faith.

67. After two weeks in this prison, it was late one night when a troop of soldiers came to our cell and a guard told us that we were going to take a train ride to a place where we would be safer. He said the people were angry at us and that we were being taken to another place where we could live. It sounded too good to be true, and the dark, hateful looks in the eyes of the soldiers told me that nothing they intended for us was for our good.

68. They loaded us into cattle cars on a train. It was bitter cold, but there were so many of us packed together that the many bodies helped us to stay a bit warmer. There was only room for some to lay down and sleep, so we took turns sleeping a few at a time. Many on the train were desperate, but in their desperation they were finding their strength in Jesus, singing songs of faith and lifting the spirits of those who were so weak, me included.

69. I tried to be like them, but I had so little to stand on. I cursed myself for my stupidity, but there was nothing I could do to change things now. How often had my father told us about not taking the good times for granted? How often had he told us that as Christians living in the Devil's world, we always had to be ready for persecution, and that times of peace and prosperity would always come to an end? They were speeches I had become both bored and frustrated with.

Text box

70. (Jesus:) When you're in a trying situation, that's when you realize the full value of faith. At times it seems trite and unnecessary to be investing so much time and effort in strengthening your faith, but when everything else in your life is gone, when you have nothing else to lean on but your faith in Me, then you find out how important it truly is.

71. Faith grows and is strengthened in trying times, but you need something to draw on--a foundation, a strong connection with Me, and a ballast of Word in your heart. Otherwise your faith will falter and your heart will grow weary. So be wise, My brides, and strengthen your faith today while you live in times of peace, because you never know when your faith in Me will be the only thing on this Earth that you have left to cling to.

72. Now I realized he had been right all along. And wherever my father was at that moment, I knew that he was probably thanking God for whatever miserable situation he was in, like these Christians around me. But I myself felt no such gratitude, no such peace, no such faith. And no matter how hard I tried to remember my father's words of faith and comfort, of strength in the time of adversity and courage in the face of danger, of God's blessing on those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, I could not remember them or take comfort in them.

73. After two long cold days of traveling, we came to a halt in the middle of a frozen wasteland. I tried to see the town or camp or whatever it was they were taking us to, but there was nothing. Then they began unhooking our car from the others and fear began to take over my heart. I still had not fully taken hold of the Lord. My pride, even though I knew I'd failed, just wouldn't let me face how total my failure had been. Up till now I kept thinking it would all be fine and I could go back to my old life and comforts and just do better next time.

74. The door to our railroad car was opened, and we were ordered to step outside. Nobody protested as we were herded out of the cattle car. They all seemed ready to accept whatever was going to happen next. I went along, my mind too numb to think about what was really happening or what else I could do. We stepped out onto a frozen wasteland, with no camp or roads or even footprints in sight.

75. In that moment I was slapped in the face with the reality that the end was near for me. My life was over and I would have to face the Lord and give account for my failure. I was desperate, both because I feared death and because I couldn't face the thought of seeing His face and the look of shame that it would surely hold for me.

76. We were marched to a nearby frozen lake where we were made to undress, as the soldiers jeered and made fun of us. Then we were told to walk out on the ice or be shot. All the way to the lake I'd been trying to see a hint of friendliness in one of the soldier's faces, hoping somehow I could find a way out of this.

77. When I reached the ice I fell back from the rest of the group and began pleading with the soldiers, but they only mocked and jeered me the more. One said that if I denied Jesus and proclaimed my desire to be a part of what they were doing, I could avoid this death. As I was considering this, I heard the other prisoners begin singing a song of praise to the Lord, and the shame of what I was considering made me turn away from the soldiers, who laughed me to scorn.

78. I began walking onto the ice, dreading what was to come. The cold wind bit severely into me everywhere. I couldn't understand why the others barely seemed affected by the cold, because it was so painful for me. As they began to fall, the horror of what was happening and the thought of facing Jesus was too much for me, and I turned and ran back to the soldiers, screaming that I would do anything they said if they would let me live. I would deny Jesus, anything.

79. I was at their mercy, and like a pack of wolves they circled in for the kill, jeering me and making me beg over and over. Then the one who seemed to be in charge gave me a gleeful look and told me that only the soldiers could be picked up when the train returned, and that unless I had a uniform, there was no hope I could go with them.

80. Then a soldier stepped through the crowd into the circle. He boldly faced the man who was in charge and said, "Here! He can have my uniform." Everyone went silent as he took it off and threw it at me with a look of total disgust. He called me a fool, and told me that he'd seen what was really happening out on the ice. He said he saw crowns descending as each one fell, and like a total idiot I'd run away from my crown just as it was about to rest on my head.

81. He then turned and walked out onto the ice with his hands outstretched, as though he was reaching for that crown. He turned when he was about twenty feet away and looked into my eyes. His face was shining, and the full impact of what he had said hit me. I wept like I think Peter must have done after he'd denied knowing Jesus.

82. That was the last I ever saw of him on Earth. I went back with the soldiers and managed to escape from the army after several months. I searched for my parents, but finally heard they had died in one of the camps. I wanted to flee Russia, and was convinced that Jesus could never forgive me for the things I'd done.

83. It wasn't until about five years later that I met a man who gently managed to get me to pour out my heart to him. He spent many months patiently guiding me by showing me the full depth of the Lord's forgiveness in the Word. Gradually I began to grasp that His forgiveness was from everlasting to everlasting. The spark of faith had been kindled again.

84. I spent the next year feeding on the Word and growing in it, under the guidance of this man, before the day when the Lord told me it was time to use that strength to help others in need. The persecution of Christians had abated somewhat for a couple of years, but was again on the rise with a vengeance. Jesus spoke to me and told me He wanted me to go to Moscow and there I would be shown what to do.

85. In Moscow I found many Christians hiding in fear of the gangs of those following Stalin, searching for Christian "traitors." I used all the Word I had been fed to build their faith, and after two

years in Moscow I was captured and imprisoned again. I was sent to a camp in Siberia where they sent us to hopefully die or at the very least be far enough from anyone else that we could do no harm.

86. There I spent the next ten years using my failures as a lesson to many, testifying of my transformation to faith again through the Word, to help them hold on when all seemed lost. When my time came this time, I was not ashamed to see His face and wasn't disappointed when I saw the look of joy and love in His eyes. I missed one crown, but in His never-ending mercy He granted me the privilege of a second chance to serve Him, love Him, win souls for His Kingdom, and make Him proud, for which I'm eternally grateful.

