

**The Unstoppable
Spread of the Gospel
[Book of Acts]**

James Kim

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Introduction

It seems that anti-Christian sentiments are increasing. Groups opposing the Church of Christ and persecuting it appear to be growing worldwide. At the same time, there are reports of declining effectiveness in evangelism within the church. The number of congregants is decreasing, and it's said that churches are closing their doors more frequently. Young people are leaving the church, and it's becoming increasingly elderly. The outlook for the church doesn't seem very bright. What should we do?

We need to be filled with the Holy Spirit. We must hold fast to the promise of the Lord and gather together in prayer, crying out to God. We especially need to repent of our sins in accordance with the guidance of the Holy Spirit. We must turn around. And we must obey God's Word. God's Word says, "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8). We must proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ as His witnesses. We should start by sharing the Gospel with our family, relatives, and loved ones. Additionally, we must share the Gospel of Jesus Christ with our friends, coworkers, and close neighbors. We should not limit the Gospel to our own people. We must also bring the Gospel to people of other nations. We must spread the Gospel to the "ends of the earth." This is the mission for all of us. We must become fervent workers for this mission. We should be Spirit-filled Christians and faithfully bear the responsibility of spreading the Gospel. In bearing this responsibility, we will face adversaries. Because of them, we may encounter difficulties, suffering, and persecution. However, even in such challenging and trying circumstances, we must rely on God's help and continue to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We should not hesitate to devote our lives to fulfilling the work of evangelism.

The reason I wanted to meditate on the Book of Acts was because I wanted to understand in more detail how the Holy Spirit of God fulfilled the word of Acts 1:8. Therefore, I hoped to glimpse how the same Holy Spirit was working abundantly in our church, advancing towards the fulfillment of the promise given by the Lord to our church, "... I ... will build my church" (Mt. 16:18). In particular, like the word in Acts 2:47, I began to meditate on the Book of Acts with the desire that our church would not only receive praise from many people, but also become a church where the Lord adds to the number of those being saved every day. In the midst of this, as I meditated on Acts 28:23-31, the conclusion I reached was that the spread of the Gospel of Jesus Christ is unstoppable. No matter how much anti-Christians or those opposing the church move according to Satan's strategy to try to stop the preaching of the Gospel, they cannot prevent the spread of the Gospel. The reason is that our Lord, who ascended to heaven, is spreading the Gospel through the Holy Spirit. As this fact became a firm conviction in my heart, it brought great comfort to me. I hope and pray that the same grace may also be with you.

Joining in the unstoppable work of spreading the Gospel of our Lord,

James Kim

(August 2015, praying to live a life as a witness according to the guidance of the Holy Spirit)

‘Wait for What the Father had Promised’

[Acts 1:1-5]

In a verse from a children's song, there are lyrics like this: ‘Promise with your pinky finger tightly crossed.’ It's a verse that young children enjoy singing when making promise. However, it seems they understand that promise can be easily broken, as the method and procedure for reaffirming promise continue to evolve. Initially, they would simply hook their pinky fingers, but at some point, after hooking their pinky fingers, they stamp it with their thumbs as a sort of "seal." Now, after making the promise and sealing it, they say "copy" to each other while pressing their palms together. This means that the promise has been duplicated, so it must be kept. Some children go even further and add a step of signing on the palm after copying the promise. It's their own triple or quadruple lock system for promises (Internet).

We live in an era where promises are not trusted. Especially politicians are notorious for not keeping their promises. A former mayor of Seoul once said that we are living in an era where many politicians present ambitious projects (as pledges) but fail to fulfill them. And he self-proclaimed, ‘But I am a person who keeps promises.’ I saw this response attached to his promise: 'He is the best politician in this era who makes promises and knows how to keep them. I respect him as one of the citizens. It's not blind admiration, but because he's someone who can take responsibility for this country, that's why I send my praise and like him. Go, Mayor!' (Internet). Nietzsche said the following about promises: ‘A man must have a good memory to keep the promises he made.’ Furthermore, the person who receives a promise must remember it well until the promise is fulfilled.

Starting today, I would like to meditate on the Book of Acts. There are three reasons for this:

- (1) The Book of Acts is a continuation of the ongoing work of the Lord Jesus Christ through His Spirit, as manifested by the apostles and other early church leaders (Sang-seop Yoo).

We believe that even now, seated at the right hand of God, our Lord Jesus Christ, who governs heaven, continues to work on this earth through the Holy Spirit, both within our church and through the church. Meditating on the Book of Acts, we hope that our church will participate in the work of our Lord.

(2) The themes of the Book of Acts, including prayer, the Holy Spirit, the church, God's sovereign order, and the expansion of His Word, are precious subjects that we believe our church members should learn.

(3) As we prepare for this year's New Life Festival, we believe that the Book of Acts is suitable for next year's theme of "Evangelism and Mission/Service." Therefore, we want to meditate on this book.

Today, I would like to reflect on three key points from the introductory passage of the Book of Acts, Acts 1:1-5:

- (1) Who is the one giving the promise?
- (2) Who are the recipients of the promise?
- (3) What is the content of the promise?

First, who is the one giving the promise? It is none other than Jesus.

Look at Acts 1:4 – “Gathering them together, He commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for what the Father had promised, ‘Which,’ He said, ‘you heard of from Me.’” The author Luke, also known as Doctor Luke, was a converted Gentile proselyte named Theophilus (meaning "one who loves God") who held a fairly high position as a "most excellent" Roman official sent to the Roman colony (Lk. 1:3). Luke sent both the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts to Theophilus, briefly summarizing his first writing in the introduction of Acts (1:1-5). The core summary of Luke's Gospel is written in Luke 1:1b-2: “just as they were handed down to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, it seemed fitting for me as well, having investigated everything carefully from the beginning, to write it out for you in consecutive order, most excellent Theophilus.” In other words, the core summary of Luke's Gospel covers everything from the beginning of Jesus' actions and teachings (Yoo). The key word we should pay attention to here is "from the beginning," indicating that the author Luke is implying that Jesus' actions and teachings did not completely end. In other words, the Gospel of Luke is just the beginning of the record about Jesus, and it suggests that the ascended Jesus will continue His ministry in a different way, through the Holy Spirit. The ascended Jesus sends the Holy Spirit and continues His ministry through the disciples or the church. In Acts 1:4, before the ascended Jesus, Luke is talking about what happened after Jesus' resurrection. It was none other than Jesus who died on the cross, was resurrected after three days, and showed Himself to His disciples for "forty days" with many sure proofs, including eating a piece of broiled fish before them (Lk.

24:42-43), demonstrating His resurrection from the dead as He had promised. Luke records this to Theophilus, addressing him as "most excellent," and also conveys the commandment that the resurrected Jesus gave to His disciples. If we express this commandment as a verb, it would be to stay and wait (Acts 1:4). Why did He command them not to depart from Jerusalem? There are two reasons for this (Yoon-seon Park):

- (1) The reason is because Jerusalem is also prophesied as the starting point of the New Testament movement.

Look at Isaiah 2:3: "... For the law will go forth from Zion And the word of the LORD from Jerusalem."

- (2) The reason is because the connection between the New Testament movement and Jerusalem seems natural even from the principles of general history.

The focal point is where the masses are moving, so it is only natural that the spreading of truth would begin there. Jesus, who commanded not to leave Jerusalem, where the truth of the Lord's word would be proclaimed, also instructed to wait for what God the Father had promised. After Jesus, who promised the resurrection, fulfilled that promise and showed it to the disciples, He told them to wait for what the Father had promised (Acts 1:4). We can see that the fulfillment of that promise is based on Jesus' faithfulness. In other words, Jesus' words assure that whatever God the Father has promised will surely come to pass.

Our Lord Jesus is The Giver of the Promises. He is both the Giver of the Promise and the Given One of the promise. He is not a man to lie, nor a son of man to change His mind. Will He not do what He has spoken and fulfill what He has commanded? (Num. 23:19) Look at Isaiah 55:11 - "So shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it."

Second, who are the recipients of the promise? It is none other than the "apostles" or 'disciples'.

Look at Acts 1:2, 4: "... after He had by the Holy Spirit given orders to the apostles ... Gathering them together, He commanded them" During the forty days between resurrection and ascension, Jesus taught and commanded His disciples through the Holy Spirit (v. 2). This implies that in the future in Acts, the risen Jesus, through the Holy Spirit, will continue His ministry through His disciples. So, what did Jesus command His disciples through the Holy Spirit during the 40 days between resurrection and ascension? Look at verse 3: "To these He also presented Himself alive after His suffering, by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over a period of forty days and speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God." Jesus' teaching and command through the Holy Spirit have two aspects: firstly, the events Jesus continuously revealed to the disciples, and secondly, about the kingdom of God. Ultimately, the purpose of Jesus'

appearance and teaching for 40 days was in His resurrection testimony. This emphasis anticipates the absolute importance of Jesus' resurrection event, which is continually emphasized in the proclamation of the message of the apostles in Acts. This is the core of the Gospel. In other words, Acts 1:3 is speaking of the essence of the Gospel, which is Jesus' suffering ("after His suffering") and resurrection. In the end, Jesus taught His disciples the Gospel for 40 days until His ascension to heaven. Having shown His resurrection with many sure proofs, Jesus, as the core of the Gospel, entrusted His disciples with the responsibility of proclaiming this Gospel, thus expanding the kingdom of God. In this sense, the proclamation of the Gospel centered on Jesus and the proclamation of the kingdom of God are one and the same. In other words, the kingdom of God explains the risen Jesus, and conversely, the content of the Gospel explains the kingdom of God (Yoo).

Here, there are three lessons for us. As believers who trust in the promise of the Lord given to our church in Matthew 16:18, (1) we must listen to the words commanded by the Lord through the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:2). We should listen carefully to the voice of the Holy Spirit commanding us through the Scriptures. (2) We must have abundant and sure evidence of the fulfillment of the promise spoken by the Lord to establish His body, the Church (v. 3). We should experience the manifestation of God's glory and grace. (3) We should be used as instruments by the Lord to proclaim the core of the Gospel - the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus, in order to expand the kingdom of God. Is God's kingdom being expanding through our church?

Third and last, what is the content of the promise? It is none other than the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

Look at Acts 1:5 – “for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.” What is the baptism of the Holy Spirit? There are various opinions. Professor Gaffin describes the baptism of the Holy Spirit as, in a word, the Pentecostal outpouring of the Spirit. The Pentecost event is also known as the baptism of the Holy Spirit, the coming of the Spirit, or the gift of the Spirit. It also implies being baptized within the Spirit. Whether one chooses one interpretation or the other, the key point is that a believer receives spiritual baptism through the Holy Spirit.

Professor Young Bok Ahn stated that it is valid to refer to the event of the 'coming of the Holy Spirit upon each person' on Pentecost day as 'the baptism of the Holy Spirit.' Pastor Young Sun Park expressed it as the 'outpouring of the Spirit,' distinguishing between the baptism of the Holy Spirit bestowed by Jesus and the baptism of the Holy Spirit bestowed by the Spirit Himself. Additionally, Pastor Hee Young Woo argued that the baptism of the Holy Spirit means being immersed in the Holy Spirit, akin to being anointed with oil or being baptized with water, through the agency of the Holy Spirit. On the other hand, Pastor Lloyd Jones equated 'the pledge of the Spirit' or 'the sealing of the Spirit' with the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Frederick Bruner asserted that being baptized is synonymous with receiving the baptism of the Holy Spirit, stating that there cannot be a separate baptism of the Holy Spirit. Similarly, Reformed theologian René Pache expressed the same view in his book "The Person and Work of the Holy Spirit." Calvin also identified water baptism with the baptism of the Holy Spirit. These various perspectives can generally be categorized into two main

claims, namely the views of the Pentecostal, Wesleyan, and Keswick movements on one hand, and the doctrine of Reformed (Calvinistic) theology on the other. The former interprets the experience of receiving the Holy Spirit after conversion as the baptism of the Holy Spirit, while the latter refers to something received at the time of conversion as the baptism of the Holy Spirit. The term "baptism of the Holy Spirit" appears seven times throughout the Old and New Testaments. Looking at Acts 1:5 from today's passage, we can understand that the baptism of the Holy Spirit signifies the fulfillment of the prophesied and promised event that manifested in the Pentecostal event. The baptism of the Holy Spirit prophesied by John the Baptist and promised by Jesus Christ was fulfilled on the day of Pentecost. In essence, the Greek meaning of being baptized in the Spirit signifies the sinner entering into a vital union with Jesus Christ, being made a member of the mystical body of Christ. It means being introduced or led into the mystery of the living headship of Jesus. The baptism of the Spirit is a historical-redemptive event distinct from any empowerment or charismatic experience and is different from being filled with the Spirit. While believers should rightly desire the gifts of the Spirit, there is no reason to seek the baptism of the Spirit (Internet).

Here, we need to consider the relationship between the baptism of the Holy Spirit and the filling of the Holy Spirit. The reason is that we may be confused. We should consider two perspectives. One perspective equates the filling of the Holy Spirit with the baptism of the Holy Spirit, asserting that the same experience that the disciples had on Pentecost is still happening today, and views this experience as the filling of the Holy Spirit. Scholars who equate the filling of the Holy Spirit with the baptism of the Holy Spirit include R.A. Torrey, D. Gee, E.S. Williams, F.F. Bruce, and H. Ockenga, among others. They argue that the filling of the Spirit occurs by being immersed in the Spirit, much like the baptism of fire that occurs with the baptism of the Holy Spirit. For them, the command to be filled with the Spirit (Eph. 5:18) is based on the assumption that one has already received the baptism of the Holy Spirit. In other words, they equate receiving the filling of the Spirit with having received the baptism of the Holy Spirit initially, as seen in Acts 1:4-5 and 2:1-4. Therefore, Bruce stated that the result of the baptism of the Spirit is the filling of the Spirit, and the filling of the Spirit continued multiple times thereafter. On the other hand, there is another perspective that distinguishes between the baptism of the Holy Spirit and the filling of the Holy Spirit. According to this view, the baptism of the Holy Spirit is a one-time event, while the filling of the Holy Spirit is seen as an ongoing process. However, equating the filling of the Holy Spirit with the baptism of the Holy Spirit poses many problems. This is because the expression "be filled with the Spirit" indicates that the Spirit occupies the hearts and minds of believers. The word 'filled' is used in Luke 5:26 in the context of being 'greatly amazed,' not in connection with the Holy Spirit. Bauer defines the verb used here in his Greek dictionary as 'to occupy the whole mind,' signifying that the mind is dominated by the Spirit. Furthermore, in Ephesians 5:18, the verb is in the passive voice, which means that the action of the verb is carried out by means of the agent. Here, the action of the verb refers to some instruction imparted to the believer, indicating that it can be interpreted as 'be dominated by the Spirit.' Therefore, it is more valid to view the filling of the Spirit as the personal dominance of the Spirit, distinct from the baptism of the Spirit. Many scholars support this perspective. Dr. Hyung Ryong Park does not deny that the baptism of the Holy Spirit occurred on Pentecost, but he states that "the filling of the Holy Spirit is different from the baptism of the Holy Spirit." J.S. Stott says, 'The filling of the Spirit is the result of the baptism of the Spirit, and baptism is a unique initial

experience, while the filling is the repeated extraordinary grace of the Spirit received during the ongoing spiritual life.’ Lloyd Jones also sees it as being under the influence of the Spirit, with the Spirit controlling us. Bill Bright also sees being filled with the Spirit as being under the domination of the Spirit and being filled with the power of the Spirit. Additionally, scholars like R. Pekson, J. Woolf Burt, and A. Murray view the filling of the Spirit as being under the personal dominance of the Spirit. This summarizes the doctrine of Baptism of the Holy Spirit and Filling of the Holy Spirit (Internet):

(1) Baptism of the Holy Spirit:

- (a) The baptism of the Holy Spirit is the immediate work of the Holy Spirit upon a believer in Jesus.
- (b) The baptism of the Holy Spirit is signified by water baptism.
- (c) The baptism of the Holy Spirit may be accompanied by an experience, but it is not always the case.
- (d) The baptism of the Holy Spirit is a one-time event and does not occur again.

