

The Beauty of Nothing

by Richard Wurmbbrand

The sermon emphasizes the value of humility and detachment from worldly things, and the importance of focusing on the spiritual, using the concept of 'nothing' as a metaphor for the power of God.

Duration: 37:51

Scripture: Job 26:7, Matthew 16:24, Matthew 28:20, 2 Corinthians 12:11, Galatians 2:20, Philippians 4:11, Hebrews 13:5

Topics: "Suffering And Faith", "Christian Perseverance"

Description

This sermon shares the powerful testimony of a pastor who endured 14 years in communist prisons, highlighting the struggles, faith, and triumphs experienced during that time. It emphasizes the value of humility, self-denial, and complete surrender to Christ, drawing parallels between the pastor's experiences and the teachings of St. Paul. The sermon also underscores the importance of gratitude, perseverance, and the enduring presence of God even in the darkest moments of life.

Transcript

Dear brethren and sisters, first of all I wish to apologize for speaking to you being seated. During my 14 years in communist jails, we almost never walked. We had heavy chains at our feet, sometimes 50 pounds, 20 kilograms.

There were heavy beatings with rubber truncheons on the soles of the feet, and now it becomes more and more difficult for me to stand for a long time. It is difficult for me even to wear shoes. That is why probably for the first time in the history of this church, you have before you a barefoot pastor.

My text is from 2 Corinthians, chapter 12, verse 11. I have become a fool in glorying. Ye have compelled me, for I ought to have been commended of you.

For in nothing am I behind the very chiefest apostles, though I am nothing. That is what Paul has to say about himself. I am nothing.

The greatest men in mankind were those who knew they are nothing. So many believe they are painters and they are sculptors. Michelangelo, the biggest of them, said, I am not a painter.

He compared his paintings with a painting of God on the wing of a butterfly, or a sunset, or a snowflake. And he knew nobody will ever be able to paint like this, and we all the others, we don't deserve the name of painters. So many of us believe that we are Christians, that we are something good, something highly

talented and gifted.

Paul said, I am nothing. I wish to start tonight by telling you a prison experience. When the communists took over my homeland, Romania, they did what they did everywhere where they came to power.

What they would do in this country too, if ever it would fall under them. They put in prison thousands of Christians, all Catholic bishops. And only two of them survived.

The others died in prison. They they could not bear the tortures. Priests, monks, nuns, Protestant pastors of all denominations, Jewish rabbis, but also thousands of laymen, farmers, workers, young boys, young girls, whosoever witnessed actively for his faith, went to prison.

And we who were considered somehow to be leading personalities of the underground church, we were kept during years in solitary confinement, I myself and others, we were during years 30 feet beneath the earth. We never saw sun, moon, snow, flowers, stars, mountains, rivers, had forgotten that these things exist. We never had a Bible, nor any other book.

We never had a bit of paper or a pen, and forgot to write it. I have not seen a lady for 10 years. I have not seen a child for 10 years.

In solitary confinement, we saw nobody except the wardens and the torturers. We never heard a sound. The cells were soundproof.

We never heard a whisper. We saw nothing. We heard nothing.

Perfect silence reigned in those prison cells. We had almost nothing to eat, sometimes one slice of bread a week, otherwise soup of dirty potato peels, cabbage with unwashed intestines, and other such dentists. 14 years, I have never seen a color.

We always saw the gray walls of the cell, and our gray uniforms. I had forgotten that brown and blue and green and red and pink and violet exist. Our world was gray.

And years passed like this, one year after another. I became very, very tired, and one night I said to our Lord, Lord, you see, I have no brethren, no sisters. I don't have your written word.

I don't have Holy Communion. I have none of these things, but you have spoken so often directly to persons, even to very evil persons, like Saul of Tarsus, who had been a prosecutor and a killer of Christians, and you came and spoke with him, and as I have nobody to speak to me, would you speak to me tonight? And then, it were exceptional circumstances, and in exceptional circumstances, exceptional things happen. And when I said, you, Lord, speak to me, I heard his voice.

His sheep hear his voice. Now, I expected from him a word of comfort, a word which should strengthen me in my faith. Instead of this, I heard very strange words.

He put to me a question. What is your name? Now, I believe that Jesus is God, and surely God should know at least what my name is. It's very strange for a God to ask somebody what is his name, but he has put such strange questions before.