87. Pietro and I became fast friends upon my arrival in Heaven. At first it was a time for tears of shame on my part, but he encouraged me and helped me to understand the love of Jesus. My greatest prayer and joy would be that you can now be warned through my story, that you can learn from my poor example and failure, to see that when you're faced with a decision to do God's will, even if it means to the death (either physical or spiritual), it's worth it to strive for the highest and best He has for you--not later or when it's more convenient or when you're not too busy with what you want to do first or what seems more fun at the moment, but today, now!

88. Redeem every moment, because you don't know how close that last chance is. You of the children of David have been given so much, because you're going to need every bit of what you have been given to strengthen your faith for the days ahead, and if you waste any of these moments here and now, I promise you, you'll regret it in the future. I did. *(End of message.)*

Text box

89. (Jesus:) I give you today what you'll need for the future. I don't haphazardly pour down gifts and spiritual weapons and instruction and truths to you, just for the fun of it. It's all for a specific and predetermined purpose--one which you may not clearly see now, but which is more important than you realize.

90. Investment of what I give you today guarantees you success in the future. Squandering or being lazy with what I give you, feeling like there will always be a "tomorrow" to come back to Me, to be more obedient, or to learn how to master the use of a weapon of the spirit, will handicap you in the days to come, because you won't be ready or prepared.

Text box

91. (Question:) Lord, what made the difference between Pietro and Franz that day on the ice? They had upbringings that were similar in many ways, but they made such different decisions in the end.

92. (Jesus:) In the natural there wasn't a lot of difference between Franz and Pietro. Both of them knew Me in their youth and had an upbringing of faith, and both of them backslid from the faith, so to speak. The difference between the two was that when they were faced with making the choice to go for My highest and best in their lives, one made the right choice and the other didn't.

93. At that moment on the ice, I was calling Franz to give his life as a martyr, to be a sample of dying grace, and to play his role as I showed the soldiers watching the beautiful vision of the crowns. But Franz chose to pull back, to succumb to his fears, to compromise his faith. It was just a split-second decision, but it was a choice to choose his way over Mine--and at a very crucial moment in his life.

94. Then Pietro, when faced with his decision, when he saw the crowns, made the right choice. It's not that Pietro was better than Franz. But when faced with a choice and a decision, to choose My way over his own, Pietro chose My way. It wasn't an easy way either. Yes, he saw a beautiful vision of a crown descending on the heads of every Christian who died, but the reality of the situation wasn't as beautiful.

95. Think about how it might have looked to Pietro--there were naked bodies standing out in the freezing cold, with harsh and biting snow swirling about. Pietro had seen the Christians die, and it wasn't a graceful or painless death. Yes, they had peace, but he could imagine himself out there, naked and freezing to death, and it wasn't an easy role to choose to accept. When he chose to accept the crown, he was also choosing to endure all that every other Christian on the ice had endured. So it wasn't a simple little choice, to just run out and so easily grab that beautiful crown. It was a sacrifice to the death, and he did it.

96. Pietro made the right choice at that crucial moment. Franz made the wrong choice. *(End*

of message.)

Introducing Karinya

Text box

97. (Jesus:) I introduce you to Karinya Karpovich, an honored member of the Heavenly City, and one who has attained the rank of "Prayer Warrior," a title of high honor here. She brought many to My Kingdom through her unceasing faithfulness in prayer.

98. During her life on Earth she saw herself as playing only a tiny role in the lives of those she prayed continually for, but to those whose lives she transformed she is still known as "babushka," and is held in great honor and awe by many here. I have chosen her as a member of My personal staff of counselors because she has such great faith and love for the lost and wandering ones.

99. (Karinya:) I am Karinya Karpovich, a tiny speck in the vastness of our Lord's love, but perhaps my story can be a small help to all who are called to the honor and challenge of prayer.

100. To begin, I must briefly mention my childhood, for that is where it all began. I grew up in the Russian Orthodox Church, where ceremony and ritual was considered our service to the Almighty. Had it not been for my father's faith I would have never understood the true reality of Christ's love. After all the chants and ceremonies of the priests, we would retire to our cottage and my father would take me on his knee and read to me from the Bible, for he was a highly educated man.

101. He had seen many sorrows in his life, but somehow we always seemed happy when we were together. He had been an important man in our village when he was young but had refused to accept the ways of the Orthodox Church, arguing with the priests that Christ was a living, powerful force, a loving force, not One to be feared and treated as some monster who would surely slay us if we were not perfect.

102. He had a beautiful wife (of Italian descent) and a newborn daughter--me. You must understand that in those days the Orthodox Church was the government, and to defy them was to be cast out. In a small village such as ours it would mean having to leave your home and become penniless, wandering from place to place. My dear father tried to stand up for the truth, but was severely persecuted and threatened that if he continued he would face being cast out. The thought of bringing such a fate upon his wife and child caused him to spend many nights in prayer and struggle. He could see no way out, for in those times to lose everything would mean that we would likely starve to death.

103. One night, while desperately praying for a solution, he found the verse that says that our Lord would always make a way of escape, and through reading the Bible he saw a thread throughout where prayer had changed governments and hearts and minds again and again. He began to see that prayer could do what he could not do by struggling in the flesh. So he agreed to stop openly challenging the church, though he secretly continued to share the truth with many who hungered after a loving God.

104. He lived the truth by example, and every evening an hour was given to prayer for those in the village, even the priests. After my mother died when I was six, my father would hold me close many nights and whisper prayers for me whenever I missed her, that I would find comfort in Jesus' arms. Though we would at times weep, I often saw my mother there with us, and the joy on her face would wipe away the pain of loss.

105. Gradually as the years passed, more and more of those in our village came to know Christ in a deep and personal way as the One Who loved them and cared for them. Many began to secretly meet with my father for prayer and Bible reading, since most could not read. His prayers changed so many lives, and so it was that, growing up, I learned the true value of prayer.

106. I married and moved to another village after my father died, and there raised a son. He was not as strong as my father had been, and as he grew older, he built his life on surviving himself, rather than supporting others. But in his son (my grandson) I saw a light. We two were inseparable, and though my son would forbid us to pray outside the church--for at that time it was thought to be a sin to be calling on Christ unless you were inside the church building--Pietro and I would secretly meet in my room each day to pray for those in the village who were sick or troubled.

107. As the years passed and Pietro grew into manhood, he became skeptical about our prayer times and came less and less, though he loved me with such devotion. Then came those wicked creatures into our midst.