(2) Filling of the Holy Spirit:

- (a) The filling of the Holy Spirit is a state where a person who has received the baptism of the Holy Spirit is completely captivated by the Holy Spirit.
- (b) The filling of the Holy Spirit is a recurring event.
- (c) The filling of the Holy Spirit can be lost due to laziness or sin.
- (d) The filling of the Holy Spirit can be restored through repentance and prayer.
- (e) The filling of the Holy Spirit is sometimes a means by which God specially equips His children for times of emergency.
- (f) The filling of the Holy Spirit may be accompanied by an experience, but it is not an absolute requirement.
- (g) It is incorrect to always seek evidence of the filling of the Holy Spirit only through experiences; rather, it should be sought in a life characterized by holiness and obedience.

What have you and I received as the promise from the Lord? We have received the seal of the promised Holy Spirit. Look at Ephesians 1:13 – “In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation--having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise.” We are those who, upon hearing the word of truth and the gospel of salvation, believed in Jesus as our Savior and received the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Now, as recipients of the baptism of the Holy Spirit through the promise, we should seek to be filled with the Holy Spirit. Let us be filled with the Word and faith, holding fast to the promise of His return, and remain faithful to the Lord until that day.

One of the promises of Jesus is His Second Coming (His return). However, when we look at 2 Peter 3:4, the Bible mentions scoffers in the last days asking, "Where is the promise of His coming?" In such times, we must firmly hold on to the promise of the Lord. Especially, we should believe without doubt in the promises concerning eternal life. Look at 1 John 2:25 – “This is the promise which He Himself made to us:

eternal life.”

Church-wise, this is the promise our Lord has given to our community: ‘I will build my church’ (Mt. 16:18). Let us all hold fast to this promise and, looking to our Lord who gave us this promise, let us be filled with the Holy Spirit and pour our strength into faithfully building the church, which is His body.

Relying on the Lord who faithfully fulfills His promises,

James Kim

(Guided by the Holy Spirit)

Witnesses of Jesus

[Acts 1:6-11]

How should we view tsunamis like Katrina and Rita hurricanes? Personally, I believe we should see them as signs of the message that must precede the Lord's coming, as indicated in Luke 21:25 - "And there will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and on the earth distress of nations in perplexity because of the roaring of the sea and the waves." Reading the phrase "the roaring of the sea and the waves," we realize that it points to God, who moves in nature and the universe, working before the return of Jesus. In fact, in Luke 21:31, Jesus said: "So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near." In times like these, how should we conduct our spiritual lives? We can consider a few things: (1) We need to be careful ourselves (v. 34). We should guard against our hearts becoming weighed down with dissipation, drunkenness, and the cares of life. (2) We should always pray and stay alert (v. 36).

As Christians who are aware of the imminent return of Jesus, what kind of people should we be? Based on today's passage in Acts 1:6-11, the answer given to us is that we should be "witnesses of Jesus." What does it mean to be witnesses? It means being those who proclaim the truth about Jesus Christ (MacArthur). The Greek root word here, "martyrs," means "one who dies for their faith," because the price to testify to the gospel of Jesus Christ was often death. This is where the term "martyr" is derived from. Therefore, based on today's passage, let's think about what it means to be a true witness of Jesus. I hope and pray that all of us may be true witnesses of Jesus, testifying to Him through our lives.

First, a witness of Jesus is someone who obeys the authority of the Lord.

Look at Acts 1:7 – “He said to them, ‘It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority.’” Here, the term "times or epochs" refers to the time of the restoration of the kingdom of Israel (v. 6). In other words, the disciples were asking Jesus if the time

for the restoration of the kingdom to Israel, as prophesied by Jesus in verse 5, would come when they receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit. The concept of the kingdom restoration that the disciples had in mind involved political, economic, and social restoration from Roman rule (Seyoon Kim). Ultimately, the disciples of Jesus made the mistake of confining the kingdom of God to the nation of Israel (Yoo). In response to the disciples' question about this "time," Jesus did not correct their misconceptions about the kingdom of God, but instead focused on answering their question about the "time." His answer was, "It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority" (v. 7). The reason is that this "time" is under the authority of God the Father. In response to Jesus' answer, the disciples fell silent.

Reflecting on this passage, I considered how our church could apply it. What if both I and others had restricted the vision of evangelizing the Hispanic community in this local society, as if the restoration of the kingdom of God were limited only to fellow Koreans living in the United States? However, by the grace of the Holy Spirit working among us, during the Bible study for church leaders last year, as we meditated on Acts 11, we prayed for Hispanic workers with the vision of evangelizing the Hispanic community. Especially, Acts 11:19-20, which shows how some Jews who were scattered due to the persecution arising from Stephen's testimony went to Antioch and also preached the gospel to the Hellenists (Gentiles) there, leading to the establishment of the Antioch church. Through this passage, we realized that our church should have a vision for Hispanic ministry and began praying for it. This year, the Lord sent pastor Victor Gomez, initiating Hispanic ministry. In today's passage, Acts 1:6-11, the disciples of Jesus wrongly limited the kingdom of God to the nation of Israel, as it came about through the salvation event of Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection. However, we must be mindful that the kingdom of God, brought about by the salvation event of Jesus Christ's crucifixion and resurrection, transcends racial and national dimensions. It should not be proposed to one ethnic group alone, be it the Korean people or any other. From this perspective, the work of our church established by the Lord does not seem to be a change in our perspective. That is, our church is not meant to gather only Koreans for worship, but rather, we have been brought together to work as a team, not only with our children of the 1.5 and 2nd generations, but also with the many Hispanic people in our vicinity. This ministry is undoubtedly a precious one, as it maintains unity in diversity within the Lord. I believe that this posture of obedience is evidence of the Lord establishing His church and body. Even though no one publicly asked the question, "Why should we do Hispanic ministry?" I believe that the Lord has initiated Hispanic ministry because we have simply obeyed the fact that it is His will. This is a beautiful faith posture of being obedient to the authority of God's Word, as heard through the voice of Acts 11:19-20.

Second, a witness of Jesus is one who receives power.

Look at Acts 1:8 – "Butt you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." In response to the disciples' question, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?"

(v. 6), Jesus gives his second answer (the first answer is in verse 7), which is the well-known verse, Acts 1:8. Jesus' response itself refutes the disciples' mistaken understanding of the kingdom of God. The disciples had confined the kingdom of God to the nation of Israel, but Jesus tells them that when the Holy Spirit comes upon them, they will receive power to be His witnesses not only in Jerusalem and Judea, but also in Samaria and even to the ends of the earth. This geographical expansion of the gospel is a rebuke to the disciples' erroneous thinking that the kingdom of God was limited to Jerusalem and the nation of Israel. Jesus' prophecy that they will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon them is also echoed by Luke in Luke 24:49 - "I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high." What does the term "power from on high" or "power" refer to? Here, the term "power" does not refer to political power, which the disciples were concerned about, nor does it refer to personal abilities related to a life of godliness as described in the Old Testament. Rather, it refers to the power that enables the disciples to go to the ends of the earth to proclaim the gospel. This power is the same power that came upon Jesus after He received baptism and was praying, enabling Him to begin His public ministry in power. Now, Jesus is telling the disciples that the same Spirit will empower them for their ministry (Yoo). In short, "power from on high" or simply "power" refers to the ability to carry out the ministry of spreading the gospel.

We, as witnesses of Jesus, are already recipients of this power. Therefore, Apostle Paul prayed like this for the Ephesian saints: "I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being" (Eph. 3:16). We should pray for the Lord, who is the head of the church, to empower our inner being through His Spirit, so that we may boldly proclaim (preach) Jesus Christ, who dwells in our hearts through faith, in order to live a life that declares the gospel. The amazing fact is that when we pray in this manner, the Lord abundantly exceeds our requests. Look at Ephesians 3:20 - "Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us." Therefore, as witnesses of Jesus who have received power, we should be filled with the Holy Spirit through prayer and boldly proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ. Starting from our respective "Jerusalem" and moving forward in obedience according to the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we must faithfully bear the ministry of spreading the gospel with the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit.

Third and last, a witness of Jesus is one who holds the hope of His return.

Look at Acts 1:11 - "Men of Galilee," they said, "why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven." After the resurrected Jesus had given the disciples the promise of the coming of the Holy Spirit and ascended into heaven, riding on a cloud in the sight of the disciples (vv. 9-10), the disciples, who were gazing intently, were suddenly confronted by two angels who made them realize two important facts (Yoo): (1) By emphasizing the expression "This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven," the angels affirmed that the Jesus who ascended will indeed return, indicating that the returning Jesus is the same Jesus who ascended. (2) The angels clarified that the

manner of Jesus' ascension is the same as the manner of His return. We need to pay closer attention to two crucial facts in the angels' message here:

- (1) Just as in the disciples' question, the element of "time" regarding the coming of Jesus is completely absent in the angels' message.

The reason is stated in Mark 13:32: "But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father."

- (2) The prophecy from the angels that the ascended Jesus will return in the same manner holds significant meaning for the disciples.

The implication of the angels' prophecy about the return in the same manner is that the disciples, as stewards, should continue to faithfully bear the ministry of Jesus through the Spirit until the end. This stewardship essentially involves nurturing God's people in the form of His word (Lk. 12:35-48), in summary, signifying the ministry of preaching the gospel and shepherding through the word. In other words, the ascended Jesus entrusts His disciples with the ministry of proclaiming the gospel and shepherding through His word, and He continues to sustain them through the Holy Spirit.

This is our ministry. As witnesses of Jesus, we bear the responsibility to carry on the ministry of the ascended Jesus through the Holy Spirit. We have the duty to faithfully undertake the ministry of preaching the gospel and shepherding through the word until the day and moment He returns, or until our lives are completed.

There is a passage about Cassie Bernall, who was a witness for Jesus. You may be familiar with the shocking event that took place on April 20, 1999, at a high school in Denver, Colorado, where two students carried out a tragic shooting, resulting in the deaths of 13 students and teachers. The perpetrators, Harris and Klebold, conducted this horrifying massacre in commemoration of Hitler's birthday. They gathered the students in one part of the campus and, pointing the gun at them one by one, asked, "Do you believe in God?" Most students, in order to survive, reportedly answered, "No." In response, Harris and Klebold, with sinister smiles, spared their lives. However, even in this atmosphere of terror, there was one student who made a resolute declaration of faith. That student's name was Cassie Bernall. Even in the face of the gun, she boldly proclaimed, "Yes, I believe in God. And you need to follow God's path too." Upon hearing these words, Harris and Klebold said, "Go to the God you believe in," and ultimately, Cassie Bernall lost her life right there. Do you know what happened after this incident? A tremendous revival fire ignited among American teenagers. They were endlessly ashamed of their own cowardice in the face of Cassie Bernall's martyrdom. Shortly after, among the remaining students, a faith movement arose, compelling them to stand as bold witnesses like Cassie Bernall. Suddenly, a movement called "Let's follow the path of Cassie Bernall" began in schools

across the United States, and prayer meetings in front of flagpoles, commemorating Cassie Bernall's martyred decision, became widespread (Internet). Cassie Bernall was a witness for Jesus. We also hope to become witnesses for Jesus, like Cassie Bernall.

Praying to undertake the ministry of preaching the gospel with the hope of Jesus' return, empowered by the Holy Spirit,

James Kim

(Praying while hoping for the Second Coming of Jesus and entrusting the ministry of spreading the gospel with the power of the Holy Spirit)

“Let another man take his office”

[Acts 1:12-26]

What is the concept of "office" about? "Office" refers to function, not position. The purpose of office is service, sacrifice, and being a servant. To perform the office well, one must become a servant to others (2 Cor. 4:4). Without service and sacrifice, one is not fulfilling their office. It would be hypocritical. Since we have all received an office, we must be faithful to it.

When we speak of a person holding an office, we can think of 1 Timothy 3:1-13, which outlines the qualifications for church officials. They must be lovers of what is good, blameless, not only within the church but also in society and morality. They must be self-controlled in all things, which means they must govern their hearts well, being careful with their words, actions, and thoughts. They must be hospitable, not given to excessive drinking, not violent or quarrelsome, and tolerant in all things. They must not love money, be stubborn or self-willed, but must keep the Word. These are the basic qualifications for an officeholder. Indeed, those who have taken on an office in the church must approach it willingly (1 Cor. 9:16-18). They did not take on the office of the church on their own, but were appointed through the organization's function, so they must lead by example. They should do it with joy in accordance with God's will and discard the notion that only they can do it. Especially when church officials serve as examples in everything, it pleases God.

In today's passage, Acts 1:12-26, we see a disciple of Jesus who did not remain faithful to the office given by God and instead betrayed it. His name is Judas Iscariot, whom we are familiar with. Today, I want to consider three aspects of the concept of office based on Acts 1:12-26, titled "Let another man take his office."

First, what does "his office" refer to? His office refers to the "apostolic office."

Look at Acts 1:25a – “to occupy this ministry and apostleship” In the Korean Bible, it is written as "봉사와 및 사도의 직무" which translates to "this ministry and apostleship." However, in the original Greek text, the corresponding meaning is ‘this office, namely, the position of apostleship’ (Yoo). The question arises: Does the office of apostles still exist today? Catholics refer to the papacy as the succession of Peter's apostolic office, considering the Pope as the representative of Christ, the head of the entire Church, and an infallible (without error) entity. Therefore, they hold the Pope's teachings in higher regard than the Bible (Internet). However, our Protestant faith denies the continuation of the apostolic office. We can find the reason in today's passage, Acts 1:21-22, which states: “Therefore it is necessary that of the men who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us-- beginning with the baptism of John until the day that He was taken up from us--one of these must become a witness with us of His resurrection.” The reason for denying the continuation of the apostolic office is that, since there is currently no one who, like those who were with the apostles from the time of John's baptism until Jesus' ascension and personally witnessed Jesus' resurrection, can succeed in the apostolic office. The apostolic office is fundamentally unique and not repeatable. Those who personally witnessed the risen Lord and were directly commissioned by Him in the early Church cannot be replaced or represented by successors. The apostolic office as witnesses and envoys appointed directly by the resurrected Lord does not continue or repeat. So, if the "his office," namely the "apostolic office," no longer exists, how can we apply that office to ourselves? While the unique office of the apostles cannot be replicated, we believe that our church has the responsibility to accept and obey the teachings and ministry of the apostles. In other words, the term "apostle" means 'one who is sent,' and in a sense, all of us Christians are 'apostles.' This is because we are those who have received a sending from the Lord into the world. Therefore, the "his office" given to all of us Christians is to, like the apostles, be sent from the Lord into the world, open our mouths, and proclaim the gospel containing the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ to the world (Progress of the Gospel). And we must nurture those who have accepted the gospel and establish them as laborers for Christ (Progress of Faith). This is the will of the Lord who sent us. As 'those who have been sent,' we must obey the will of the Lord who is the 'Sender.' Fulfilling the will of the Lord is the responsibility of those who hold our office.