He asked Adam, Adam, where are you? Well, if he is God, he should know where Adam is. He put this question to Adam, not because he did not know, but to make Adam think, am I not in the wrong place,

hidden in a bush, hiding myself from my creator, before whose eyes nobody can hide himself? And so, the Lord put to me the strange question, what is your name? Now, I had known all my life that my name is Richard, but in that moment, I could not reply to Jesus, my name is Richard, because I happened to have read in church history that in Britain there was once a big saint with the name of Richard, who, because of his faith, has been sentenced to death. It was known that he was a believer and propagated his faith.

It were times of persecution, so a police officer mounted a horse, as it was in those times, to go to arrest him. The horse went berserk, overthrew him, and he died on the spot, so it was a clear case of murder, because if Richard would not have been a Christian, this police officer would not have mounted a horse to arrest him, he would not have fallen from the horse, he would not have died, so there was no much discussion, he was sentenced to death for murder. And now, Richard was on the gallows, and the executioner had some difficulty in fixing the noose of his rope, and Richard was such a good, good man, he could not bear that anybody should have a difficulty because of him, so he went to the henchman, bowed before him, and said, sir, I'm so sorry to give you trouble, I'm a farmer, I'm skilled, would you allow me to help you?

I know how to fix the noose of the rope, and the executioner, as executioners usually are, was very polite and allowed Richard to help him, and Richard fixed the noose, then he bowed again to the executioner and said, thank you very much for having been so kind, and know that I have no grudge against you, I am very happy to go to the Lord, thank you for everything, and with a big smile on his face, Richard died, and I have the same name as that saint, and I fear to say to Jesus, my name is Richard, because I, I trembled about something else, what if I say, my name is Richard, and he says, are you like that, Richard?

I was not like that, Richard, we all have beautiful names, Paul, are you like that, Paul, a zealous apostle, Mary, oh, you must probably be pure and innocent like that, Mary, Magdalene, are you also a woman of such deep repentance for your sins, Joan, are you also an apostle of love, we have beautiful names, to which nothing corresponds in reality, we can tell each other, this is my name, we can't tell it to Jesus, because he might ask us, are you like the others who have borne this name, this prestige, and this heroism, for my name's sake, so I could not say that I am Richard, should I say I am a Christian, I fear to say it, because I knew that in the first centuries, under the Roman persecution, Christians entered into the arena of circuses to be devoured by wild beasts for their faith, and they said, Christianusum, I am a Christian, and I was not as courageous as those Christians, should I say I am a pastor, I did not dare, because I knew that a pastor has to watch day and night over his flock, and I have not been like this, he had asked me, what is your name, I bowed before him and said, Jesus, I have no name, allow me to bear your name, and that is what he really wishes from us, Paul understood it, not I live, not the old Paul, not a new Paul, not the wicked Paul who has been a murderer, not the new Paul who is an apostle, not the wicked and full of vices, not the very good and full of virtues, the I has been abolished, not I live, but Christ lives in me, you have been brought up with the English language, we who have learned English being grown-up men, we wonder very much about how you write words, in English you write the word you with a small y, he with a small h, she with a very small s, but I, capital letter, I am something very very important, a capital letter, and Jesus tells us, whosoever wishes to come after me, should cease to write I with a capital letter, whosoever wishes to come after me should deny himself, his brother, his fellow man should come first, God should come first, and he somewhere in the rear, whosoever wishes to come after me should deny himself, not be anymore, not I live, but Christ lives in me.

Years of prison passed, we were very hungry, as I told you, we were hungry after food, we were hungry after love, nobody ever smiled to us, nobody hugged us, nobody caressed us, nobody told us a nice word,

only words of hatred.

We were so hungry after love, I passed through brainwashing, 17 hours a day, we had to sit on a forum without moving, you were not allowed to rest a little bit your head on your hand, or to close your eyes, that would have been a crime, and 17 hours a day, from five in the morning until ten in the evening, we had to hear, communism is good, communism is good, communism is good, communism is good, give up, give up, give up, give up, christianity is dead, christianity is dead, christianity is dead, and then the pharaoh shows, to hear 17 hours a day, nobody loves you anymore, nobody loves you anymore, nobody loves you anymore, nobody loves you anymore, to hear this during hours, during days, during weeks, during months, during years, 17 hours a day, and in your nightmares, you continue to

hear, give up, give up, give up, nobody loves you anymore, we were hungry after love, we were hungry after a printed page, we were hungry after the face of a man, and we were hungry for one thing more, a hunger which is unknown in your country, we were hungry for holy communion, the year set fast, and we have had no holy communion, now how should we take it, we were everyone alone in a cell, so it could not be a fellowship of brethren, at that time we did not have even this one slice of bread a week, we got instead some dirty mace cake, wine, from where should you take wine, in a subterranean communist prison cell, we had no bible, we had no hymn book, we had nothing, we consulted with each other, without being everyone alone in a cell, by tapping through the wall in moscow, you know