108. I had gone to the marketplace to buy whatever was to be found. It was a hard year, harder than others. Food was scarce for the common people, and our government had been corrupted by greedy men who lived in luxury while many went hungry. When I arrived, there in the village square was a small group of men. They boldly spoke of food for all and equality for the poor. Their words were fiery and eloquent, but their eyes were dark and filled with hatred and anger.

109. Many of the village people saw them for what they were, and were telling them to leave. But the youth were fascinated by these men's spirits. Many villagers had become so involved with trying to survive that they only saw these men as more trouble when they already had more than they could handle. The villagers finally drove the men out of the village, but the men set up camp outside the village, as if they knew that the youth would come out to see them.

110. I saw Pietro among the crowd and saw his fascination for their ideas. They sounded so powerful, so full of hope and vision, but there was a frightening darkness to them that many of the youth could not see, for they had not experienced the years of pain and suffering that others had undergone at the hands of men like these--those who promised so much, but had taken what little we had and given only pain and suffering in return.

111. I knew that night would be a turning point. The Lord spoke to my heart as I awaited my grandson's return, knowing that trouble was in the air. The Lord told me that if I would pray, that it would all work together for good in the end in Pietro's life. It would take much interceding for him. He said that great trouble was coming on us all and that this was the path to Pietro's salvation, but that it would only come if I became a faithful prayer warrior for him, bearing his needs and seeking the Lord for the help he would need for as long as it took.

Text box

112. (Jesus:) It can take weeks, months, or even a lifetime to see the results of your prayers, but results are guaranteed! No matter how long it takes for Me to perform the miracle, it will be done, because I always answer the prayers of My children--sometimes immediately, sometimes further down the road, sometimes in the far future, or sometimes I answer in the spirit world.

113. So don't ever stop praying for those you love, even if you aren't seeing immediate results. Prayers bring results! Prayers weave the magical spell of My miracle-working power, and when it's My time, the answer will be delivered.

114. You know the story of his departure that night. I never heard from him again, but through the days of trouble that followed I held on to him in prayer, and many times our Lord would encourage me by allowing me to see glimpses of him. Sometimes what I saw was deeply troubling and caused me to fight even harder in prayer. The sight of him in a Bolshevik uniform with his gun, forcing others into prison, drove me to desperate prayer for his rescue from the clutches of these evil ones who had so deceived him.

115. It was a little over a year after Pietro's departure that the Bolsheviks returned to our village. Several were the same ones who had come before, and the hatred in their eyes had grown fiercer. My son had been one of those who had driven them out of the village. This time they came in large numbers and they rounded up the men who had driven them out and hanged them in the village square as a warning to all not to resist their control.

116. After Pietro left, my son had begun to change. He was seeing that his ways had not changed anything. Little by little he had begun praying again. In the last few months before his death he had agreed to have daily prayer in our little cottage. The pain of Pietro's leaving had broken his spirit, but through prayer he had regained hope.

117. Before my son was killed with the others, he boldly proclaimed before all who had gathered to watch that these men were of the Devil, that he had found true faith and freedom in Christ, and would proclaim it to all with his last breath. His witness stirred many souls, and though in the months ahead many were to die as they refused to become a part of the terror that was sweeping our land, they did so with a knowledge of the truth.

118. My daughter-in-law, myself, and many others continued to pray together for those in pain and for our loved ones. We prayed for the true children of God in our land, and I prayed for Pietro with more desperation than ever. It was late at night when the Bolsheviks came again a few years later. They had found out through spies that we were the ones at the center of what they had come to regard as a resistance movement--though our only "movement" was to have prayed against their evil ways.

Text box

119. (Jesus:) The greatest movement is the movement of prayer. Spirit helps move into action when you pray. My hand is moved to perform miracles when you pray. People and situations are moved and changed, and progress is set in motion when you pray. My winds of judgment move toward the wicked when you pray. Demons are pushed back and moved to a place that is far from My children when you pray.

120. So much good and positive movement happens when you pray, because prayer is an alive and moving force that is never dormant or still!

121. They set fire to our house, and as the flames spread I awoke to a vision of my Pietro casting off his uniform and flying up to meet his Savior. I never even felt the flames, because a band of angels encircled me and I began to float away. I knew that my task was done. I'd done what I could through prayer, and my dear Pietro and I would soon be rejoicing for the victory.

122. Here in Heaven I at first arrived in a place of wonder amongst many of those I had known before, and I found myself teaching and showing them the power of prayer. It wasn't anything but the lessons I had learned from my father, and my experience in seeing the fruits of his prayers and mine. But these lessons and experiences were now a part of me and flowed out to others to help them grow.

123. Now I fully see how real our words are--especially when those words are petitions to the One Who waits on our every need, longing to lift and help each one, awaiting the call from one in prayer for one in need so that He can go to work on their behalf. As I said, I am so unworthy to be allowed into the presence of the Lord, but if I can in some way be a tool to bring help to those in need, I am of all creatures most happy. *(End of message.)*

Text box

124. (Jesus:) Not one word uttered in prayer ever escapes My attention. I bring instant action--either to answer the prayer immediately, or to route the prayer power to a reservoir to be used to answer the prayer at a later date.

125. Words on Earth come and go; sometimes they are remembered and other times they are forgotten. But words uttered in prayer are never overlooked, forgotten, or lost in My world! Not one drop of strength, energy or time invested in prayer is ever wasted.

Introducing Vladimir

126. (Vladimir:) I am one who was there. I am not proud of what I did that day. I am deeply ashamed of myself and how I hurt others. I was, how is it said in English, a guttersnipe*. I did not know my father. My mother died when I was still little. I roamed the streets of Petrograd stealing what I could and fighting for anything else. (*A street urchin; a person of the lowest class; a child who spends most of his time in the streets, especially in slum areas.)

127. It was all the same. If I stole and the police caught me, they would beat me. If I did not steal and come home with something, my uncle would beat me. As I grew up, I found that life was cheap and I watched many die. I had become so callous that it had no effect on me anymore. But one day it did, and that day remains seared in my memory. Though it is something I can now choose not to think about, it is still a vivid nightmare to recall.

128. Some men had been in the poor parts of the city telling everyone that if they would all go with them to the palace, the czar would see that many were starving and would give them food and maybe even money. So many were dying and desperate that the crowd grew. I was eighteen at the time. We marched forward, hopeful that our czar would help us if he could just realize the desperate need. There had been other demonstrations before, at other times or other places, but this would be different, we thought.

129. As we approached the palace gates we were faced with many soldiers. It shocked me at first. I had seen the palace guard at a distance, but here were all these soldiers, many of them my own age or even younger. Some were peering out from behind barricades with rifles pointed at us. Others were standing in front of the gate to the palace, but their eyes were filled with fear. Didn't they know we only wanted to let our czar know of our plight?