**Second, why was "his office" entrusted to another man for him to take on?
The reason is that he was unable to bear the weight of that office.**

Judas, who was one of the twelve apostles of Jesus, betrayed Jesus. Therefore, Apostle Peter, in the upper room (v. 13), gathered with the remaining apostles, including Mary, the mother of Jesus, and a crowd of about 120 people (v. 15), and preached. An interesting point in Peter's sermon is that the betrayal of Judas Iscariot was already prophesied in the Old Testament. Look at Acts 1:16: "... Brothers, the Scripture had to be fulfilled which the Holy Spirit spoke long ago through the mouth of David concerning Judas, who served as guide for those who arrested Jesus." Here, the Scripture that spoke long ago refers to the verse in Acts 1:20, which quotes Psalms 69:25: " May their place be deserted; let there be no one to dwell in their tents." In the end, Peter, by quoting Psalms 69:25 in Acts 1:20,

explains that Judas committed the sin of rejecting Jesus as the one who led those who arrested him, a sin that collaborated with the forces of darkness, namely the power of Satan. This reveals that Judas Iscariot became a target of God's curse. Therefore, by appointing someone to fill Judas Iscariot's vacant position, as stated in Acts 1:20b, "Let another take his office," Peter affirmed the necessity to fulfill the Scripture in Psalm 109:8b, "... Let another man take his office."

It seems that nowadays many of us Christians are taking our responsibilities too lightly, much like Esau, who despised his birthright by selling it to his brother Jacob for a single meal (Heb. 12:16). Just as the passage warns of Esau as a profane person who scorned the spiritual office, thereby blaspheming God, too many Christians are committing the sin of treating the responsibilities given to us by God lightly. In some ways, this tendency to be neglectful of the roles within the church may be understandable. This is because church responsibilities do not come with exercising great authority, nor do they necessarily come with significant honor. Indeed, a wise person cherishes the duties within the church. They prioritize faithfulness to these responsibilities. This sentiment was exemplified by the American retail magnate, John Wanamaker. When offered a position as Secretary of War by the President, he promptly declined. His reason was that he was serving as a Sunday School teacher in his church, and taking on the position would mean he couldn't teach the children every Sunday. It was only when the President promised to arrange his schedule to accommodate his teaching duties that he accepted the position. Every Saturday, he would fly back to his hometown to teach the children. When journalists once asked him if being Secretary of War was not a higher calling, he reportedly responded: 'Teaching in the Sunday School is my life work. But being Secretary of War would be only a side issue for a year or two, wouldn't it?' What a precious attitude this is. Here lies the true posture of a faithful believer, valuing the service of God more than any high worldly position (Internet).

Third, how should "his office" be taken on by someone else? It should be determined by the casting of lots.

Look at Acts 1:26 – "And they drew lots for them, and the lot fell to Matthias; and he was added to the eleven apostles." Because of the vacancy left by Judas's betrayal, and in accordance with the fulfillment of Psalms 109:8b, another disciple was chosen to take on the office of apostleship. The criteria for selecting a replacement for Judas were that the candidate must have been with the other eleven apostles from the time of John's baptism until Jesus' ascension. Two candidates, Joseph called Barsabbas (also known as Justus) and Matthias, were nominated (Acts 1:21-23). Out of these two candidates, one was chosen to assume the office of apostleship in place of Judas, after prayerful consideration by approximately 120 disciples. Look at Acts 1:24-25: "And they prayed and said, "You, Lord, who know the hearts of all men, show which one of these two You have chosen to occupy this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside to go to his own place." This prayer of approximately 120 disciples, who prayed throughout the night, reflects the example set by Jesus, who, after praying all night, chose his disciples (Lk. 6:13). It is a prayer asking the Lord, who knows everyone's hearts, to reveal the one He has already chosen from among the two candidates (Yoo). They

then cast lots to discern the will of the Lord. Through this process, Matthias was chosen to join the eleven apostles (Acts 1:26). At that time, the casting of lots likely followed the Old Testament custom, where the names of the two candidates were written on separate stones, placed in a container, and shaken. The name that appeared on the first stone drawn was the one selected (Lev. 16:8; Num. 18:6-8; 10; 1 Chron. 24:5, 31, 26:13-16; Neh. 10:34, 11:1; Ps. 22:18; Ezek. 21:21) (Yoo).

Is the casting of lots a useful method for us today? The Joint Council of Presbytery Associations reportedly revised the rules and regulations for the election of council members in accordance with biblical principles, using the method of casting lots at the 85th General Assembly held in 2000, the first year of the new millennium (Location: Jinju Church, Chairman: Pastor Dong-kwon Kim). Afterward, it faced a crisis of imminent failure due to strong resistance from entrenched interests. However, by the sovereign grace of God, it was brought up for reconsideration at the 86th General Assembly held in the first year of the 21st century (Location: Chunghyun Church, Chairman: Pastor Jong-tak Yeo). The Assembly, after engaging in biblical and theological discussions and debates, received overwhelming support from the majority of presbyters and made a resolution. Why do they engage in casting lots? The reason is to prevent election fraud and corruption. However, according to Professor Sang Seob Yoo, there is a crucial issue regarding casting lots. It lies in the responsibility, duty, and mission of those chosen by casting lots according to biblical principles. He states, 'If God, being pleased with himself and deeming it appropriate, has chosen through the casting of lots, then those individuals bear the responsibility, duty, and mission to carry out God's will humbly, seeking to satisfy God's heart more than anyone else. We are responsible to God and people, and should receive praise, respect, and trust. We should not become unfortunate ministers who, like Saul, arrogantly disregard God's word, act according to their own will, and end up rejected, having forsaken the sovereign grace and expectation of God, who chose them as the first king of Israel through casting lots' (Yoo).

This is a story about a certain deacon: This deacon had been serving in the church for over a decade since its establishment. However, when the deacon took on a job later on, he couldn't maintain his faith life as faithfully as before. In response, the pastor, considering that someone who should be an example to the other believers wasn't being faithful in his faith life, decided to remove the deacon from his position at the beginning of the new year. Upon hearing this, the deacon's daughter asked, 'What did father do wrong to be cut from his position as a deacon?' She felt embarrassed and couldn't bring herself to go to church. Furthermore, the deacon's wife started to cautiously ask, 'Are you really okay? Are you really okay?' showing a lot of concern. So, the deacon went to talk to the pastor. "Pastor! Is it possible for a deacon who has once been appointed in the church to be removed from their position? What exactly did I do wrong to be cut from my position as a deacon?' he asked, feeling upset. That's when the pastor responded, "Saint OO! In the church, if the believers' faith lives are found to be insincere, it is allowed to remove them from their position. That's the reason why Saint OO was removed from the position of a deacon.' The deacon had nothing to say. Upon reflection, he realized that he had indeed been neglecting his church life and faith life since starting his job. Therefore, the deacon accepted the fact that he was removed from his position as a deacon and quietly continued his church life.

However, the other believers around him couldn't understand how someone who had once been appointed as a deacon could be removed. They thought it was quite severe. They tried to comfort the deacon, but the deacon remained unmoved and continued his faith life silently. The pastor's perspective was, 'I removed Saint OO from the position of a deacon to make him reflect on his negligence in his faith life, as someone who should be an example to others. Additionally, it was to encourage others to be more diligent in their faith life by witnessing Saint OO's case.' We should be faithful in the positions entrusted to us. Faithfulness is what is required of those who are entrusted with a responsibility (1 Cor. 4:2).

Aspiring to be faithful in the roles we receive,

James Kim

(Humility, Service, Servanthood)

Devoting Themselves to Prayer

[Acts 1:14]

Our church's motto for the year 2008 is "Devote yourselves to prayer." The verse that serves as the motto is Acts 1:14. The background of this verse is when Jesus, after His crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension, returned from the Mount of Olives, also known as Olivet, to Jerusalem where His disciples were staying in the upper room. About 120 of them gathered together in prayer. Reflecting on this verse, I have chosen the title "Devote yourselves to prayer" while praying that you and I may live a life of obedience to this word. In summary, this word can be encapsulated as "Prayer, Expectation, and Waiting." We need to pray, expect, and wait.

So, how should we pray, what should we expect, and how should we wait? Let's contemplate on these questions. How should we pray?

We should pray together.

Certainly, individual prayer is crucial. However, just as Jesus' disciples, about 120 of them, gathered together in prayer, we too should gather together to pray. We live in an era where the habit of gathering is often overlooked. Look at families. Isn't it challenging for family members to come together in one place for a simple evening meal? Therefore, for church members to gather together for prayer is indeed a challenge. That's why the author of Hebrews advises in Hebrews 10:25: "not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching." Those who see the Day of the Lord's return drawing near with spiritual eyes should have a sense of urgency and strive to gather together in prayer.

Second, we should pray with one accord.

The disciples of Jesus mentioned in Acts 1:14 prayed with one accord. Therefore, we should

also follow their example and come together in unity to pray to God. This type of prayer is often referred to as united prayer. How can we pray to God with one accord? The key is found in Ephesians 4:4-6. To summarize, within the context of "one God, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one hope, one body, one Spirit," we can pray to God with one accord. We have become one body in the Triune God, sharing one faith, one baptism, and one hope. Therefore, we can gather together with one accord to pray to God. Our hope is to supplicate to God with one accord.

Third, we should hold fast to the promise while praying.

The promise that the disciples of Jesus held onto in today's passage is found in Acts 1:8 - "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." We too should hold fast to the promises that the Lord has given us, and gather together in unity to pray. We must cling to the promise of the Lord, as in Matthew 16:18, where He says, "And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." Together, we should call out to God, holding onto His promises.

As we supplicate to God in this manner, what can we expect from Him? I have four expectations:

(1) Receiving the fullness of the Holy Spirit.

We know from Acts 2 that when the early church, about 120 believers, gathered together in unity, holding onto the promise, they received the infilling of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost.

(2) When this happens, we can anticipate boldly proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Just as the early church, filled with the Holy Spirit, boldly preached the gospel even in the face of persecution and adversity, we too hope to be empowered by the Holy Spirit to boldly proclaim the gospel in any circumstance.

(3) Next, we anticipate the ongoing work of the Lord in adding those who are being saved daily (Acts 2:47).

Rather than ambitiously desiring church growth through human effort, we hope to experience the work of the Lord in growing His church both qualitatively and quantitatively.

(4) Lastly, we look forward to our church being established as a community of love.

We pray and hope for our church to be established as a community of love, similar to the early

church depicted in Acts 2:42-47 and 4:32-35.

How should we wait? We should wait with faith, steadfastness, and patience. Trusting in the Lord's perfect faithfulness, we must patiently watch for how the Lord will answer our prayers. It is crucial not to forget the importance of patience. The Lord will respond to our prayers in His perfect timing.

Praying, hoping, and waiting,

James Kim

(While yearning for the work of the Lord in adding those who are being saved)

“What does this mean?”

[Acts 2:1-13]

Are people in the world truly astonished by us Christians? If so, why are they astonished? On a typical day, Japanese scientists dug 50 meters underground and discovered a small piece of copper. After studying this piece for a long time, Japan announced that ancient Japanese people had a nationwide telecommunication network over 2,500 years ago. Naturally, the Chinese government was agitated. They urged their scientists to dig even deeper. At 100 meters, Chinese scientists found a tiny piece of glass, and soon after, ancient Chinese were declared to have a nationwide optical communication network 3,500 years ago. Korean scientists were furious at this report. They dug down to 200 meters but found nothing. Then, Korean scientists concluded that ancient Koreans had mobile phones 5,500 years ago (Internet). The reason people in the world are astonished by us Christians is like this parable. Just as the Korean scientists concluded that ancient Koreans had mobile phones 5,500 years ago without finding anything, people in the world do not discover the image of Jesus in our lives, yet we claim to be "little Christs." It seems that the era of astonishing the world by our conduct has passed. The world is no longer astonished by our wrongdoings. How should we live in this world? What aspects of our lives can bring positive astonishment to people in the world?

In Acts 2:12, the Scripture says, “And they all continued in amazement and great perplexity, saying to one another, ‘What does this mean?’” In the New Korean Standard Version, it is written as, "What does this mean?" I take this statement as the title. I reflect on why devout Jews who were present at the time said to each other, "What does this mean?" in Acts 2:5. Thinking about this, I contemplate three ways to astonish people in the world based on today's passage.

First, in order to astonish people in the world, we must make an effort to gather in one place.

Look at Acts 2:1 – “When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place.” Why

has it become increasingly difficult for all of us to gather at church? There may be several reasons:

(1) Busyness:

Just as it's said to be challenging for families to sit down together for a meal, parents find it hard to see their children when they're busy with their own tasks. The same goes for the church. Everyone is occupied with their own responsibilities, making it difficult to gather in one place.

(2) With busyness, there is a lack of mental space.

With little mental space, we live a life of being pushed around here and there.

(3) Being pushed around like this leads to a change in priorities.

Living in a fast-paced world, we end up chasing after various things in the busyness of life. In the end, the priorities shift and change to what is deemed most important.

Ultimately, living a church-centered life has become increasingly challenging. Personally, I find myself paying attention to Hebrews 10:25: "not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near." As the day of the Lord's return draws nearer, the habit of neglecting to meet together will likely become even more prevalent. Therefore, whether in the church or at home, saints should make an even greater effort to gather together.

Looking at Acts 2:1, the Bible tells us that about 120 disciples were all together in one place on the day of Pentecost. As we have already meditated, after the ascension of Jesus, about 120 disciples gathered together in Jerusalem. What did they do when they gathered together? They devoted themselves to prayer with one accord (1:14). This "prayer" is one of the central themes in the Book of Acts. The mention of prayer first appears in 1:14 and appears a total of 32 times, all the way to 28:8 (Yoo). This teaches us that the prayers of the apostles and the early church in the 1st century reflect the prayer life and teachings of Jesus recorded in the Gospel of Luke (Yoo). Seeing these 120 disciples gather together and pray, we need to think about how we should pray as our church strives to gather together.

(1) We must pray with one accord (1:14).

God's grace increases even more in a united gathering. True prayer cannot be achieved in a place filled with complaints and disputes (Park). Look at James 4:2-3: " You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. You are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures." We need to offer united prayers. When offering united prayers, we should hold on to the words of Matthew 18:19 in faith: "Again I say to you,

that if two of you agree on earth about anything that they may ask, it shall be done for them by My Father who is in heaven.” Praying with unity for God's will to be done is the highest form of cooperation between us and God.

(2) We must continually devote ourselves to prayer (Acts 1:14).

This means persevering and putting forth effort until the end (Park). There are many things that hinder us from being dedicated to prayer. One of them is busyness (Nowen). In the midst of this busyness, there's a significant risk that the priority of prayer won't become ingrained in our lives. While making an effort to gather together, we must devote ourselves entirely to prayer. I pray for the revival of individuals, families, and the church.

When we gather together and pray with one accord, people in the world will be amazed. The reason is that they will witness the power and results of our united prayer.

Second, to astonish people in the world, we must receive the fullness of the Holy Spirit.