there exists such a code through which cables are conveyed, a, b, c, and so on, one prisoner learns this alphabet from another, and we communicated in this way, and we asked each other, how should we do, we are hungry after the body and the blood of our lord, as it is communicated in holy communion, how should we take it, we have nothing, and at once we had an illumination, waited a bit, we have, we have something which is called nothing, if nothing would be nothing, we could not have it, we have something which is called nothing, now what is the value of this nothing, we have nothing, they're taking away from us our families, our houses, our furniture, our libraries, our churches, everything they're taking away from us, they're taking away from us our own clothing, they're taking away

from us even our names, every prisoner, if he was a more important one considered by them, was taking away his name and given a number, and he had not, he was not allowed to tell even a warden what his real name is, they feared that the warden at a glass of wine might betray the secret who is in prison to a friend of his, so we were given numbers, the one prisoner number 5833, the other prisoner number 9221, and so on, and all the prisoners did not remember their numbers, and then they were beaten because of this, I had the advantage to have a number very easy to be remembered, I was prisoner number one, that was easy to be remembered, but they're taking away from us everything, even our names, we had nothing, we were nothing, they mocked us, they did with us what they liked, they opened

forcibly the mouth of Christians and spit in this mouth, and they did worse than spitting in the mouth, they throwed you under their feet, we were nothing, and we had nothing, there was another one who said I am nothing, St.

Paul, and when he wrote this, he was free, he said I was nothing, and I am nothing, and then we had something, the name of which is nothing, we had nothing, and we begin in these half-dark prison cells, subterranean prison cells, in which all kinds of thoughts come to you which don't come in the pre-world, we began to think about the value of the nothing, we all loved this world with its beautiful multicolored butterflies, and the chirping birds, and the scenting flowers, and the pretty children, and we remembered,

but wait a little bit, out of what did God make this beautiful world?

He made it out of nothing, so nothing is a very valuable material, you can make a universe out of nothing, if anyone would try to make all these things out of gold and diamond, he would not succeed, but out of nothing, God created this world, created it, but with what is Holy Communion taken in churches? It is taken with bread, and out of what is bread made? Out of flour, and out of what is flour made? Out of wheat, and out of what is wheat made? God made it out of nothing, and in Holy Communion we take wine, wine is made out of grape juice, and the grape juice comes from the grapes, and the grapes come from the vineyard, and God has made the vineyards out of nothing, so nothing is a very valuable material, nothing is the basic material where this Holy Communion is taken everywhere in the world, nothing, we have nothing, and nothing is a material out of which the universe is made, then we remember in those prison cells that in Job 26 it is written, God hangs the earth, this huge ball on which now four billion men live, plus animals, and trees, and seas, and rivers, and whatever you like, this huge ball, God hangs the earth upon nothing, if God would have hung the earth upon a thick cable of steel, the cable of steel would have broken, but when it hangs upon nothing, nothing is the most resistant material in the world, the earth hangs upon nothing, and it hangs well, it does not shake, so I have nothing, to have nothing means to have something very valuable and very resistant, and then we remember the words of Paul, I am nothing, now if I, Richard Bormann, would be a very good preacher, it would be rumored, you know, Richard Bormann is approximated like Billy Graham, now all respect for Billy Graham, the greatest soul winner whom we have in the world today, but I believe that Saint Paul was a little bit bigger than Billy Graham, and about Saint Paul it is not written that he was a big preacher, about Saint Paul it is written that he was nothing, so if I am nothing, then I am like Saint Paul, in the first church of Corinth, Christians quarreled, some said, Paul, what a preacher, and the other said, go away, Peter puts Paul in his little pocket, and the other said, you should better hear Apollo, he is the real preacher, and because all three preached love, they instead of loving each other, quarreled with each other, who preaches about love better, and then Saint Paul says, I am nothing, and we were nothing, we had nothing, and we felt how foolish we have been not to rejoice about the fact that we had nothing, and that we were nothing, and we decided by mutual consultation, on a Sunday morning, to take Holy Communion with nothing.

Every similar thing had happened in the past, in former centuries, so we decided to take Holy Communion with nothing, and at a certain moment, on a Sunday morning, we gave a signal through the wall, from one end of the corridor to the other, there were many cells, and at one and the same moment, we took in our hands nothing, we thanked God for nothing.