130. A young officer stood behind a line of soldiers interspersed with cannons. We began to call for the czar to come out and hear our plea, but no one came. We called louder, wanting to talk to

anyone, and some in the crowd began to get impatient. There were some who seemed to be egging people on to throw stones to show that we weren't happy that no one would come out.

131. The young officer behind the soldiers was trying to keep the soldiers calm, shouting at them to hold their fire. I began to realize that things were getting crazy, as the shouts of the crowd became angrier and the shouts of the officer more desperate. I was standing in the very front of the mob, and suddenly the danger of the place I was in became clear.

132. I turned to fight my way back into the crowd, but before I could get through the first line of people, someone stepped out and threw a rock that hit one of the soldiers. Another soldier next to him, in a panic, fired his rifle, and the air instantly erupted into a thunderous roar of gun and cannon fire, screams and wails of pain. There had been many children and women amongst the crowd, with children playing in front of everyone, as no one had thought they would hurt us.

133. Many in the front were killed in the first volley. The young officer was shrieking at his men not to fire, but his voice was drowned in the roar. Those in front knew what had happened, but few of them were left alive to tell the tale. I was standing directly in front of a cannon, and its blast sent me flying through the air.

134. When I woke up, I was lying in a hellish pile of dead and mutilated bodies. I crawled away from the scene through the blood and horror. I had seen death and thought I was hardened to it, but what I saw before me now overwhelmed my heart completely.

135. The fury of such a senseless massacre of innocent children and people blotted out the reality that it was more the result of a panic by the soldiers than a preplanned slaughter of the poor. Fury and wrath boiled over. I didn't even stop to think of the miracle that had just occurred. I had been standing directly in front of a cannon and even those behind me had been killed, but I was still alive and whole.

Text box

136. (Jesus:) Oh, the lengths that I will go to save a lost soul! There is no sacrifice that is too much to make for even one of My lost children, no depths that are too deep for Me to stoop to in order to lift a weary and searching soul, no heart that is too far gone for Me to give My salvation to! How far are you willing to go for Me and for others?

137. All I could think about was the hatred welling up inside me--hatred against the czar, against the government, against all those who had brought our country to this point. The weeks and months that passed after the massacre were so filled with that hatred and anger that reason no longer had any place in my life. I had no faith to turn to. Being hopelessly poor, I was no more welcome in the church than the rats that ran through the little room I shared with four others. I had no outlet for this hatred at first, but it wasn't long before I was challenged to join the Bolsheviks and participate in their plans to rout out these hateful rich and destroy their power so we could bring work, bread, and liberty to all.

138. I didn't understand the true battle that was taking place. All I knew was that these Bolsheviks were giving me food and clothes to wear, and that what they said made sense. I wanted to have what I'd seen those rich have, and this was a way to make things right. If it meant a few of them had to die to make them share, well, I'd seen so many die to help them keep those riches that it seemed fair enough to me.

139. As time went by, though, the treatment of so many was so cruel, and seeing children and women being sent to prisons and worse brought back the horrors of that day of riots. My conscience--seared as it was with hatred and anger--still ached at times, but I would force myself to go on, blinding myself to the horrors of what I had become a part of.

140. It was a routine mission, I kept telling myself. I had not been on the trains carrying the prisoners to the camps before, but it was just as routine as rounding them up, I was told. I couldn't help noticing one of the soldiers traveling in the seat across from me. He seemed younger than me, but not by much. I could tell from watching him, looking into his eyes, that he was facing an inner struggle much greater than our struggle for the revolution had been.

141. He had a tortured look in his eyes, a look that told me he was battling something. And something about him was different from the rest of us. The other soldiers were joking or drinking or cursing, or unconcerned and lethargic, but this man had an air about him that somehow seemed more pure or wholesome. I couldn't put my finger on it, on what made him different. Was he a spy? He almost reminded me of some of the ones I had arrested. They'd had an air of calmness or peace about them that

I couldn't understand, and he had something of that air too, even in the midst of the mental anguish he seemed to be undergoing.

Text box

142. (Jesus:) Once you're Mine, you're always Mine. Even if you stray far from My will or you disobey My call for your life, others will still see Me in you. There is no denying My Spirit in you, because once I'm in your heart, I'm there to stay. I can never be completely hidden, no matter how much darkness, sin or disobedience may try to cloak My power, no matter how much one may try to pretend I'm not there.

143. Even the wayward are bound to Me, and our connection of love will never be broken. My Spirit in them can never be eliminated or destroyed.

144. The days passed slowly, traveling through endless expanses of flat whiteness. Then suddenly we stopped in the middle of nowhere, and to my surprise I was ordered to get off the train. They were detaching the last car of prisoners and we were ordered to stay with them while the rest of the train went on to the camp.

145. After the train pulled away, the commander told us to open the car and march the prisoners down to a lake nearby.

146. "But they'll freeze!" I whispered to a fellow soldier beside me.

147. He laughed and said, "That's the whole idea. And since they do have religion, they don't want to go to hell and burn, so we'll give them heaven instead--a nice cold heaven." Then he laughed, and some of the other soldiers laughed with him.

148. This was not what I had expected. I agreed with getting these people out of the way in camps, but why kill them for no reason? That sort of senseless killing was what I had rebelled against in the first place. Again the visions of the riots were haunting my mind. The words "the slaughter of the innocents" hit me, and in that moment I began to see that these men, these Bolsheviks, were no different than the rich who had slaughtered the poor for their own purposes. And I suddenly saw how far I had traveled down that same murderous path myself.

149. A sick feeling washed over me. As we reached the lake and the other soldiers drove the prisoners onto the ice, I could hear something that hit me with more force than that cannon had. It was soft and faint at first, but then grew louder and louder. They were singing. The prisoners were actually singing!

150. The words swept across the icy landscape and cut fiercely into my heart. They were singing, praising Jesus. I had heard the chants of the churches from outside their buildings. This was not a mournful chant, but a song of joy and praise. How could they sing as they faced death? I was in shock at what my eyes were seeing and my ears were hearing, but which my mind couldn't comprehend. As I stood on a small hill, back a bit from the whole scene, one of the prisoners ran back from the ice pleading and begging for mercy, and he was quickly encircled by a group of soldiers who were laughing at him and mocking him.