Look at Acts 2:4 - " And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit was giving them utterance." After the ascension of Jesus, about 120 disciples gathered in the upper room (1:13) and devoted themselves to prayer at the feast of Pentecost, one of the three major Old Testament festivals (2:1). Suddenly, there was a sound from heaven like a rushing mighty wind that filled the whole house where the 120 disciples were sitting (v. 2). Here, the "rushing mighty wind" from heaven refers to the Holy Spirit. In the Old Testament, the word "ruach" means "wind," and this wind is a symbol of God showing His presence through the Holy Spirit (1 Sam. 22:16; Job 37:10; Ezek. 13:13) (Yoo). The phrase "filled the whole house" in Acts 2:2, compared to the statement in verse 4 "And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit," prompts us to consider why the author Luke expressed the fact that the 120 disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit as "filled the whole house." In the Old Testament, the tabernacle and the temple were filled with the glory cloud, which represented the Holy Spirit's presence. However, in the New Testament era, the author is implying that this new covenant people, whom the Holy Spirit indwells, have become the temple where the Holy Spirit dwells. It's not a building like the tabernacle or temple, but rather God's people who have become the temple where the Holy Spirit resides. In the end, these 120 disciples, by holding onto Jesus' promise in Acts 1:4 and 8 and waiting, experienced the fulfillment of the promise through the baptism of the Holy Spirit, receiving the fullness of the Holy Spirit. We often come across prayer topics in our gatherings that seek the fullness of the Holy Spirit. In light of this, I want to reconsider what this fullness of the Holy Spirit entails. 'Being filled with the Spirit means being filled with Christ. It means being filled with the living Christ and His words (Jn. 7:37-39). Being filled with the Spirit does not refer to a secret, mysterious experience, but to a life under the control of the Spirit' (Internet). So, how do we go about receiving this fullness of the Holy Spirit? It's through prayer (Acts 2:4; 4:31; 6:3, 5; 9:17). Pastor Andrew Murray said, 'Without the filling of the Spirit, it is absolutely impossible for a Christian or a church

to live and work as God desires. Therefore, we must seek the filling of the Spirit with our whole heart' (Murray). As we look at the accounts in the Book of Acts where they received the fullness of the Holy Spirit through prayer, we need to seek the fullness of the Holy Spirit not only individually, but also together in unity through concerted prayer. Furthermore, to receive the fullness of the Holy Spirit, we must meditate on God's Word day and night (Ps. 1:2). Being filled with the Spirit means being filled with the Word. In other words, being filled with the Spirit means being filled with God's Word to the extent that our whole personality is molded by it. Therefore, we need to meditate on God's Word, be governed by it, and be led by it. In doing so, we must also be cautious of things that hinder the fullness of the Spirit (Internet):

(1) We must be cautious of ignorance regarding God's Word.

When a Christian lacks knowledge of the Word, the fullness of the Holy Spirit is hindered. God's Word records truths about the relationship between Jesus Christ, God the Father, and the Holy Spirit. This deficiency in knowledge of the Word neglects a Christian's communion and weakens the power received from it.

(2) We must guard against pride and haughtiness of heart.

Pride leads to destruction, and a haughty spirit comes before a fall (Prov. 16:18). God detests pride. It is the sin of Satan (Isa. 14:12-14). God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble (1 Pet. 5:5).

(3) We should be cautious of fearing others.

Modern-day Christians often fear standing out from non-Christians and instead seek to conform to the behavior and standards of non-Christian society. As a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, and a people belonging to God (2:9), we should not be ashamed of the Gospel.

(4) We must be cautious of unconfessed sin.

Sin severs the lifeline of God's power (Ps. 66:18). If any form of unconfessed physical, moral, intellectual, spiritual sin remains hidden in the heart of a Christian, the fullness of the Holy Spirit cannot exist.

(5) We must be cautious of hearts tainted by worldly pleasures.

Being enamored with materialism and entangled in the customs of secular society hinders us. Loving things of the world and its pleasures contradicts loving the Lord supremely, seeking the righteousness of God's kingdom (Mt. 6:24-33).

Pastor Charles Finney stated, 'Just as it is a sin for sinners not to repent, so it is a sin for Christians not to be filled with the Spirit. Since Christians possess more light, the sin of not being filled with the Spirit is even greater than the sin of unrepentant sinners' (Finney). Knowing the gravity of the sin of not being filled with the Spirit, I and many others should be obedient to the Ephesians 5:18 command to be filled with the Spirit. In doing so, when people of the world witness the fruits of the Spirit through us, they will be astonished.

Third and last, to astonish people of the world, we must speak of God's mighty deeds.

Look at Acts 2:11, "Cretans and Arabs--we hear them in our own tongues speaking of the mighty deeds of God." On the day of Pentecost, as the 120 disciples prayed together, divided tongues as of fire appeared and rested on each one of them (v. 3). This signifies that when they were filled with the Holy Spirit, they began to speak in various dialects. These dialects were spoken in the languages of devout Jews who had gathered in Jerusalem from every nation under heaven (vv. 6, 8). Interestingly, the mention of Jerusalem (v. 5), Judah (v. 9), and Rome (v. 10) in Acts 2:5, 9, and 10 respectively, when connected with Acts 1:8, indicates that the disciples, filled with the Holy Spirit, proclaimed the Gospel to the regions representing the entire known world of that time (Park). This manner of disciples, each speaking in their own dialect while filled with the Holy Spirit, reminds us of the Tower of Babel incident in Genesis 11. Due to humanity's prideful sin, God dispersed the people by diversifying their languages. In Acts 2:1-13, on the day of Pentecost, when the disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit, they were enabled to speak in dialects understood by people from regions representing the entire world (Park). Ultimately, they were enabled to proclaim the mighty deeds of God (v. 11). What does this term "mighty deeds of God" refer to? While several commentaries remain somewhat reserved about this phrase, some suggest it refers to 'praising God' (Park, *The Bible Exposition*, *The Bible Knowledge*). According to Bavinck, during the creation of heaven and earth, angels praised (Job 38:7), and when Christ was born, a multitude of heavenly hosts praised (Lk. 2:13-14). Therefore, the Pentecost event, where miraculous dialects burst forth, is understood as an event of praise (Park). Ultimately, the Pentecost event is a reversal of the Tower of Babel incident. While at the Tower of Babel, people gathered together to praise themselves, the Pentecost event involved the 120 disciples praising God in dialects representing the nations of the world.

So how should we view speaking in tongues? When I was studying at Westminster Theological Seminary, I learned that tongues ceased during the apostolic era. Therefore, I believed that all tongues had ceased. However, as I prepared today's sermon and read Dr. Yoon-Seon Park's commentary, I realized that there is a need for more nuanced distinctions. That is, it is difficult to conclude that even the gift of tongues mentioned in 1 Corinthians 14 has ceased, although tongues during the apostolic era ceased. What is certain, however, is that tongues are being misused in our present age. In other words, there are false tongues. In some churches, it is believed that if one does not speak in tongues, they have not received salvation. Conversely, in many cases, the gift of tongues is boasted about, similar to the Corinthian saints. Although the Bible does not state that mature believers must speak in tongues, there may be cases where individuals mistakenly think that speaking in tongues makes them more spiritually mature than other congregants. In

Acts 2:4 and 11, we can find one or two principles regarding tongues during the apostolic era:

- (1) The first principle is that tongues should be spoken "as the Spirit was giving them utterance."

Look at Acts 2:4 - "And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit was giving them utterance." What does it mean to speak in tongues "as the Spirit was giving them utterance"? It essentially means speaking in tongues in accordance with "the word of God." This is because we cannot separate the Holy Spirit from the word of God.

- (2) The second principle is that speaking in tongues should be done for the purpose of praising God, that is, for the purpose of giving glory to God.

Look at 1 Corinthians 14:2 – “For one who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God;” Speaking in tongues directed towards God should edify the church (v. 26), and if there is no interpreter, the person should remain silent in the church and speak to himself and to God (v. 28). In a message I shared about two weeks ago, there was Isaiah 43:21, “The people whom I formed for Myself Will declare My praise.” We have been chosen by God to be His new covenant people in order to proclaim His praise. Therefore, we should praise the great God. Whether we praise in Korean, English, Spanish, or in the languages of various nations and peoples, we should give glory to God. By offering our praise to God, we can amaze the people of the world. The reason is that they too will witness the glory of God.

Let us all become Christians who astonish the world! As we gather together in prayer, filled with the Holy Spirit, let us praise the greatness of God, and in doing so, let us astound the world!

With the hope that we may become Spirit-filled Christians who astonish the people of the world,

James Kim

(Praying together with one heart, holding fast to the promise of the Word, and seeking God)

Before the Coming of the Great and Glorious Day of the Lord'

[Acts 2:14-21]

How should we interpret the frequent large-scale natural disasters that have occurred in the 21st century? Environmentalists attribute them to human exploitation and devastation of nature. In contrast, Christian fundamentalists say that this world is drawing near to the end prophesied in the Bible. Regarding this, we, as Gospel believers standing in the Reformed tradition, should understand that these two perspectives are not contradictory but should rather hear God's voice, which He intends to show to humanity through natural disasters, within the providence of God's nature and history, connecting them with each other. God's warning through natural disasters can be categorized into three points:

(1) It is a warning regarding personal sin.

God, through natural disasters, warns us that we should live righteous lives before Him in regard to nature and our neighbors.

(2) It is a warning regarding societal sin.

The disaster of Sodom and Gomorrah was an ethical crime, and yet God sent down brimstone and fire from heaven to destroy the city. Similarly, during the time when iniquity was rampant, God, through the flood, wiped out all the people of that era.

(3) It is a sign of the end of times.

In Matthew 24, Jesus speaks of the signs of the times when the Son of Man will come. These signs start with natural disasters. When the disciples ask about the signs of the end of the world, Jesus responds as follows: "Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There

will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of birth pains." (Matthew 24:7-8).

In Acts 2:20, which we read today, it says, "the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord." Here, considering the return of Jesus, let us think about how we should live before that day comes, and seek to hear God's voice.

First, "before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord," we should not get drunk.

Look at Ephesians 5:18a – "Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery." Today, in Acts 2:15, during the sermon of the Apostle Peter, it is stated that the 120 disciples who received the baptism of the Holy Spirit and were filled with the Holy Spirit did not get drunk. The reason Peter mentioned this while preaching in front of devout Jews from various nations (v. 5) and a large crowd (v. 6) gathered for the Pentecost when the Holy Spirit descended, was because among the gathered people, some were mocking and saying, "They have had too much wine" (v. 13). However, Peter provided evidence that at "the third hour," which in our time is 9 o'clock in the morning, during a cultural practice of that time, and specifically on the day of Pentecost, it was entirely impossible for the 120 disciples to be drunk.

I came across an internet news article with the title 'Korean-Americans, Drinking an Average of 12 Bottles of Soju per Person Last Year,' where it reported that the total sales of soju (including Jinro and Doosan brands) in California in 2004 were 2.73 million bottles, which is a whopping 20% increase from the previous year's 2.28 million bottles. This calculation was based on the sales figures of the leading brands Chamisul and San Soju, using data from the California Census of Korean-Americans (a total of 241,923 individuals), which averages out to about 12 bottles per person. In church, a common question that arises when discussing alcohol is, "Where in the Bible does it say not to drink?" Look at Luke 1:15: "For he will be great in the sight of the Lord; and he will drink no wine or liquor, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit while yet in his mother's womb." So, I wrote a piece centered around Luke 1:15, titled "Let's Not Drink Soju!" and posted it on our church website. I still remember being surprised when I was in Korea and saw a bottle of Chamisul Soju in the refrigerators of many young people's homes. Some houses even had hard liquor. However, as I spent more time in Korea and observed the drinking culture, it became clear how challenging it is to avoid drinking gatherings, and how difficult it is to say 'No' to a glass of alcohol. In this context, it's worrisome to see young Christians seamlessly assimilating into the culture of drinking like their non-Christian peers. My concern is this: are we not resolutely saying "No" to the proximity of alcohol in our lives, recognizing that indulging in it can dull our hearts? Of course, one might argue that it's okay to have a drink or two, as the Bible does not explicitly forbid it. However, it seems to me that there is a significant gap between alcohol and the pursuit of being filled with the Holy Spirit. In other words, in the life of a Christian seeking the fullness of the Holy Spirit, alcohol is of no help. Instead, it can be an obstacle. This is why Paul advises, "Be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, making the most of your time, because the days are evil" (Eph. 5:15-16). The wisdom of the world might

say, "Drink, and even get drunk to forget the stresses and worries of life," but God's wisdom advises us to be filled with the Holy Spirit and not with wine or liquor (Lk. 1:15). In my opinion, we need to be cautious. What do we need to be cautious of? We must be cautious not to let our hearts be dulled by getting drunk. "Be on guard, so that your hearts will not be weighted down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of life" (21:34). Even if, due to work or business, there may be situations where one feels compelled to drink, it's important to firmly say "No" to alcohol, being mindful of oneself and setting an example as a Christian in the world.

Second, "before the great and glorious day of the Lord arrives," we should not get drunk, but instead be filled with the Holy Spirit.

Look at Ephesians 5:18: "...but be filled with the Spirit." When we look at Acts 2:17-18, during Peter's sermon, it proclaims the fulfillment of the prophecy of the prophet Joel (Joel 2:28-32), which speaks of pouring out the Holy Spirit, not the disciples getting drunk and speaking in various languages, as the 120 disciples did. What Peter emphasized by using this prophecy from Joel was that the declaration of declaring the mighty works of God in the various languages of the nations witnessed by the large crowd (Acts 2:11) was not limited to the fulfillment of Joel's prophecy, but rather, it extended to "all people" (ve. 17), encompassing sons, daughters, young men, old men, male and female servants, and all social strata receiving the Holy Spirit through the Pentecostal outpouring. The phenomenon that occurs when people of all strata receive the pouring of the Holy Spirit is as Joel the prophet stated: 'they will prophesy,' 'see visions,' and 'dream dreams.' This is akin to the Old Testament prophets receiving God's word through dreams or visions and proclaiming it to God's people. In the Pentecostal outpouring on that day, God's people became prophets, testifying about the astounding work of God, namely the redemption event of Jesus Christ (Yoo).

We must all live a life exalting and testifying about Jesus by receiving the fullness of the Holy Spirit. In the book 'Those who are called do not get discouraged,' Pastor Han Heum Ok said the following: 'Perhaps you know you're a sinner but continue to commit certain sins. Then you need to receive the Holy Spirit. Is your heart willing, but your flesh is weak, making it difficult to obey? Then you need to receive the Holy Spirit. Is worship becoming tedious? Is there a lack of joy in praising and giving thanks? Then you need to receive the Holy Spirit. Is it difficult to listen to the Word? ... Is your mouth heavy, making prayer a struggle? Then you need to receive the Holy Spirit. Are you serving diligently but your spirit feels constricted and thirsty? Then you need to receive the Holy Spirit. ... Is evangelizing a challenge? Is there no burning compassion for dying souls? Then you need to receive the Holy Spirit. ... Regardless of the reason, you need to receive the Holy Spirit'(Ok). So, how do we go about receiving the fullness of the Holy Spirit?

(1) We must earnestly desire the fullness of the Holy Spirit.