You must not have a thing to thank God for, if I have a new car, I will thank God for it, you can thank for the old car, the old car has four wheels, and you can have a very good ticket from the police with the old car, you don't need a new car for that, and you must not have some higher pay, and you must not have some higher position to thank God. A bird does not think, a bird does not sing because of the things it gets, the bird sings because it has a song in its heart, and Christians are simply thankful and grateful in their character, and they thank, not for things, they thank because they are thankful, and we thank God for nothing, we blessed the nothing, the beautiful nothing, out of which multicolored butterflies and the smiles of children are made. We blessed the nothing, we ate nothing, and we remembered the body of our Lord Jesus Christ, which has been broken for us, we had broken the nothing, if you break the oblate of the host in Holy Communion, it makes pop, it opposes a resistance, but the nothing opposes no resistance, as a lamb went to the slaughter, so did Jesus go without any resistance, and we remember this is sacrifice without any resistance, and then we took another nothing, the nothing can have many shapes, things have

always one shape, if you have a Datsun, you don't have a Toyota, and if you have a Toyota, it is not a Volkswagen, things have shapes, nothings can have all kinds of shapes, so we took another nothing, and we thank God for this other nothing, and we blessed this other nothing, and it was a real experience, the blood of Jesus Christ was communicated to us in the form of nothing.

Now, I would recommend to no church to do it like this, I believe that things in the church should be done exactly as it is written in the Word of God, no change.

The best wine is the old wine, and the best theology is the old theology, and the best thing to be followed in the church is what the first Christians have done, so take Holy Communion as it has been done by the first Christians, but I think we can learn from these underground Christians, from the persecuted Christians, who do it otherwise in special circumstances, we should learn from them the value of the nothing, and they can help us, you can help them, they have no Bibles, they have no Christian literature, or very little of it, thousands of Christians are in prison today, in all kinds of countries, there exists no communist country in which Christians should not be persecuted, in some countries more, in other but where there is communism, there is persecution of Christians, and

families of Christians hunger, there are today children who hunger because their parents died in prison as a result of their Christian faith, or are in prison because of their Christian faith, we have to help them, but I believe that these persecuted Christians can help us much more than we can help them, we can help them with a few coins, with a few bills, with big checks of hundreds or thousands, they can help us with something more than that, they can help us to realize the value of the nothing, the detachment of the things of this world, and attachment to the heavenly bright is our love, and not the transitory things of this world, it was only seemingly that we were alone, it so seemed on the surface, but Jesus is a gentleman, and he has promised I will be with you always, now he

spoke Hebrew, and the word always does not exist in Hebrew, the only thing which he could say in Hebrew, I am Jewish myself too, and my beautiful wife whom you have seen, she's Jewish too, and I can tell you a secret of the Hebrew language, the word always does not exist in Hebrew, or every day it is said in some English translations, it doesn't exist in Hebrew, every day, what does it mean he will be with us every day, I have some friends who see me every day for 10 minutes, but the Hebrew word means every day is a whole day, 24 hours a day he's with us, he's with us when we are in our nice homes, he's with us also when we are in prison cells, he's with us if we are in a sick room, he's with us in poverty, he's with us in richness, he's with us in days when we pass through sorrows, and

in days when we can jubilate, and he has never left us alone, we were not alone, he was with us, he never comes by himself, he always comes surrounded by a host of angels, and he beautified even suffering in prison cells, we did not always feel his nearness, but in moments when we felt it, then the gray walls of the cell shone like a diamond, there was light in the darkness, fires of burning cloth were in that cell, and in our hearts there was such a joy, and such a jubilation, that if such experiences would have lasted more than fractions of a minute, our hearts would have ran in pieces, he's there, and when you renounce to the I, I, this big I, myself, when you renounce to this, when you deny yourself, when you can say like Michelangelo, I am not a painter, and you are a Michelangelo,

and when you are a child of God, who takes a cross upon himself, and no, I am nothing, it's much too big a privilege for me even to say that I'm a cross-bearer, I would not dare to shout loudly I am a Christian, because I know what a great thing is to be really a Christian, then God takes possession of your soul,