151. Another soldier had been standing off a ways from the group of soldiers, watching the whole scene unfold. As he began to move toward the group of soldiers I saw it was the young man who had seemed different from us all. He pushed and shoved his way into the middle of the group and I could hear him as he shouted at the other soldiers, berating them, and then at the man, calling him a fool.

152. He took his uniform off and turned to walk, naked, out to where the prisoners were. This was like some sort of unreal dream, and I wanted only to wake up and find myself on the seat in the train still traveling to the camps. He had his hands held high, and as he walked forward, there seemed to be a light around him.

153. The other prisoners had collapsed, so my gaze was riveted on this soldier. As he fell to the ground, I saw something that I will never forget. It was as though his body fell, but another body, a body of light, remained standing for a moment and then floated up into the air. I thought the cold must have affected my brain, but it was all so real.

154. I couldn't talk or think that evening as we waited for the train to return the next day to pick us up. Some of the soldiers made a sport of shooting at the wolves who came out to inspect the bodies on the lake. We raised some snow banks to keep out the wind, pitched a camp and made a fire to warm ourselves, and once darkness fell we all took turns standing guard to watch for any wolves that might try to get at us or our provisions. While I was taking my turn on guard, the soldier I was stationed with was very quiet and seemed deeply disturbed about something. I knew how he felt. I could barely

Speak myself.

155. I asked him what was bothering him. At first he wouldn't answer. I said, "You know, I never expected anything like this." He looked up and his eyes were filled with tears, and held the same look of terror that I had seen in those young soldiers' eyes outside the palace that day.

156. "Did you see it?" he asked me. "Did you see the light and the crowns?"

157. I didn't know what he meant by the crowns, but it was scaring me to think that what I'd seen was real.

158. "I think I saw something," I choked out the words. "I didn't see any crowns, but as that other soldier walked out there and fell, I saw a light, almost like it was a part of him that went upwards."

159. We were both silent for a while, trying to take in what we both now knew had not just been our imaginations.

160. "Do you think it's possible?" I mean, do you think what he said could be real?"

161. "What are you talking about?" I asked, wishing I didn't have to hear what was coming.

162. "Pietro, the soldier who went on the ice to die!" he said in a frenzied burst. "He said that he saw crowns of light coming down on each one as they fell. He said one was coming down on the prisoner when he ran back to plead with us for mercy. That's why Pietro went out there. He said he wanted that crown. I think I saw it coming down to him. I'm going crazy. I'm losing my mind, but I could see it. I thought it was just me, but then when you said you saw the light too ... it has to be real! Do you think others saw it too?"

163. "I don't know," I said. My voice was quivering as I began to grasp all that had happened. "If it's real, then what is it? Why did it happen? Is God on the side of the rich?"

164. The other soldier, Yuri, laughed. "You really don't know much, do you? This isn't about rich and poor. What's your name, anyway? I don't even know it."

165. "It's Vladimir, and why are you laughing at me?" I may not be that smart, but we're fighting to give the wealth of the rich to the poor," I proclaimed indignantly.

166. "Vladimir, they've duped you, my friend. They could do that without all this bloodshed. What they fear more than the rich are the Christians. You see, the Christians don't fully live their faith a lot of the time, but when they do, it's a living example of what the Bolsheviks would like to create, but the Bolsheviks want to do it without God in the picture.

167. "They want to get rid of the alternative. Otherwise, why should anyone risk their life in the Bolshevik cause if they could achieve utopia through Christianity?" These people who were left here to die were put in that last car for a reason. They'll send the other rich to camps for a while, but what they fear more than anything are these Christians.

168. "You saw them. You saw how they weren't even afraid to die. It's not human. It proves there's something more to life than revolutions and governments and work and bread and liberty--and that's why they have to take care of these Christians out here, because if they had public executions, the quiet and triumphant ways such Christians die for their cause would be a much stronger argument than any sayings of Lenin or Trotsky.

169. "Look at me! I've been an atheist my whole life, and been taught to hate the thought of God. I figured these Christians were just putting on a show to defy us, and I volunteered to come here and do this job just to prove to myself that all that garbage about them being different and having something special was a lie. But then when I met Pietro, it made me very uncomfortable. I thought something was odd about him. I didn't know he was one of them, but something inside him was just different, sort of a peace or something that didn't make any sense.

170. "Then when he went out there and I saw what I saw, well ... everything looks different now. What I thought was true looks stupid, and what I thought was just make-believe and a lie ... let me just say that it's hard to deny what my own eyes and ears tell me happened out there."

Text box

171. (Jesus:) When you've had such a wealth of truth for years and years, it's easy to get familiar with it and forget what it's all for. But if you do, you're selling yourself short, you're missing out, and by neglect you're throwing away what many of the lost in the world would give their lives for.

172. I have given you, the children of David, My truth in great abundance, but what will you do with it? Will you minimize it and treat it as something of little worth? Or will you treasure it and hide it in your hearts?

173. We sat for a long time again in silence, trying to make sense of it all.

174. "I don't know about you, but what if it's true?" I said, my voice trembling again at the thought of what we had been a part of. "Does that mean we're damned to Hell? We just helped kill them! I don't think we can be forgiven for that."

175. "But why would we have seen all this if God is going to damn us?" Yuri asked.

176. "Maybe it's to torment us and make us suffer extra, knowing what's coming for us," I muttered, feeling that as bad as I'd had it in this life, I was now doomed to something even worse in the next. Then it struck me.

177. "Wait! If these people were God's children, and they didn't curse us or damn us or show anger or hatred against us, maybe their God is like them. It sure would have to be something supernatural to make them be that way, so maybe He is a God of forgiveness and mercy. Maybe He'd forgive us and give us another chance."

178. "I don't know," answered Yuri. "That's not what my parents told me, but then I'm finding that a lot of what they told me wasn't true, so who knows." There was a touch of hope in his voice.

179. "We have to find out, Yuri. I don't want to go to Hell. I think all of it is real after what we saw, and I have to know if there's any hope of making things right." I was desperate and clinging to any straw of hope at that moment.

180. "Making things right? You have to be kidding!" Yuri exclaimed. "We've killed them! What are you going to do, bring them back to life?"

181. "I don't know!" I replied, "But there has to be something we can do!"

182. Silence came down again as our minds searched in frenzied silence for some way out of this.

183. "What if we found some real Christians and asked them? They might know," Yuri queried, a glimmer of hope starting to appear in his eyes again.

184. "Sure, we'll find some and say, 'Hi, we just murdered some of your Christian friends and we're sorry now, so can we be forgiven and not have to suffer for it?" I berated him. "Do you think they'd listen? They'd probably kill us."