Pastor Lloyd Jones emphasized that a sincere desire is necessary to receive the fullness of the Holy Spirit. This means being in a state conducive to receiving the fullness of the Spirit when

we have a genuine desire to be filled along with our consecration. This desire should include a willingness for God to judge and remove sin from our lives. It signifies a desire to separate oneself from the ways and evil systems of the world, seeking to die to sin and live for God in our daily lives. Additionally, it implies a desire to bear the fruit of the Spirit in our lives. The fullness of the Spirit, brought about by the Holy Spirit, is truly given to those who thirst for it, to those who are prepared to pay the price, and to those who are willing to forsake all else. Jesus also said, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled" (Mt. 5:6). One crucial point to note is that the genuine desire to be controlled by the Spirit can only be achieved through the richness of prayer and the Word. The reason it's called the fullness of the Spirit is precisely for this reason. A desire lacking in the follow-through of prayer and the Word is merely a superficial and intellectual aspiration.

(2) We must confess our sins.

Stott mentioned that when the grace of the Holy Spirit's fullness is lost, it can be restored through repentance and prayer. He noted that the Holy Spirit is grieved by sin (Eph. 4:30) and ceases to fill the sinner. Repentance was stated as the only way to be filled again. Leman Strauss emphasized the need for repentance, stating that those who are rude, unkind, ungracious, unforgiving, and unthankful are not filled with the Spirit. He asserted that a believer who repents of their sins, puts on the garments of holiness, and lives truthfully is sensitive to the Spirit and is therefore a Spirit-filled believer. The Holy Spirit cannot rule over a sinner who does not hear the Spirit's reprimand within them and does not abandon their sin. It can be understood in this sense that those who resist the Spirit will never receive forgiveness.

(3) We must seek.

If we are to receive the fullness of the Holy Spirit, we must seek it. The extent to which the Spirit dwells in us depends on whether we seek Him in faith. This is both our duty and God's way. When we earnestly seek the Spirit and are filled with Him, we come to know that God is the One who sent Him for us to seek. D.L. Moody also stated that one should examine oneself, confess all known sin and shortcomings, yield oneself wholly to God in obedience to the leading of the Spirit, and then seek the fullness of the Spirit according to Luke 11:13 and said that after Pentecost, Christians sought the Holy Spirit alone.

(4) We must walk in faith.

All blessings in Christianity come to us through faith. By believing in Christ as our Savior, we are justified from sin, and by believing in Him as our Savior, we are sanctified from the power of sin. Likewise, the fuller indwelling of the Spirit of holiness in us is received not through works, but through faith. While it is true that the Spirit helps us in our weakness and prays for us, it is

through faith that we actively seek the Spirit's presence and power in our lives. Faith is the means by which we possess the Spirit and Christ. Rene Pache explained that the first step in being filled with the Spirit is having faith. This involves (a) believing that we must first believe in Jesus Christ and look to Him for everything, (b) believing that Christ desires to dwell within us through the Spirit, and (c) believing that Christ desires to fill us with the Spirit. (d) We must obey God's Word. Many people fail to receive the fullness of the Spirit due to this condition, while many others experience the fullness of the Spirit through this condition more than any other. Torrey emphasizes obedience as one of the steps in receiving the fullness of the Spirit. He states that when he speaks of obedience, he is referring not only to receiving Jesus as our Savior but also to obeying in everything, doing what God commands. The heart of obedience lies in the will. Surrendering our will is considered one of the most fundamental conditions for receiving the fullness of the Spirit. Ultimately, the fullness of the Spirit, which signifies being under the Spirit's control, is experienced when we obey the Spirit's promptings and leadings, and the results manifest themselves. Waiting for the Spirit to do everything without a willing heart and obedient will is foolish, as it fails to recognize the Spirit's personality. Only personal obedience allows for the fullness of the Spirit. Leman Strauss stated, 'An empty heart is the first condition for the fullness of the Spirit, and when we yield ourselves completely in submission to God's Word, God will fill us with His Spirit.' The obedience of the disciples who obeyed Jesus' final commandment to stay in Jerusalem and wait for the Spirit resulted in them being filled with the Spirit, demonstrating that obedience to Christ's commands is the key to the fullness of the Spirit (Internet).

Third, "before the great and glorious day of the Lord arrives," we must call upon the name of the Lord.

Look at Acts 2:21 today: "And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." In today's passage, Acts 2:19-20, during Peter's sermon, Joel's prophecy about the signs of the last days is mentioned. "Blood, fire, and billows of smoke" refer to many wars, and "the sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood" signify various expressions of God's wrath, indicating that there will be disasters. The purpose of these many wars and disasters is to lead people back to the gospel of Christ (Park). Are you familiar with the movie "The Day after Tomorrow" (released worldwide in May 2004)? It is a Hollywood film depicting a catastrophe in which global warming causes the polar ice caps to melt at an alarming rate, leading to a new ice age covering the entire Northern Hemisphere. This results in most of the Northern Hemisphere becoming uninhabitable. Americans, in a bid to survive, migrate en masse to Mexico, facing a tragic situation due to the closure of Mexico's borders. According to Reuters on May 26, 2004, the Arctic Climate Impact Assessment (ACIA), a gathering of scientists from eight countries near the Arctic studying Arctic climate, released a massive 1,800-page report stating, 'Arctic ice caps are melting at an alarming rate, and the temperature rise in the Arctic is two to three times higher than the global average, raising concerns of a major disaster.' It has been confirmed that Arctic ice caps have decreased by a third over the past 30 years. If this

trend continues, it is expected that all Arctic ice caps will disappear before the end of the 21st century. Global warming continues unabated. The increase in the size and frequency of hurricanes, such as Katrina, which turned the southern United States into a wasteland, is attributed to global warming. The evidence of warming is more pronounced in the Arctic" (Internet).

The great and glorious day of the Lord will come. Along with the judgment of the Lord, there will be the salvation of the Lord. For those who do not believe in Jesus, it will be a day of judgment, but for us who believe and receive Jesus as our Lord and Savior, it will be a day of salvation. "And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved" (v. 21).

God gives warnings and allows for delays. In the history of humanity, the flood was an irreversible disaster, but God gave a sufficient warning and grace period. God first warned Noah, who found favor in His eyes (Gen. 6:12). Just as in the case of Noah, God instructed him to build an ark in preparation for the flood and allowed for a sufficient period to carry out this task. This period was an opportunity for Noah to prepare for the salvation from the flood, and it was also a sufficient time for the people of that time to turn back to God from their sins. By faith, Noah, warned of things not yet seen, in godly fear, built an ark to save his household (Heb. 11:7). However, the rebellious humanity of that time, while God was patient and waited for a long time, perished due to disobedience (1 Pet. 3:20) (Internet). Therefore, before the great and glorious day of the Lord arrives, we must not indulge in drunkenness. Furthermore, before the great and glorious day of the Lord arrives, we must receive the fullness of the Holy Spirit instead of becoming drunk. And before the great and glorious day of the Lord arrives, we must call upon the name of the Lord. Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

Anticipating and waiting for the great and glorious day of the Lord,

James Kim

(Praying for the reception of the fullness of the Holy Spirit without indulging in drunkenness)

“Jesus, whom you crucified”

[Acts 2:22-36]

In the creation myth of the ancient Korean kingdom, there is a verse in an inserted song that goes like this: ‘Thick and thick, I’ll give you my old house, build a new one.’ Do you know what this means? There is a frog with a venomous bite called the ‘Om toad.’ When this Om toad lays eggs, it used to be afraid of snakes and avoided them. But after laying eggs, it goes to find a venomous snake and fights with all its might, spewing venom. Eventually, it gets eaten by the snake, but in the process, it leaves behind its venom. This venom, left behind in the belly of the snake, eventually kills the snake as well. Moreover, the eggs in the belly of the mother Om toad are born as healthy baby Om toad, fed by both the mother Om toad and the snake. In the phrase ‘Thick and thick, I’ll give you my old house, build a new one,’ the old house refers to the mother who sacrifices her body for her children, and the new house symbolizes the children (Internet). There is a spiritual lesson to be learned from this allegory. In a way, the "old house" can be likened to Jesus. Jesus, who sacrificed His body on the cross for us, through the crucifixion, has given us a "new house" - a new life and eternal life. Even if we betray Jesus time and again, Jesus, seated at the right hand of God, continues to intercede for us even today.

Today's passage, Acts 2:22-36, is the second part of the sermon delivered by the apostle Peter, who was filled with the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. He addressed to the fellow Jews and all of people who dwelled in Jerusalem (v. 14) in this portion. In the first part (2:14-21), he emphasized that the 120 disciples were not drunk, but had received the fulfillment of Joel's prophetic words about the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and being filled with the Spirit. He exhorts them to call upon the name of the Lord to receive salvation before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord (vv. 20-21). Following this, in today's passage, Peter preaches about Jesus, who was crucified, resurrected, ascended, and promised by God the Father to send the Holy Spirit. He declared that the Holy Spirit, whom to the fellow Jews and all of people who dwelled in Jerusalem (v. 14) saw and heard, was poured out on the 120 disciples (v. 33). In verse 36, he mentioned "this Jesus whom you

crucified." I will contemplate on four aspects of Jesus, which are central to today's passage, and seek to hear God's voice through Peter's preaching.

First, the Jesus whom Peter preached about is the one who was "handed over" (v. 23).

Look at Acts 2:23a – “This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge” Here, "handed over" refers to the crucifixion of Jesus. So, how was Jesus handed over? This signifies that from eternity past (2 Tim. 1:9), God had already ordained and planned Jesus' substitutionary death (MacArthur). Here, we must bear in mind two facts:

- (1) The first fact is that Jesus' death on the cross as the atonement for our sins was not a random event, but it was within God's preordained plan (Park).

Look at Luke 22:22a - "For the Son of Man goes as it has been determined..." Jesus' substitutionary death on the cross was determined from the beginning.

- (2) Another fact is that if God the Father had not delivered Jesus to the Jews and lawless men, they could never have crucified Him.

Jesus Himself speaks of this fact in John 19:10-11: "So Pilate said to him, 'You will not speak to me? Do you not know that I have authority to release you and authority to crucify you?' Jesus answered him, 'You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given you from above....'" So, why did God deliver Jesus to the Jews and lawless men? Paul explains it this way: "who was delivered up for our trespasses..." (Rom. 4:25). In order to atone for our sins, God the Father, who did not spare His own Son, delivered Him up for us all. If God the Father gave us His most precious Son, what will He not graciously give us? (8:32). What will He not give us, who gave us Jesus, who is the highest?

Second, the Jesus preached by Peter is the Jesus who could not be held by death.

Look at Acts 2:24 - " But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him." In other words, the Jesus who was handed over to the cross was raised again by God the Father (resurrection). Witnessing this fact, Peter preached that Jesus had risen from death. Look at verse 32: " God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact." He also provides another testimony to Jesus' resurrection by referring to David in the Old Testament: " But he was a prophet and knew that God had promised him on oath that he would place one of his descendants on his throne. Seeing what was ahead, he spoke of the resurrection

of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to the grave, nor did his body see decay" (vv. 30-31). Here, Peter emphasizes that David, in the core of the citation from Psalms 16:10, received an oath from God prophesying that the Christ, Jesus, would come from his descendants (2 Sam. 7:12). David, who knew (Acts 2:30) and also "seeing what was ahead" (v. 31), pointed out that the Christ would be crucified, rise from the dead, and be enthroned as king. Professor Sang-seop Yoo stated, 'The resurrection of the Messiah was absolutely necessary in order to enthrone the Messiah on David's throne. God decisively accomplished this through the resurrection of Jesus' (Yoo).

The resurrection of this Jesus gives our physical bodies a dwelling in hope. Look at Acts 2:26 - "Therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced; my body also will live in hope." Due to the resurrection of Jesus, our bodies now dwell in hope. Why does our flesh dwell in hope? Look at Acts 2:27 - "because you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay." However, without the resurrection of Jesus, our bodies would have no hope. Without the resurrection of Jesus, what kind of people would we be? Look at 1 Corinthians 15:19 - "If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied." However, we are people with hope. Through the resurrection of Jesus, our physical bodies have hope. The reason is that the resurrection of Jesus is precisely our resurrection. Look at 1 Corinthians 15:42-44: "So is it with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body." Also, look at Philippians 3:20-21: "But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself."

Third, the Jesus preached by Peter is the way of life.

Look at Acts 2:28 - " You have made known to me the paths of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence." What does "the paths of life" mean here? It refers to the salvation given to us through the resurrection of Jesus. This salvation encompasses both the spiritual and physical aspects (v. 27, Park). In the midst of being filled with the Holy Spirit, Peter quotes Psalms 16:8-11, proclaiming that through the death (Acts 2:23) and resurrection (v. 24) of Jesus, there is salvation in calling on His name for both the spiritual and physical aspects (v. 21). However, too many people seem to be walking the path of destruction rather than the path of life. Even within the church, there are cases where people refuse to hear and believe the gospel of Jesus Christ, choosing the path of destruction. This cannot be anything but tragic. Those who refuse to believe in Jesus even at the doorstep of death may consider death as the end. However, for the righteous, death is not the end, but rather the beginning of eternal life in heaven (Park). Instead of being the end, death signifies the commencement of life in the eternal kingdom. David was well aware of this fact. His confession in Psalms 16:10 (quoted in Acts 2:27) indicates that he foresaw the Messiah's resurrection from death. Following David's example, Peter emphasizes in his sermon that, just as David rejoiced in anticipation of this event, we too should be filled

with gladness. The reason being that entering the eternal kingdom and standing before God will truly be the ultimate joy. This is why David earnestly prayed to God in Psalms 27:4, "One thing I ask from the Lord, this only do I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze on the beauty of the Lord and to seek him in his temple."

Fourth and last, the Jesus preached by Peter is the exalted Jesus.

Look at Acts 2:33 - " Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear." Here, the phrase "exalted to the right hand of God" means that God lifted Jesus up to heaven and seated Him at His right hand. In other words, God exalted Jesus to His throne, fulfilling the promise made to David (Yoo). This event of being enthroned at the right hand of God signifies that God officially appointed Jesus as the ruler in heavenly authority. This first act of rulership was carried out by Jesus, who received the Holy Spirit from the Father and poured it out on the 120 disciples on the day of Pentecost (v. 33). Professor Sang-seop Yoo stated: '... the Pentecost event is a historically significant event that demonstrates that Jesus began to rule legitimately from the right hand of God. Apostle Peter urged all the house of Israel to clearly know this fact (Acts 2:36). Now, the Pentecost event that took place on Pentecost day enables us to see the invisible fact that Jesus received His enthronement as Lord and Christ in heaven' (Yoo).

Who nailed Jesus to the cross? Was it the Roman soldiers? The high priests? Or was it the Jews? If we look at the hymn "Jesus Shed His Blood for Me", it says that "that mindless mob" crucified Jesus on the cross. When I sing this part, I often change it to 'mindless James' crucified Jesus on the cross. The basis for this is Hebrews 6:6: " if they fall away, to be brought back to repentance, because to their loss they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace." Of course, it is talking about apostasy, but are we not living lives that "crucify" Jesus all over again by betraying Him repeatedly? Our God gave Jesus to be crucified. However, Jesus could not be bound by death. The resurrected Jesus, who emerged from death, showed us the way of life. God exalted this Jesus. Through faith in this Jesus, I hope and pray that both you and I can obtain and enjoy eternal life.