Christ reigns in you, and then you have great triumphs, I wish to tell you just one episode also from my own prison life, I speak as the first person from personal experience, but I mean the thousands who pass through the same experiences in the communist prisons, one night I was interrogated by a colonel of the communist secret police, his name was Dulgeru, which means in English carpenter, three carpenters have played a big role in my life, one carpenter died on the cross for

me and saved me, another carpenter brought me to Christ, and that now was the third carpenter who had to decide about my being free or being killed, he asked me I should betray the secrets of the underground church, I should tell him where we print secretly and what we do and so on, I refused to do it, then he said all right, if you don't tell me everything which I ask from you, you will be shot, at that time in our country the communists shot without any judgment, whosoever they liked, and God gave me such a quietness in that moment, and I said colonel, I know that one order of yours is enough, if you give the order I will be shot, and now you have a chance of an exceptional experiment, put your hand on my heart, and if my heart beats frightened, what should I do, I die, then you have

the right to doubt that there is a God and there is eternal life, but if my heart beats quietly, serenely, tick-a-tack, tick-a-tack, tick-a-tack, I go to my beloved one, then you should know there is a God and there is an eternal life, he got mad and shouted never will I release you, let him, what is his name, release you, he didn't wish to pronounce the name of Jesus, never will you see Westminster Abbey, I don't know how it came into his mind to mention Westminster Abbey, it's a renowned cathedral in London, never will you see Westminster Abbey, I said well colonel, his name is Jesus and he's the son of God, and if he wishes I will be released, and if he wishes I will see Westminster Abbey too, I was not very keen to see it, but because he had said I will not see it, 14 years passed, I

was released from prison, he was put in prison by his own comrades, and I saw Westminster Abbey, and at Westminster Abbey they sell illustrated cards, and I remember there the conversation which I had had, I bought a card and I sent it to him, colonel, he was no more a colonel, he was a prisoner now, do you remember what you said to me, let him release you, well he has released me, he's Jesus, he's the son of God, and I'm now at Westminster Abbey, and he can release you too, and you should also believe in him, and if he wishes you can even see Westminster Abbey as I have seen it too.

These years of prison have served us much, it is a very big suffering, thousands of our presidents suffer such tortures, I will not describe them because you would not sleep a fortnight if you would listen what these tortures are, their hunger, they are deprived of their children, of their beloved ones, my wife has been in prison at the same time when I was in prison, but in another jail I did not see her for 14 years, she was told officially that I hanged myself in prison, they lied to her, she did not believe it and so on, there is very great suffering in these prisons, but there is not only suffering, there exists the conquest of suffering through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, and I must say then afterwards when we were put in common cells I have heard many more joyous Christian songs in communist prison cells than in very well-to-do homes in the free world, and I've seen in communist prisons beautiful triumphant smiles of the brides of Christ, they were in his embraces, they felt his holy kiss upon their lips, and they would not have changed with American millionaires unless the American millionaires were brides of Christ too, then they had two joys, to have millions and to have Christ, but the Christian faith has proven true, the Christian faith is very persecuted in communist countries, and we have to help them, they have no bibles, they have no Christian literature, the Christian mission to the communist world, we help these persecuted Christians, we smuggle into them bibles and Christian literature, I will not tell you how we smuggle, because a smuggler who says how he smuggles is a very poor smuggler, but millions of pieces of literature enter, I can tell you

so much, here you see a gospel in a plastic bag, this is thrown into the sea near the Russian shore, the Chinese shore, the Albanian shore, it is a straw which makes it float on the surface of the sea, and when the tide comes it is brought in, and here is a piece of chewing gum or of chocolate, we should make the children interested to pick them up, that is how the gospel enters in communist countries.

Russia and the European satellite countries have every year five, six, seven million tourists, you can't check the tire of every car when so many tourists enter, you can't check every car to see if it doesn't have a double floor, sometimes they check thoroughly, they would untighten the screws, they don't find a double floor, they apologize, they put everything in order, the car is allowed to pass, the gospels were not in the double floor of the car, they were in the double roof of the car, where there are seven million tourists, among them there are many pregnant women, now with what is a woman pregnant, you will say with a boy, how do we know it can be a girl, how do you know a girl, it might be twins, it might be also a womb full with gospels, and it is simply not true, but your doctors and nurses say that a woman can be pregnant in the ninth month only once a year, because they are pregnant four, five times a year in the ninth month and have every time a very happy delivery without the slightest pain, we have to help these persecuted Christians, they need bibles, they need the word of God, they need hymnals, and we try to bring them into these countries, they need badly relief for families of Christians who are in prison, and we try to do this as best we can, but this is only one way, the help is reciprocal, they can help us much more than we can help them, they can help us with the example that courageous heroic Christianity is not a thing of the past, it is not a thing of history, it is a thing which exists today, in this century more martyrs have died for Christ than all the past centuries together, there are in these days also men and women who love Christ wholeheartedly, passionately, it is a shame to be a lukewarm Christian, to be a shallow Christian, there is no motive to be so, he has given his life gladly for us, he went singing to Gethsemane, let us also give wholeheartedly our lives to him, let us be dedicated to him in the service of God the Father. Amen.

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