185. "Well, it's worth a try--and if we die we're no worse off than we are now."

186. "And where are we going to find them?" I asked, dreading the thought of the only answer I could imagine, but not wanting to even entertain it.

187. "We could try to get into the prison in Petrograd. It would be dangerous, and if we got caught we'd be shot--but I'm ready to take that chance. I have to know too." Yuri spoke with a tone of determination that hadn't been there before.

188. We talked late into the night, making plans how, when we got back to Petrograd we'd find a way to get put on prison duty together and try to seek out a Christian who could help us to know. Then ... we didn't know what would be next, but we could both feel our lives would never be the same again.

189. When we reached Petrograd, our first move was to volunteer for prison duty. We reported separately so as not to arouse suspicion. It was all a game of appearances in those days, and you had to be very careful about your actions, and who saw you with whom, because it could all be reported to the Party. And you never knew when even some innocent thing could end up looking suspicious in the eyes of whoever was watching. So we tried to be as careful as we could.

190. There was no way to push for the same times on duty. You took what you were given, and for the first week we were on totally different schedules. The second week, however, we were put on the same schedule and were both assigned to Block C, where the most notorious prisoners were being held.

191. We felt helpless, as of course there wouldn't be any Christians among the worst of the criminals. But His ways aren't ours, and as we took up our time of duty, we found that these cells were jammed with men, women, and children rather than hardened criminals--and many of them were Christians. Their plight was horrible, but there was little we could do for them.

192. We tried the best we could to help them and befriend them. They thanked us, but seemed suspicious, thinking we were spies sent to find some reason to have them executed. Finally, after three days one man whose name was Dmitri began to speak with us. The other guards had gone for a break and we quickly told him our story, begging him to forgive us and asking him if there was any hope for us, or if we were damned for eternity.

193. Our tears were shared by many who were listening to our story, but rather than curses and hatred, we felt many hands reaching through the bars to comfort us as we wept. Dmitri told us that

Jesus was not a God of vengeance but of mercy and forgiveness. He said that Jesus had seen our hearts and forgiven us. All we had to do was to ask Him to forgive us, receive that forgiveness, and let Him rule our lives from then on.

194. From that moment on, Yuri and I were new creatures. We had to find a way to help our brethren, whatever the cost, and if we had to give our lives to do it, that no longer worried us.

Text box:

195. (Jesus:) I have given My all for you; how much are you willing to give for Me? I went all of the way to the cross for you; how long will you carry your cross for Me? I wore a crown of thorns for you; how hard are you willing to fight for My crown of life that I have promised you? I fought till the very end. Will you?

196. We were determined to find a way to help as many as we could. It was going to be far more than we could ever hope to do, though. We were only two simple soldiers and these people were held in the most guarded block of the prison.

197. That night Yuri and I did as our Christian friends had told us, and for the first time in our lives we did our best to talk to Jesus. It was awkward at first, talking to someone you couldn't see, and I felt a bit silly. But then as I expressed what was burning in my heart, something inside me changed. It was like a door opening, and I wasn't just talking to someone I couldn't see. There He was before me and I was talking to Him like a very dear friend.

198. Afterwards I hesitatingly asked Yuri if he'd felt anything. He looked pretty nervous, but I could see he'd had an experience too. I launched into an account of what had happened to me, and the growing smile that filled his face showed he'd had the same experience.

199. "So, what do we do now?" Yuri asked

200. "I don't know, but we've got to do something. Do you think," I asked, "if Jesus could show us what He just did, that He could show us a way to get the Christians out of prison?" It was more than I could imagine, but then I'd had so much more than I could ever have dreamed happen in the last weeks that it all seemed like it might be possible.

201. So again we got quiet and waited for the pictures to start. We didn't know quite what was going to happen, but we knew something would. After sitting for a while the plan began to form in my mind, though it was so far beyond anything I could hope to do or cause to happen that afterwards I was afraid to say what I had gotten.

202. "What I think came was just too far-fetched to imagine," I said, "so you go first."

203. "Mine is totally impossible too," Yuri muttered, looking a bit discouraged.

204. As we exchanged the accounts of what we had been given, we looked in shock at each other. The two plans were equally far-fetched and impossible--in fact, they were identical! Both plans relied on these particular prisoners being assigned to the last car of a transfer train that we did not even know was scheduled.

205. Imagine our surprise when a few days later we were informed that a transfer of prisoners was indeed taking place, and our block was one of those being transferred. Hearing that, Yuri and I jumped into action. We went to the chief officer in charge of transfers, explaining that we had won the trust of the prisoners in our block, and that they would trust us when we told them that we would be taking them to a place where it would be safer for them to stay. Also, both of us had been on this kind of transfer mission before, so we knew what the trip meant, and would have no problems with it.

206. "That's perfect," the officer replied, "because your block just happens to be assigned to the last car on the train." By now, such confirming pieces of news no longer surprised us.

207. The day arrived and the prisoners were to be loaded into the last freight car of a train headed for the north. When the transfer officer saw our band of prisoners peacefully and trustingly climb into their assigned wagon, he commended us admiringly. "I may recommend you two for a little promotion. We need more talented and dedicated men like yourselves in the officer's training camp. When you return, come in and see me. I may have some good news for you. In the meantime, Vladimir Sentrikov, I'm putting you in charge of the soldiers who'll be remaining with you should you happen to need to drop any passengers off along the way."

208. Outside of the official "You are being taken to a better place where you will be safer" line, we had not told any of the prisoners of our plan. We did not want to put them in the position of knowing anything about it, both for their safety and ours. So as the prisoners were loaded into the last

car, some were apprehensive to see that it was a freight car, but as they looked into our eyes they seemed to feel reassured. I, however, felt anything but reassured at this moment. This was going to take the most amazing miracle to accomplish.

209. The officer personally walked along the length of the train inspecting everything, every hitch, door, list of prisoners, to ensure that there would be no mistakes made. His attention to detail was legendary, and the fact that he would inspect our car last--and that the train would depart at his "all clear" signal almost immediately afterwards--made the timing of our plan all the more impossible.

210. As soon as the officer had inspected every inch of the last car and began to walk toward the front of the train, Yuri slipped down into the space between the cars and began removing the pin which connected the last car to the rest of the train.

211. As he struggled to work the heavy metal pin loose, the officer suddenly stopped several cars up, turned, and began quickly walking back toward me. The train would now start moving any second, and Yuri was between the cars frantically trying to work the pin loose. The officer was now looking directly at me, only ten feet away, leaving me unable to give Yuri a signal of any sort!