In Christ's gospel and sharing the path of life by God's grace,

James Kim

(By God's grace, while walking the path of life)

For a True Revival

[Acts 2:37]

Last week, I listened to an interview with Pastor Kyung Won Kim on the Korean Gospel Broadcasting radio, who will be coming to our church revival meeting to preach. In the interview, when the host asked Pastor Kim how we should prepare for the revival meeting, his answer was that we should prepare with a heart of repentance. When I heard this answer, I couldn't agree more. I thanked God for it, because I believe God has been preparing not only my heart but also the hearts of our church members for the upcoming revival meeting.

Today, during this Wednesday prayer meeting, I want to further prepare for the upcoming revival meeting. I want to listen to the word of repentance to ready our hearts. And I want to earnestly seek a heart of repentance before God. I want to offer this supplication based on Acts 2:37, saying, "When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?"

We need to pray together to God, asking that we are cut to the heart by the words of our Lord.

We are living in a spiritually insensitive era. We increasingly witness hardening of hearts in our lives. We are losing reverence for the Word of God. We are facing an era that even shies away from efforts to obey His word. We must heed the words in Hebrews 4:7: "... Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts." We should emulate the example of David. After he counted the number of the soldiers under his command, he was conscience-stricken (2 Sam. 24:10). In other words, he felt a prick in his conscience. Afterwards, he repented for his sin, saying, "... I have sinned greatly in what I have done. Now, O LORD, I beg you, take away the guilt of your servant. I have done a very foolish thing" (v. 10). Therefore, I pray for the appropriate fruits of repentance. Look at Acts 26:20 and Matthew 3:8: "... they should repent and turn to God and prove their repentance by their deeds ..." (Acts 26:20), "Produce fruit in keeping with repentance" (Mt. 3:8).

In true repentance, there is reconciliation, restoration, reformation, and revival among us. I fervently pray for the outpouring of such amazing revival in our church, brought forth by God.

While praying for God to bring about the work of true revival through repentance,

James Kim

(Dreaming of reconciliation, restoration, reformation, and revival through repentance)

“Be saved from this perverse generation”

[Acts 2:37-41]

Dallas Willard states in his book "Renovation of the Heart" that efforts to change behavior without inner transformation are in vain. However, it seems that we are more focused on changing behavior rather than inner transformation. For example, nowadays many churches are putting more emphasis on hardware rather than software. In an internet article titled "The 'Plate' Has Shifted" on the Church Communication Research Institute website (July 11, 2002), Eui-yong Lee talks about ten ways the world is changing. The third change is described as follows: 'The third change is a shift from hardware to software. If we consider the piano as hardware, then the sheet music can be considered as software. Until now, it was important how big and high-performing the piano was. But now, how to play the piano, similar to the sheet music, has become more important. An era has come where the invisible is more important than the visible. Making computer software products doesn't require a large office space or expensive materials. All you need are a few computers and a space for brilliant minds to work. Christianity is originally a religion of software, not hardware. However, these days, churches seem to be more interested in hardware. Teaching directed towards people's souls and the hidden Christian cultural elements within it are more important than church buildings, interior decorations, or real estate.' If we are to focus on the hidden Christian cultural elements, we cannot help but consider how much we are struggling and striving towards God for inner change, which is not immediately visible. Therefore, we should reflect on whether we are bearing the fruit of behavioral change stemming from inner transformation. Are we truly producing such fruit? Or are we only experiencing the fruit of behavioral change without true inner transformation? Dallas Willard said this about inner transformation: 'The gentle but strict process of inner transformation begins and continues through the agency of God's grace dwelling in our souls and in the surrounding world (Willard). Have we, as we look back on this year, at least experienced inner transformation through the agency of God's grace in our worship?'

The Bible refers to the generation we are living in as a "perverse generation" (Lk. 9:41; Acts 2:40). The term "perverse" is the opposite of "straight" and means "crooked, twisted, distorted" in contrast to "straight" or "direct." In other words, the era we are living in is described as a distorted era. We are living in a time where twisted hearts, thoughts, and behaviors prevail. Even within the church, we see distorted words and actions stemming from twisted hearts and thoughts. For example, in the news I heard on Friday, it seemed that a survey was conducted in Korea. Many of the respondents stated that pursuing national interests is more important than truth. The criteria or standards for decision-making are distorted. Judgments are made based on what serves one's own or the nation's interests. In the era of postmodernism, which emphasizes individuality, people fall into relativism, choosing and acting according to what they personally believe to be right. However, as Peter says, we need to be saved from this perverse generation (Acts 2:40). How do we go about doing that? Let's contemplate a couple of things.

Firstly, to receive salvation in this perverse generation, we must respond to the Word.

It seems that we as Christians are confused about what to respond to and what to remain unresponsive to. In other words, it appears that our 'spiritual response/non-response system' is not functioning properly. For instance, while we should be responding to God's Word as we live in this world, we often show a sensitive response to worldly concerns and material matters rather than responding to His Word.

In an internet article titled "Identification of Cells Involved in Immune Non-Response in the Digestive System" by Professor Kang Chang-yul at Seoul National University, it is mentioned that our bodies have states called "immune response" and "immunological tolerance." The immune response refers to the state in which immune cells attack foreign substances entering the body to remove harmful materials. On the other hand, immunological tolerance refers to the state in which immune cells do not trigger unnecessary immune responses to harmless substances. Immunological tolerance refers to the state where immune cells do not trigger immune responses to antigens coming from outside or originating from one's own body (autoantigens).

In a certain sense, it can be thought that within us, there should be a 'spiritual immune response' actively attacking harmful thoughts and temptations entering our hearts from the world. However, we might find ourselves in a state of "spiritual immunological tolerance," where our faith, acting as immune cells, fails to attack. We need to clearly distinguish what we should respond to and what we should remain unresponsive to, and put it into practice.

In Acts 2:37, which we saw today, around 3,000 people responded to Peter's sermon. When the word of God was proclaimed to them, they showed a response to God's Word. Let's look at Acts 2:37: "When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles,

'Brothers, what shall we do?'" How did they respond to God's Word? We can consider three aspects:

(1) We must receive the Word of God.

Look at Acts 2:41a - "Those who accepted his message ..." We must open our hearts wide and humbly receive God's Word. We should never let God's Word be scattered along the wayside. In other words, we should not allow it to be heard but not understood, allowing the evil one to come and snatch it away. Nor should it fall on rocky ground, where it is received with joy but lacks roots, so it withers when trouble or persecution arises due to the word. It should not be among thorns, where it is heard but choked by the worries of this world and the deceitfulness of wealth. Instead, God's Word should be sown in "good soil." This means we must hear and understand God's Word and bear fruit (Mt. 13:19-22).

(2) We must hear God's Word and be cut to the heart.

God's Word is living and active, sharper than any double-edged sword. It penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart (Heb. 4:12). Therefore, we must experience a conscience-stricken response through God's Word. Without this response, our hearts will inevitably grow harder. We need to diligently cultivate the field of our hearts, breaking down the hardened areas like plowing a field. Just as with a hoe, the hardened parts of our hearts must be broken and shattered through God's Word.

(3) We must ask, "What shall we do?"

Even if we receive God's Word with a conscience-stricken response, if we do not make a decision to act upon it, we cannot truly say we have fully responded to God's Word. After hearing Peter's proclamation of God's Word filled with the Holy Spirit, those who accepted his message (Acts 2:41) were cut to the heart and asked Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" (v. 37). They did not merely ignore or pass over the pricking of their hearts (conscience) caused by the spoken Word. They refused to return to their previous state after the sermon ended. How precious was their response to the proclaimed Word! Do we think there are people nowadays who, after hearing the Word preached by pastors, will ask the pastor, "What should I do?" Truly seeking change, they are not just ones who cry out for change with their lips, but they actively and earnestly strive for transformation in response to God's proclaimed Word.

We must become genuine seekers of transformation. To do so, we must respond to the proclaimed Word of God. We must humbly receive God's Word, and not reject it when it pricks our hearts and consciences. Furthermore, in that pricking, we must ask, "What shall I do?" and find the

answer. Then, by obeying that answer, transformation will occur in our lives.

Second and last, in order to receive salvation in this perverse generation, we must obtain forgiveness of sins.

Look at Acts 2:38: "Peter replied, 'Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.'" During the Pentecost when Peter proclaimed the Gospel of Christ before the gathered crowd, those whose spirits were pricked and received the message asked together, "What shall we do?" to Peter and the other apostles. At that moment, Peter responded to them, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins" (v. 38). What does it mean to receive forgiveness of sins? It means to repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Here, "repentance" refers to a "change of heart" (Park), and Peter exhorted the gathered crowd, who were responding to God's Word, to first repent of the sin of crucifying Jesus on the cross (v. 36), no longer hating Him and denying Him as their Lord and Christ, but instead, to receive Him in their hearts as their Lord and Christ. What is repentance? It is a change of heart, not just a change of thought. True repentance is a change of heart that leads to a change in our actions. However, it is important to remember that actions can change without a true change of heart. Essentially, repentance is taking an opposing stance against our 'old self' and instead, aligning ourselves with God (Interne). We must make a decision. We must decide whether to follow God or continue to insist on our old ways. We can no longer waver. This decision leads to an essential change of heart in our relationship with God. Therefore, four elements serve as evidence of true repentance: a change of mind, a change of emotions, a change of will, and a change of behavior. Furthermore, the command to receive forgiveness of sins is coupled with the command to 'be baptized.' What does "baptism" mean? In the denomination constitution to which our church belongs (PCA The Book of Church Order Chapter 56), it is written as follows: "Baptism is the sign and seal of God's covenant of grace, and it signifies our engrafting into Christ, of regeneration, of remission of sins, and of our giving up unto God, through Jesus Christ, to walk in newness of life." We must be baptized after repenting of our sins. If we have already been baptized after repenting our sins, we must seek a change of heart. In other words, we must pursue a change of mind, emotions, will, and behavior. Therefore, we must receive salvation in this perverse generation.

Dallas Willard says in his book "Renovation of the Heart": 'If, in salvation and transformation, we properly receive the grace of God through right direction and steady action, our inner being will inevitably be transformed to resemble Christ more and more. The outer life, especially the change in behavior, naturally follows' (Willard). One of the steady actions we must take is to respond faithfully to the Word of God. We must humbly receive the proclaimed Word of God, allowing it to prick our hearts and consciences. Then, it is our responsibility to lead this pricking towards a transformation, starting from a change of heart and extending to a change in behavior. Another steady action we must take is to repent. By examining ourselves in light of the Word of God, we should repent of the sins that are revealed, exerting effort to bring about a change in our intellect, emotions, will, and actions along

with the change of heart.

For those who desire to receive salvation in this perverse generation,

James Kim

(Praying for the forgiveness of sins through true repentance, in the midst of receiving the pricking from the Word of God)

The Church Added by the Lord

[Acts 2:42-47]

Pastor Rick Warren (Saddleback Church) said: 'The most important issue of the 21st century church is not church growth, but church health. The problem is not whether the number of the church membership is large or small, but its health.' And he proposed five ways to measure church growth: The church needs ... (1) To grow warmer through fellowship, (2) To deepen through discipleship, (3) To become stronger through worship, (4) To be widen through ministry, and (5) To grow bigger through evangelism. He said that rather than the number of church members, the percentage of church members who are mobilized for ministry and mission is a more accurate measure of the health of the church. Is our church truly healthy? Is it becoming stronger through worship, deepening through education, expanding through ministry, growing warmer through fellowship, and experiencing significant growth through evangelism? Today, focusing on the passage Acts 2:42-47, I earnestly hope and pray that our church not only be a healthy one, but, in biblical terms, the church added by the Lord. Let's consider what it means for the church added by the Lord.

First, the church added by the Lord is devoted to four key things.

Look at Acts 2:42 - "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer." On the day of Pentecost, filled with the Holy Spirit, after hearing Peter's proclamation of the Gospel of Christ, around 3,000 people repented of their sins, received baptism, and became disciples of Jesus. After embracing Jesus as their Savior and Lord, they were baptized. Following this, they were wholeheartedly devoted to four key things:

(1) They devoted themselves entirely to learning God's Word.

Look at Acts 2:42 - "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching ..." Since the believers were relatively new to receiving Jesus, they couldn't help but exert great effort in learning from

the apostles' teachings in order to foster their faith growth. The author of Acts, Luke, portrays the ideal relationship between Jesus and His disciples as those who sit at His feet to learn God's Word (Lk. 2:46; 8:35; 10:39) (Yoo). As we pursue the ideal relationship with Jesus, we must faithfully and diligently learn God's Word. A professor from Chongshin Theological Seminary once posed this question in an exam: 'What is the most necessary thing for saints?' The answer: God's Word. While each saint may have different things they consider most necessary, from a spiritual perspective, what we all most need is God's Word.

(2) They entirely devoted themselves to fellowship.

Look at Acts 2:42 - "...devoted themselves to the fellowship ..." I have doubts whether the term "fellowship" commonly used by us Christians today truly aligns with the fellowship referred to in the Bible. The Greek term for fellowship is "koinonia," which carries two meanings. First, it means to share together, and second, to give what one possesses to others (contribution) (Internet). The fellowship we are discussing among the saints is not merely sharing a meal, engaging in enjoyable conversations, playing games, or talking about various topics from the past week. Those are activities we engaged in even before our regeneration. There were new forms of sharing. It was about sharing what we have learned from God's Word, praying together, interceding for fellow saints in difficulty, and sharing our possessions with one another. Thus, Christian fellowship is fundamentally different from the convivial interactions that worldly people often engage in (Internet). So, what does the fellowship referred to in today's scripture mean? The original Greek uses the definite article, so it's saying "the fellowship." What does this refer to? It signifies "the fellowship of the Holy Spirit" (Yoo). In the midst of the Pentecostal outpouring, the 3,000 newly added saints were participating in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, the early Jerusalem church wasn't just a human community uniting for mutual harmony and unity, but rather a community of the Holy Spirit centered on the Spirit Himself (Yoo).

(3) They entirely devoted themselves to the breaking of bread.

Look at Acts 2:42, - "... the breaking of bread" Scholars mainly interpret this passage as referring to the Lord's Supper. In other words, they entirely devoted themselves to the Lord's Supper. So, what should we do? Starting next year, we plan to increase the frequency of the Lord's Supper from four times to six times a year. We want to humbly receive the bread and wine, symbols of Jesus' body and blood, in faith, desiring to partake in the grace of our Lord.

(4) They entirely devoted themselves to prayer.

Look at Acts 2:42, "...devoted themselves to prayer" The word "prayer" is in plural form. It means that the early Jerusalem church was entirely devoted to various forms of prayer. Another

noteworthy fact is that there's a definite article before the word "prayer." So, the author Luke is saying "the prayer." This indicates that the early Jerusalem church was modeled after the 120-word prayer (1:14). The fact that this practice continued even as the Jerusalem church expanded to 3,000 members is a great challenge to us. In the early Jerusalem church, numerical growth of members directly correlated with an increase in people devoted to prayer. This shows us that prayer is not just a means for church growth; it's a fundamental aspect that the church must continually possess (Yoo).

When the early Jerusalem church entirely devoted themselves to the Word, fellowship, breaking of bread, and prayer, what was the result? Look at Acts 2:43 - "Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles." In one word, the church had spiritual authority among unbelievers in society (Park). How far has the spiritual authority of today's church declined among even unbelievers in society? The church, as a community, is losing its authority and being ignored and scorned, not just by unbelievers but even by believers. The cause is that we Christians are not exerting the effort in what we should be doing. We need to entirely devote ourselves to the Word, true fellowship, the Lord's Supper, and prayer. Only then can the church establish spiritual authority in the presence of unbelievers.