212. I decided to walk toward the officer to meet him farther away from our wagon.

213. "Vladimir! I almost forgot to tell you," he said with an air of official authority, "I've decided to accompany this train so I can report on your activities firsthand. My personal reports would carry the most weight with the Party. I have been told that you and Yuri will be riding on top of the train for the first leg of the journey out of the city to ensure that no one finds a way to escape or has any help from outsiders. So I thought perhaps I should ride along on top with you so we can talk. I like you, and see a lot of potential in bright young men like you and Yuri."

214. "Thank you, sir," I said boldly, hoping the explosion of nerves inside wasn't showing. "I would see it as an honor to have you ride up there with me, but my concern for the safety of such a valuable member of our revolution would prompt me to beg you to sit in the passenger car up front, and as soon as we are out of the city I will join you at the first stop.

215. "Besides, there are often low branches and other obstructions that come close to the cars, and I'm afraid conversation might prevent us being watchful enough and could lead to one or both of us getting hurt. Yuri and I take opposite sides of the car for that reason, to avoid being tempted to talk to each other. I beg you for your sake and mine that you meet me in the passenger car."

216. The officer hesitated for a moment, not wanting to appear afraid of the danger but also wanting to ensure his own safety. Just then the engine lurched forward a few inches. The hitch began to separate, and Yuri leapt from between the cars--barely missing having his foot trapped under the wheel as it shifted.

217. "Very well, then," the officer said, a bit disappointed but also relieved that his attempt at bravery would not have to be put into action. "I'll await you up front." He turned and in as dignified a manner as possible tried to half-walk, half-run to the passenger car before the train lurched again and began to pull away.

218. As the train moved, our car shifted a few feet forward, then came unhitched from the departing train, leaving our prisoners at the platform with Yuri and I not knowing whether to laugh or cry.

219. So far the plan was working. Now came the hard part. I had to walk into the transfer office again. The officer had left one of his assistants in charge. I didn't know how the Lord was going to pull this next part of His plan off. I'd just been told to watch and see and I would know what to do. Part of the plan was to have Yuri fill out another roster listing this car to go to a certain city far away in the Balkans. The irony was that, growing up on the streets, I had never learned to read or write, while Yuri had been educated in both. Yet here the Lord had told me to be the one acting as the educated part of the team. As I walked into the office, a man was arguing with the assistant on duty.

220. "I have 13 cars on my roster and there are only 12 cars at the platform. Where is the officer? I cannot go without the other car. I demand to see the officer."

221. The argument was becoming heated. The assistant couldn't allow his position of responsibility to be tarnished by such a mistake in the officer's absence, and he had to somehow make it appear as someone else's fault. The train, of course, was bound for the very city we had been instructed to use on our new roster. I was a little surprised how quickly the steps of the plan that were completely beyond our control were unfolding.

222. "Excuse me, sir, perhaps I can help," I offered as I quickly placed Yuri's roster in the assistant's hand. "I believe I am in charge of the car you are looking for. It was mistakenly put at the end of platform three. Here are the papers." Both men looked up, surprised.

223. "There's no extra car at the end of platform three!" the assistant roared. Two mistakes could cost him his job.

224. "I believe it was the error of some comrade who was on duty before you got here, sir," I explained. "Perhaps if we just quietly pull the train over to platform three, we can eliminate the whole problem and no one needs to know about it."

225. The other man, not wanting to spend endless hours going through the trouble of correcting his roster and explaining to the officials what happened to the missing car, quickly agreed with the idea, and the assistant sighed audibly. He waved his hand dismissively in the air and said, "Do what you want, as long as I don't have to hear about it. Now leave me alone. I have too much work to do as it is."

226. The car was soon hitched up. This particular train was a civilian train filled with goods as opposed to prisoners, so the sight of the car jammed with people caused the conductor to raise his eyebrows in surprise. He was getting used to these strange times we were living in, however, and knew better than to ask questions.

227. After three or four days of traveling, with Petrograd far behind, we arrived at the town of Kharkov. I explained to the man in charge of the train that Yuri and I were assigned to take these prisoners to a work camp outside this town, and showed him a set of orders from a top official--created by Yuri, of course--to prove it. If there was one thing the communists knew how to do, it was to have papers for everything--especially military operations. Fortunately for us, during this time there were so many versions of papers that it was impossible for this civilian conductor to know whether our paper was actually an official one or not--another one of God's little setups that helped speed His "impossible" plan along.

228. Several miles out of town I instructed the conductor to stop the train and unhitch the car on a side rail to await the other soldiers who would come to take the prisoners to the camp.

229. As the train pulled away, Yuri and I burst into shouts of praise for the miracles we had witnessed, and soon had all the surprised prisoners safely out of the train car and dispersed throughout the countryside to follow the Lord wherever He would lead them. It was a tearful but happy departing.

Text box

230. (Jesus:) Even if I tell you to do something unconventional and seemingly impossible, it will work out if you're following Me. No matter how crazy or unrealistic My ways seem, and even if your own plan seems more logical or workable, it's always best to follow My lead.

231. In the future, outstanding and awesome miracles of deliverance, protection and supply will be more commonplace, and being able to hear clearly from Me will ensure you are able to receive My plan and enact it. Often miracles take action on your part--some step of faith, like rolling away the stone. But you can't take a step of faith unless you know what step to take, and finding what that step is takes listening, believing, and receiving.

232. As for Yuri and me, the Lord led us to travel south to the Balkans, where we found relative freedom to help and encourage others to come to know Christ. We never heard from the officer again, and the Lord miraculously enabled us to live out our lives in relative peace in service to Him. *(End of message.)*

The Importance of Your Daily Decisions

233. (Jesus:) Every day you have to make decisions--decisions to yield, decisions to obey, decisions to choose My highest and best, decisions to forsake your own wants and desires. Like your Father David told you many years ago, it's as if every day you've got to choose to die to yourself and your own ideas, to die daily. Every day you're faced with dying to yourself spiritually in order to do My will--and most of the time the decisions you make to serve Me aren't easy; they cost immensely.

234. You're not faced with martyrdom today. You're not out on the ice about to face your physical death. But every day you've got to choose My will above your own--no matter how difficult, despite the personal cost. That's what discipleship is all about. That's what being a Christian is all about. That's what being a Family member is all about. And it all boils down to little decisions. Are you going to choose My way or your own? Are you going to take the high road or the low road? Are you going to give 110% or just 50%?