Second and last, the church added by the Lord is a church where saints have fellowship.

When we look at the confession of faith that we make every Sunday during worship, we see that we affirm this: "in the Holy Spirit, the holy Church, the communion of saints" So, what kind of church are we confessing to have where saints have fellowship every Sunday? Based on Acts 2:44-45, we can consider two aspects:

- (1) A church where saints have fellowship is a church where all the believers were together and had everything in common.

Look at Acts 2:44-45: "All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need." The Jerusalem church lived a life of sharing their possessions with one another. This doesn't mean that each believer sold all their property and contributed it to the church for distribution to everyone. It signifies that the saints shared their possessions with one another, and when occasional financial needs arose among the saints, those who had the means sold their real estate or property to address these needs (Yoo). It wasn't that everyone in the early Jerusalem church had excess, and it also wasn't that everyone donated everything they had. Some individuals made contributions, and other saints took on the responsibility of meeting the financial needs of their fellow believers.

- (2) A church where saints have fellowship is a church that diligently gathers with one accord.

Look at Acts 2:46 - "Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts." In modern terms, this means that the saints gathered with one accord in the church or in homes. This is what it truly means for saints to have fellowship with one another. So, what did the early church saints do when they gathered, whether in the temple or homes?

(a) They gathered in various homes, sharing meals with joy and sincerity.

Look at Acts 2:46, "...they broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts." In the early Jerusalem church, they took turns going from house to house, sharing meals along with the Lord's Supper. They did this with joy and sincerity (Yoo). And they shared these meals with joy and sincere hearts. This is why we have district gatherings. In the effort to gather with one accord, we share in God-centered meals, recognizing that we are one family in the Lord. This allows us to practice Christ's love for one another. Therefore, we should recognize ourselves as one community.

(b) They praised God.

Look at Acts 2:47, "praising God..." After gathering together for a God-centered communal meal, the believers offered praise together to God. It couldn't have been a small group meeting for glorifying God.

The inaugural Jerusalem church, when they were devoted to the four practices, received favor with all the people (v. 47). In verse 36, Peter preached, saying, "Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified" The response to the message was that 3,000 disciples repented and were baptized. They wholeheartedly engaged in the practices of God's Word, fellowship, communion, and prayer, and there was a sense of fellowship among them. As a result, they gained favor with all the people. In other words, the whole house of Israel who had crucified Jesus now looked with favor upon the community of Jesus' believing disciples. During this time, the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved (v. 47). I earnestly hope and pray that our church, which serves as a body of Christ, diligently engages in the practices of God's Word, fellowship, communion, and prayer, and seeks fellowship among the saints, becoming a church where the Lord adds to our numbers daily those who are being saved.

In service to the Victory Elders Church established by the Lord,

James Kim

(Praying for the work that the Lord adds to our church)

‘What I have I give you’

[Acts 3:1-10]

The article titled ‘True Gospel Evangelism [Sitting at the Lord's Feet Every Day]’ (Christigreen) questions what the best method of gospel evangelism is, one that can be consistently effective across all eras. It raises queries such as ‘Is it through reform movements? Short-term or long-term missions? Turning the globe into a mission field? Is it through life as a form of evangelism? Is it through radio or television?’ It acknowledges that God has used all of these methods, sometimes employing quite dramatic means, to proclaim the gospel to the world. However, the Bible does not particularly emphasize any of these methods as crucial in spreading the message that Jesus is the Son of God. It goes on to suggest that the most powerful method of evangelism, one that can be consistently effective across all eras, is when the church comes together with one heart and one mind to form a community of love. The article cites Christigreen, who states: ‘There are not many evangelism training booklets and lectures that mention united churches. However, Jesus prayed for believers to be united. This is because true fellowship, characterized by genuine love for one another, is unfamiliar to people in this world. Such unity will draw people's attention. Have you experienced a gathering where the believers were of one heart and one soul? If so, you will know that such a gathering acts like a magnet, drawing those around you. Conversely, no one is attracted to a quarreling church. Chronic disputes are a clear indication that Jesus is not acknowledged as Lord there. The pure unity of saints is the best tool God has given us for gospel evangelism (Internet).

In Acts 2:42-47, we have already meditated on the church that “the Lord adds to their number daily those who were being saved” (v. 47). We learned that this church was one that found favor with all the people (v. 47). In other words, this early church was attractive even to the people of the world. What was the characteristic of this early church that drew the hearts of all the people? It was the way the saints came together with one heart and one mind, sharing joyfully and with sincerity, displaying love for one another. As Mr. Yong-woo Choi said: ‘Modern people are trapped in a state of spiritual panic, like hyenas wandering through the fields, feeling lonely and isolated with hearts that seem to be pierced. The phenomenon that emerges from living a life pursuing only pleasure, materialism, and external convenience, having lost God, the One in whose image we were created, is one of self-

destruction, mental illness, and rebellion. What these modern people truly, genuinely desire in their hearts is warmth. It's truth. It's gentleness. It's love. The character of Jesus was gentle and humble. Gentleness and humility can also be expressed as warmth, truth, gentleness, beauty, happiness, and love. When a church is warm, truthful, gentle, beautiful, happy, and filled with love, people naturally gravitate toward such a place. They can't help but go there. However, if the church doesn't seem much different from their own spiritual state, how can modern people feel the power of the church?' (Internet).

We, as members of the church, must become attractive saints. Therefore, we must exert effort in evangelism. In today's passage, Acts 3:1-10, we see the first miracle of Acts involving Peter and John encountering a man who had been lame from birth at the Beautiful Gate of the temple, healing him in the name of Jesus Christ when they went up to pray. I would like to contemplate Acts 3:1-10 under the title "What I have, I give you," focusing on how we can give what we have.

First, to give what I have, I must pay attention to the needy souls.

Look at Acts 3:5 - "So the man gave them his attention, expecting to get something from them." In today's Scripture, we encounter a needy soul. This man is the one referred to as the crippled man who was being carried to the temple gate (v. 2). One day, at three in the afternoon (v. 1) when Peter and John were going up to the temple to pray, they encountered this man and he began to beg for money (v. 3). When Peter and John looked at him and said, "Look at us!" (v. 4), the crippled man eagerly looked at them, expecting to receive something. What was it that this crippled man was so eager for at this moment? Our immediate response might be money. What did a beggar like him want? While this is a common-sense answer, we can find more solid evidence in the mention of the Beautiful Gate (v. 2) at which the crippled man was sitting and begging. At that time, it is said that there were ten gates leading into the Jerusalem temple. Among them, the one at which the crippled man sat and begged, known as the "Beautiful Gate," was the tenth gate, renowned for being adorned with silver and gold, and was commonly known as the Nicanor Gate (Yoo). The man who was now sitting at this gate, begging Peter and John to allow him to enter the temple to pray, was in need of silver and gold. He was begging for money because he needed it.

There is a book written by Drs. Win and Charles Arn titled "The Master's Plan for Making Disciples." In this book, there is an interesting diagram that indicates when extended family members who do not believe in Jesus are most receptive to the Gospel. Starting from the top of the diagram, here are a few items in sequence: the death of a spouse, divorce, separation, the death of a close family member, personal injury or illness, job loss, retirement, etc. What these authors argue is that people in our lives experience "periods of transition" caused by recent events, and the more recent these transitional periods are, the more receptive they are to accepting a new life, such as in Christ or within the church. If we approach and share the Gospel with our extended family members who we need to reach out to, especially those who are in a stable personal situation without any major problems or unusual disruptions, they generally have less receptivity to accepting a new life in Christ or in the church.

What we can consider here is the relationship between "intercessory prayer" and "transitional periods." Just as Peter and John encountered the lame man begging at the Beautiful Gate of the temple when they were going up to pray at 3:00 PM, among the people we are interceding for, there are particularly difficult and challenging individuals. Among them, there may be people who, like the crippled man, come to church every Sunday in need of something. Furthermore, there may be intercession targets who do not believe in Jesus. We need to pay special attention to them and recognize their urgent need for the Gospel and love of Jesus. Here, what does "paying attention" mean? Look at verse 4: "And fixing his attention on them, with John, Peter said, 'Look at us.'" This refers to intimate focus and contact between personalities. True contact between personalities occurs in a scene where gazes meet and confront each other (Park).

We must pay attention to needy souls, especially those in transitional periods of life. There must be intimate focus and contact between personalities when it comes to caring for them.

Second, in order to give what we have, we must be clear about what we don't have.

Look at Acts 3:6a – "Then Peter said, 'Silver or gold I do not have, ...'" Peter clearly stated to the crippled man that he and John did not possess what the man was asking for. How disappointing might this word have been to the beggar, who had been sitting and begging at the Beautiful Gate of the Jerusalem temple, known for being adorned with silver and gold? It could have been a statement sufficient to discourage him. We may wonder, 'How could Peter say such a thing?' 'Why didn't he show more pity for the beggar and instead abruptly state that he had no silver or gold?' However, pretending to have something we don't is more likely to disappoint the other party. Therefore, it is necessary to clearly state when something is not available according to the other person's request.

In an article from Donga.com titled 'Let's Discard Only This... / Deep-rooted Hypocrisy,' it is written: 'Most people live in this world with various flaws that are usually hidden and supplemented by other strengths, gradually deviating from their true selves. However, among the various deviations from the norm, there is something that can never be hidden. It's what we call 'pretense.' Pretense is also known as 'masking.' Pretending to know when you don't, acting superior when you're inferior, pretending to have when you don't. This 'pretense' is based on a relative sense of showmanship. It belongs to a kind of social malady because it forcibly packages oneself and tries to present falsehood as truth. If you delve deeper into the essence of this 'pretense,' it is nothing more than vanity, ostentation, and illusion, and even exaggeration, extravagance, falsehood, and greed are included in this 'pretense.' The cause of this malady lies in the fact that its content is not genuine (Internet). Let's not pretend to have what we don't. Let's be people who can plainly say when something is not available. Let's not pretend to possess something we don't.'

Third and last, in order to give what we have, we must know what we

possess.

Look at Acts 3:6 - " Then Peter said, "Silver or gold I do not have, but what I have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk." What should we give to the crippled man who begs for silver and gold? I once had a conversation with Rev. Han, who studied at the Korean Presbyterian Theological Seminary. One story he shared was about an exam question from a professor at the seminary. The question was apparently simple yet profound: 'What do saints need the most?' What do you think? While individual saints may have different personal needs, from a spiritual perspective, it is a fact that the Word of God is what we all need the most. From the perspective of the crippled man, gold and silver were what he needed the most, which is why he resorted to begging for them. However, from the viewpoint of the apostles Peter and John, that wasn't the case. In their eyes, what the lame man needed most wasn't gold or silver, but something more fundamental: the ability to walk. Doesn't that make sense? When Peter said, " Silver or gold I do not have, but what I have I give you," he was referring to the ability to walk "in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth" (v. 6). Here, what he meant by "what I have" was precisely the power to walk "in the name of Jesus Christ." What's crucial here is the name Jesus Christ. This name isn't some sort of magical incantation. Just as a person's name represents their authority and influence, the name "Jesus" signifies His power. And the authority of this name "Jesus" refers to the works done by the Holy Spirit in the name of Jesus.

What is the remarkable significance of the name of Jesus? The name of Jesus is the name by which we are saved. Peter performed a miracle by using the name of Jesus to make the crippled man rise and walk. And as they preached about Jesus Christ, the number of believers continued to grow. At this point, the apostles were arrested by the leaders of the Jewish religion and brought to court. They were asked, 'By what power or by what name did you do this?' (4:7). In response, Peter boldly declared in verse 12, 'And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.' Our salvation comes through the name of Jesus Christ. There is no one but Jesus. He alone is the exclusive path to salvation and our true hope. Through Him, we receive salvation, obtain life, and live a fulfilled existence. The name of Jesus is one that receives glory, honor, and praise. In Hebrews 2:7, the Bible says, "You made him a little lower than the angels; you crowned him with glory and honor." However, to grasp this glory and honor, one must understand the suffering and death of Jesus Christ. Because it was through the suffering and death on the cross that the name of Jesus Christ was exalted, and the glory and honor of God were revealed. When trying to believe in Jesus Christ, you might wonder why such suffering is happening to you. However, from the perspective of eternity, our trials are but momentary. As Romans 8:18 says, "I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us." At every fleeting moment of hardship and adversity, look to Jesus Christ, who was adorned with glory and honor. The name of Jesus is a name that performs miracles. In Acts 3:6, Peter and John boldly declared to the lame man sitting at the temple gate, " Silver or gold I do not have, but what I have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk." The name of Jesus is not only the means through which eternal life is granted to us but also the powerful name that we can turn to in times of various hardships and difficulties in our lives. The power

of Jesus' name remains the same, whether then or now. What changes is our faith. We are people who possess this amazing name. Just like Peter, when we proclaim in the name of Jesus Christ, God's wondrous works will also manifest in our lives. May we not live a powerless and hopeless life but triumph in the name of Jesus Christ.

The first verse of the gospel song "Jesus," written by Jeong-mi Song, goes like this:

'Leaving the highest and most exalted throne, abandoning the glory of heaven
Descending to seek us, the lowly and humble
God came down to meet each despairing soul, one by one
The Lord, who came down to meet us, His name is Jesus
Beautiful name, Jesus
Healing the sick, making the blind see, the power of His name
Oh, Jesus, oh, Jesus, His name endures forever
The Son of God, who raises the dead and wipes away every tear.'

We are individuals who bear the beautiful and eternal name "Jesus." We are Christians. Through the indwelling Holy Spirit, we manifest the power of the name "Jesus." When we pray in the name of Jesus, the power of prayer is revealed. When we proclaim the gospel in the name of Jesus, spiritually dead souls accept Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord, receiving new life. We witness and hear of these miraculous transformations.

With a prayer for an even greater manifestation of the work of new life,

James Kim

(While praying for an even greater manifestation of the work of obtaining new life)

What does God do?

[Acts 3:2]

This is a passage reflecting on previously overlooked parts of the Bible. It's a verse that was read casually without attaching any special meaning to it, a passage that was simply passed over. The specific verse mentioned is Acts 3:2a - "Now a man crippled from birth" Until now, I had only thought of the story as Peter and John going up to the temple and instructing the man who was unable to walk from birth to rise and walk in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth (v. 6). However, during a recent early morning prayer meeting, I was reminded of John 9:1, which speaks of a man blind from birth. Perhaps the reason for this connection is that the Acts 3:2 passage caused me to think of the man blind from birth from John 9:1, which had been meditated upon earlier. As a result, I began to contemplate whether there might be a connection between these two biblical stories. In particular, while meditating on the man blind from birth, I considered three teachings about what God intended by saying, "but that the works of God might be displayed in him" (v. 3): (1) The Lord intended to strengthen the disciples' weak faith by giving sight to the man blind from birth, (2) The Lord intended to reveal the sin of unbelief among the Jews and Pharisees who doubted the man's healing, (3) The Lord intended to save the soul of the man blind from birth by granting him sight. Then I ponder why God chose to have the man who was unable to walk from birth in Acts 3:2-8 walk through the apostle Peter and reflects on what God might have intended by this act. I am curious about what God's purpose might have been in this particular case.