235. The essence of this testimony is about doing My will, whatever that may mean for you.

If I've put you "out on the ice," so to speak, and asked you to be a witness for Me or to die to yourself, then that's your calling and your role, so do it with joy and your whole heart, no matter how great the sacrifice. If I'm calling you to step in and fill a place of service left by another, do it with pride and enthusiasm. If I've called you to keep fighting for Me after a big defeat and setback, give it your best shot. If I've called you to be a prayer warrior, pray like a house on fire. If I've called you to follow a crazy plan to fulfill My will, then do it regardless of how unconventional it is in the natural; don't take the road of your flesh and carnal mind, which is always opposite to My way.

236. You will receive a beautiful crown of life, as will all My children, which is automatically yours through salvation. But there's so much more available for those who give Me their all. I guarantee that the rewards waiting for you, the children of David, in Heaven are much greater than any of the dear ones in this story received, because you are giving your whole lives to Me each and every day. I am compelled and moved to translate that into magnificent, spectacular, and satisfying rewards--more than your mind could ever imagine or comprehend. I also delight to endow you with rewards and blessings for the present, to show you My love and thankfulness.

237. You may never know how pivotal one choice is. That's why I urge you to strive to make the right choices, My choices, at every turn. That's why I instruct you to hear from Me, to stay firmly grounded in the Word, and to keep your connection with Me established and strong. It's so that when you're faced with choices, your faith will be strong enough so that you'll make the right ones--choices for Me, choices that will enable My will to play out, choices that will in turn bring fulfillment and happiness to your life, as well as many rewards in the life to come.

238. My darling brides, please make good, wise, obedient, yielded, sacrificial, loving, spirit-led, Word-based decisions every day. That's how you'll be strengthened in spirit to do My will even when it really costs! And when the time comes for you to receive your beautiful crown of life and heavenly rewards, you won't be ashamed; you'll rejoice, because you'll know that you have done your best, you've run the race with patience, you've made the right choices, and you've served Me well. I'll place your crown on your head and say to you, "Bravo, My obedient, loyal, and deserving bride! Be surrounded by the fullness of My love, and enjoy the totality of your reward!" (*End of message.*)

A Condensed History of the Russian Revolution

Compiled from Encyclopedia Britannica and a variety of Internet resources

Under the reign of Emperor (Czar) Nicholas II, Russia was an absolute autocracy, with all the power in the hands of the emperor and the nobles of his court. At the same time, the working class was becoming more organized through the creation of legal labor unions that it was hoped would encourage the workers to concentrate on making economic gains and disregard broader social and political problems.

In January of 1905, after an embarrassing defeat in the Russo-Japanese war that exposed Russia's backwardness, discontentment with the emperor steadily started to grow, and a wave of strikes broke out in St. Petersburg, the Russian capital where the emperor's residence, the Winter Palace, stood. Some were violent, and many strikers and demonstrators were killed.

A series of strikes in other cities and peasant uprisings in the country followed, and by October of that year, faced with a massive general strike, Nicholas promised the country an elected parliament, called the Duma, that would help the monarchy govern the country. The following year a constitution was drafted and elections were held for positions in the State Duma, putting legislative power into the hands of the people for the first time, and guaranteeing fundamental civil liberties for the general population.

Ongoing efforts to gain still further power independent of the monarchy were put on hold at the outbreak of World War I in 1914, when Russia declared war on Germany. However, the people's support for the war fell drastically when, by the start of 1916, the Russian army had suffered two million casualties and looked to be heading for certain defeat. At the same time, the peasants were facing famine, and revolutionary elements among them began organizing strikes and demonstrations throughout the country in demand for bread.

On March 8, 1917, a local strike by women textile workers outside of Petrograd (*the name was changed from Saint Petersburg to Petrograd in 1914*) gained momentum until it turned into a citywide general strike. In response, the monarchy issued an ultimatum that any workers not returning to their duties within three days would be drafted into the army and sent to the front. The people, however, ignored the ultimatum, and continued to gather in the streets in protest. The army was called out to keep the people under control, but many soldiers identified more with the people than their emperor's chain of

command.

With the strikes and demonstrations continuing into the third day, and growing more aggressive, a training regiment of soldiers was ordered to fire into the crowd, killing scores of demonstrating workers. After hearing of this incident, however, one regiment after another mutinied and joined the revolution, providing the revolutionaries with guns and armaments they had so far lacked, and sealing the victory for the revolutionaries.

Realizing that the emperor had now lost all means of enforcing power, the State Duma declared a new provisional government on March 12, and on March 15, Emperor Nicholas II formally abdicated the throne, ending the 300-year rule of the Romanov dynasty.

On the promise that he could get Russia out of the war with Germany, the Germans arranged to have Lenin, a Russian revolutionary who was in exile in Switzerland, smuggled back into Russia. Lenin returned to Petrograd in April 1917 and denounced the Duma's provisional government, which was still pursuing the war with Germany. By October, Lenin's revolutionary Bolshevik party had grown in numbers and popularity, and in November, under the leadership of Lenin and the organizational direction of Leon Trotsky, the Bolsheviks seized control of the government and all key public services. The war with Germany was ended on Germany's terms, and Lenin's Bolshevik Party went on to become the Communist Party that governed and ruled Russia for the next 70 years.

Text box

239. (Question:) Was this account the only time Christians were put on ice to die during the Russian revolution? Or was it a common occurrence? According to a Web site detailing persecution of Christians in Russia, in 1918 alone, Felix Dzerzhinsky's organization, the first Soviet secret police, "executed over 3,000 Orthodox clergymen of all ranks. Some were drowned in ice holes or poured over with cold water in winter until they turned to ice pillars." So execution by freezing seems to have been pretty common in Russia. Was this the case?

240. (Jesus speaking:) Truly many of My children were gathered unto Me in those days of the Russian revolution. The Bolsheviks were evil and bloody men, with a fierce hatred of Me and of anyone associated with Me. They were consumed with rage, hatred, jealousy, and inspired of their father the Devil to attempt to destroy all that was good and godly. They killed millions of My children, and this method of exposure to the elements was one method they used in the early days.

241. Later, they lost patience with such methods and shot people instead, but this was common in earlier times. It happened throughout Russia, and the tales of these executions and the miracles that I did in some of them spread throughout Russia as well. At times I simply gathered My children unto Me, where they would be warm and safe and never in need or danger again. At other times I did miracles such as you read in this story, manifesting Myself to some of the soldiers, or causing their weapons to jam from the cold, or causing those who were thought to be dead to revive once their tormentors were gone, when I still had matters for them to tend to on your Earth. *(End of message from Jesus.)*

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End of File