In Acts 3:2, the man who was crippled from birth, like the man born blind in John 9:8, was a beggar. In other words, both were poor individuals. They were considered disabled. The man born blind from birth sat by the road and begged (v. 8), while the man who was crippled from birth couldn't walk at all, so every day he was carried to the temple gate to beg from those entering the temple (Acts 3:2). Given that he was around forty years old (4:22), it seems he had spent quite a long time sitting at the temple gate in Jerusalem, begging from people. So, when he was able to walk after being helped by Peter and John to enter the temple, and even leaped and praised God (3:8), all the people (v. 9) living in

Jerusalem were amazed when they saw him. They recognized him as the one who used to sit and beg at the temple gate, and they were greatly astonished at what had happened to him (v. 10). This led to a large crowd gathering in Solomon's Colonnade (v. 11), where Peter preached to them (vv. 12-26). In his sermon, Peter urged the gathered crowd to pay attention to him and John (v. 12), but they rejected (v. 14) the One whom they had killed, the Author of life, but whom God raised from the dead (v. 15). He then emphasized to them, 'By faith in the name of Jesus, this man whom you see and know was made strong. It is Jesus' name and the faith that comes through him that has completely healed him, as you can all see' (v. 16, modern Bible). While saying this, Peter boldly called on the gathered people to repent and turn to God, so that their sins may be wiped out (v. 19). When Peter preached in this way, about five thousand of the men who heard the message believed (4:4). How amazing is the work of God, the ministry of the Holy Spirit, and the power of God's Word? In Acts 2, when Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, preached, those who accepted his message, that is the number of believers totaled about three thousand (2:41). However, in Acts 3, as we've just seen, about five thousand men came to believe in Jesus. This is nothing short of the power of the Gospel, the work of the Holy Spirit, and the divine purpose that God intended through the man who was lame from birth. It is undoubtedly a remarkable work of God's astonishing salvation.

In the midst of this amazing work of God's salvation, there was also the work of Satan. The work of Satan can be seen when Peter and John were speaking to the people and praising God for the man who had been crippled from birth, now walking (3:9). This astonished all the people gathered at Solomon's Colonnade (v. 11). The priests, temple guards, and the Sadducees (4:1, modern Bible) were greatly angered when they saw the apostles teaching and proclaiming the resurrection of the dead through Jesus (v. 2, modern Bible). From the perspective of the Sadducees, who did not believe in the resurrection of the dead (Mt. 22:23; Acts 23:8), they naturally would not have been pleased with the apostles' teachings and were likely to have disliked them (Acts 4:2). So, they arrested Peter and John and kept them in custody until the next day (v. 3). The following day, Jewish leaders, elders, and scholars (experts in the law) gathered in Jerusalem (v. 5). Among them were Annas the high priest, Caiaphas, John, Alexander, and others from the high priest's family (v. 6). They confronted Peter and John, asking, "By what power or what name did you do this?" (v. 7). At that moment, Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, boldly preached to them as well (vv. 8-12). In his sermon, Peter told the gathered assembly, 'You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead' (v. 15, modern Bible). He also declared, "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved" (vv. 11-12). Upon hearing Peter's sermon, the high priests, members of the high priest's family, Jewish leaders, elders, and scholars were amazed (v. 13). The reason for their astonishment was that they considered Peter and John to be uneducated, common men, yet they spoke boldly (v. 13, modern Bible). Seeing the healed man standing with Peter and John, they had nothing to say in opposition (v. 15). They couldn't deny what had happened because the miraculous sign performed by Peter and John was known to all who lived in Jerusalem (v. 16). So, they threatened Peter and John, commanding them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus (v. 18). This is indeed the work of Satan. Satan despises Jesus' disciples speaking and teaching in the name of Jesus. Satan

hates Jesus' disciples preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ. The reason is that he hates people being saved in the name of Jesus. Therefore, from Acts 5:17 onwards, we see that the high priest and the Sadducees greatly opposed the apostles, arrested them, and put them in jail (vv. 17-18). They sternly warned Peter and the other apostles not to teach or speak in the name of Jesus (v. 28, modern Bible). Yet, despite this, Peter and the other apostles proclaimed that Jesus, who was crucified, was raised back to life by God, and that God exalted him to his own right hand as Prince and Savior to grant repentance and forgiveness of sins to Israel (v. 31, modern Bible). When they heard this, the leaders were furious and wanted to put the apostles to death (v. 33, modern Bible). Thus, Satan's followers not only strongly oppose the spread of the gospel of Jesus Christ but also vehemently hate and despise the Savior Jesus Christ. They not only crucified Jesus on the cross, but also sought to kill Lazarus, whom Jesus had raised from the dead (Jn. 12:11), and even plotted to kill the apostles of Jesus (Acts 5:33). The reason for this is that many Jews were leaving them and believing in Jesus because of their testimony (Jn. 12:11). This is the evil work of Satan.

Even in the midst of such wickedness from Satan, Peter and the other apostles, filled with the Holy Spirit, boldly proclaimed the gospel of Jesus Christ (Acts 4:13). Despite the opposition from the high priests and the Sadducees who disliked their preaching (4:2), and even being threatened and warned by them (17, 18), Peter and John declared before them and a multitude of others (vv. 1, 6) the following words: "Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God's sight to obey you rather than God. For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard" (vv. 19-20). Moreover, when they were filled with jealousy (5:17), arrested, and put in prison (v. 18), and subsequently brought before the high priests and those allied with the Sadducees for questioning (v. 27), Peter and the other apostles proclaimed in their defense: "We must obey God rather than men!" (v. 29). As a result, the apostles were flogged and ordered not to speak in the name of Jesus, and then released (v. 40). However, the apostles, upon being released, rejoiced that they were considered worthy to suffer for the sake of Jesus' name, and they left the Sanhedrin (v. 41). They continued to teach and preach that Jesus is the Christ, whether in the temple or in their homes, day after day (v. 42). This is indeed the astonishing work of the Holy Spirit of God.

I have been pondering the passage that I have read and passed by many times, the part that says the man who was crippled from birth in Acts 3:2, and I have been reflecting on its connection to the man born blind from birth in John 9:1. In the process, I found myself contemplating what God was doing through the man who was lame from birth. Through this valuable contemplation, as I read and meditated on Acts 3-4, I came to the conclusion that the work of God through the man who was crippled from birth was none other than the salvation of his soul. God enabled the apostles to make the man who was crippled from birth walk in the name of Jesus Christ, and as a result, they gathered many people, empowering the apostle Peter to boldly proclaim the gospel to them. Consequently, God caused around 5,000 men to believe in Jesus Christ and receive salvation among those who heard the word. Even in the midst of Satan's wicked work, God performed His amazing work of salvation through the astonishing work of the Holy Spirit among the disciples of Jesus, who were filled with the Holy Spirit. I believe

that this astounding work of God's salvation will continue until the day when Jesus returns, and it will be completed. Spiritually, I am grateful for the immense and astonishing grace and love of God, who enables even someone like me, who is not naturally bold, to do the work of God in the name of Jesus Christ. With a heart of gratitude, I acknowledge this great and wondrous grace and love of God.

In Christ,

James Kim

(With gratitude, believing in God's ongoing and ultimate work of salvation through Spirit-filled disciples of Jesus until the day of His return)

A Man Whose Faith Comes through Jesus

[Acts 3:11-16]

Scottish pastor Samuel Rutherford once said, 'Christ carries the wind. God has placed you beside Christ, facing the same direction as Christ. Therefore, you cannot expect a sheltered, windless spot on the mountainside.' In this statement, it implies that just as we walk in the same direction as Christ, we too must live carrying the wind. In other words, we cannot move forward without facing resistance (Tozer). However, human instinct longs for the sheltered, windless spot on the mountainside. Pastor Tozer stated in his book "That Incredible Christian" regarding 'true faith' and 'false faith': 'A person with genuine faith does not shy away from any suffering in order to partake in Christ's victory. On the other hand, a person with counterfeit faith is only certain of wanting no part of the wind, but desiring the sheltered, windless spot on the mountainside. Everyone must decide for themselves whether they want to stand in the temporary peace that seems to come from false faith, or in the eternal peace that comes from genuine faith' (Tozer). What decisions do you make every day? Are you standing in the temporary peace that seems to come from false faith, or are you standing in the eternal peace that comes from genuine faith? Those born of faith from human sources will seek only the sheltered, windless spot. However, as believers born of Jesus, they will follow Christ, resisting the world's winds, just as Jesus did.

Today, focusing on Acts 3:11-16, I reflect on how a believer born of faith in Jesus lives. I hope to examine whether we are truly possessors of faith in Jesus. In the midst of this, if we find that we have a faith derived not from Jesus, but from some other source or a misguided belief, I pray that it becomes an opportunity for repentance and a pursuit of true faith.

First, a man whose faith comes through Jesus does not seek to be the center of attention.

Look at Acts 3:12 - "When Peter saw this, he said to the people: 'Fellow Israelites, why does this surprise you? Why do you stare at us as if by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk?'" As we have already contemplated, Peter and John encountered the man who had been crippled from birth at the temple gate, and, in the name of Jesus of Nazareth, commanded him to walk, lifting him up by his right hand. We are familiar with the miraculous healing that followed. As a result of this miracle, Peter and John gained the attention from all the people (v. 9). Everyone gathered in amazement, and they even crowded into Solomon's Colonnade (v. 11). It was in this context that Peter addressed the assembled crowd, saying, "Fellow Israelites, why does this surprise you?... Why do you stare at us?" (v. 12).

Now, consider this: What if news had spread about me, in the name of Jesus of Nazareth, raising a man who had been crippled? Wouldn't people gather in astonishment, exclaiming, "Wow, that's incredible!?" For instance, when certain well-known revivalist pastors hold healing meetings, don't people flock to them? And when a healing miracle takes place, the pastor becomes well-known, and the church experiences significant growth. Wouldn't you agree? However, the question arises afterward. How should we respond when we gain recognition from everyone, become popular, and achieve widespread fame?

Peter and John clearly stated to the amazed all the people: "It is not by our own power or godliness that we made this man walk" (v. 12). This is the confession and attitude of a genuine believer. A believer born of faith in Jesus actually finds it strange to be the center of attention. The reason for this lies in knowing one's own lack of personal power and recognizing one's human inadequacy. Additionally, when comparing one's own godliness to the holiness of Christ, it is clear that one is nothing. Therefore, receiving attention from people can be burdensome, knowing that it was not one's own actions that brought it about. However, what is happening in churches today? Many individuals within the church are struggling with a strong desire to be noticed. This applies not only to pastors, elders, and deacons, but also to many believers. The immature faith that is unable to overcome the human instinct to seek recognition and attention from people is prevalent. What is the cause? It's the immature faith that desires recognition and attention from visible people rather than seeking recognition from the unseen God. One result of this is that instead of God's glory being manifested, one's own glory is exalted. Such a faith can never be called a faith that comes through Jesus.

The believer whose faith comes through Jesus does not seek to be the center of attention. He does not boast of his own power or godliness in order to gain recognition from people. Therefore, we must uproot the temptation of seeking honor. We should not become like fame-seeking celebrities in the church. There should be no superstars in the church.

Second and last, a believer whose faith comes through Jesus gives glory solely to God.

Look at Acts 3:13a - "The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified his servant Jesus" What does it mean to glorify God? It means to humble oneself before the infinite and glorious presence of God, to revere Him. It involves offering thanks and praise in the face of God's love and grace, finding joy only in God, and manifesting and bearing witness to God's glory through every aspect of one's life. It means acknowledging God in the highest place, loving Him, walking in His will, and not only exalting God but also expanding His kingdom and participating in all that God does (Internet). Look at Isaiah 43:7 - "everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made." Peter and John, through the healing miracle of the lame man, rejected all the attention directed at them and instead gave all the glory to God. How did they glorify God?

- (1) They glorified God by proclaiming that the God of our fathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who raised Jesus from the dead among the dead, has glorified His servant Jesus.

Look at Acts 3:13-15: " The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified his servant Jesus. You handed him over to be killed, and you disowned him before Pilate, though he had decided to let him go. You disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked that a murderer be released to you. You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead. We are witnesses of this." Peter, speaking to the assembled people in Solomon's Colonnade, declared that the crippled man was now walking by the work of the covenant God they knew well, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. In doing so, he seized the opportunity to proclaim the gospel. He addressed the gathered crowd, emphasizing how they had denied Pilate's attempt to release Jesus. But instead, they had called for the release of a murderer and put to death the Author of life (vv. 13-15). However, he proclaimed that God, in contrast, raised Jesus from the dead, declaring the message of resurrection. This proclamation led the assembled people to believe in God and His Son Jesus Christ, urging them to proclaim the gospel. Thus, rather than seeking personal acclaim when presented with an opportunity to be exalted, Peter chose to humble himself, confessing that his own power and piety amounted to nothing (v. 12), and exalting God by proclaiming His power, while seizing the opportunity to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ.

- (2) They glorified God by proclaiming that the man who was lame from birth was made well in the name of Jesus.

Look at Acts 3:16 - "By faith in the name of Jesus, this man whom you see and know was made strong. It is Jesus' name and the faith that comes through him that has completely healed him, as you can all see." When all the people were astonished at the miracle performed by Peter and were about to exalt him, Peter was cautious, fearing that the glory would be attributed to himself. Instead, he glorified Jesus. A true miracle is one that glorifies Christ, focusing on Him and bearing witness to Him (Park).

Desiring to become a possessor of faith born from Jesus,

James Kim

(While wishing to give glory to God alone, being uncomfortable with seeking attention from people)

God who Desires to Give Blessings

[Acts 3:17-26]

1 Chronicles 4:9-10 says: "Jabez was more honorable than his brothers; and his mother called his name Jabez, saying, 'Because I bore him in pain.' Jabez called upon the God of Israel, saying, 'Oh that you would bless me and enlarge my border, and that your hand might be with me, and that you would keep me from harm so that it might not bring me pain!' And God granted what he asked." Pastor Bruce Wilkinson commented on the prayer "Oh that you would bless me" in his book "The Prayer of Jabez," saying: 'When we make wanting God's blessing the only thing that satisfies our soul, we are in a position to know 'the fullness of joy in His presence,' as the psalmist says. Everything else we may desire becomes a way of seeking His blessing in those areas of our life. What we want more than anything else is for God's glory to fall on us, in us, through us, and around us' (Wilkinson). So, do you and I truly seek God's blessings as the highest value in our lives? If so, have all our other needs become secondary, as Pastor Bruce Wilkinson suggested? Or do we still consider God's blessings as secondary and pursue all our other needs as the ultimate blessings?

Today, I would like to contemplate on Acts 3:17-26 with two main points: (1) What are the blessings that God desires to give us? (2) What must we do to receive these blessings from God?

First, what are the blessings that God desires to give us?

From today's passage, we can summarize them into three main points:

(1) The first blessing that God desires to give us is forgiveness of sins.

Look at Acts 3:19a - "Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out," Here, "sins may be wiped out" means being completely freed from the record of wrongdoing. In English, the phrase "wiped out" refers to completely erasing the ink on a document, much like the complete forgiveness of sins. Colossians 2:14 states: "having canceled the written code, with

its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross." King David in the Psalms proclaimed: "Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered." (Ps. 32:1). The phrase "sins may be wiped out" in Acts 3:19 signifies even more than just covering sins. As we know, Peter, who proclaimed this message, had experienced this truth firsthand. After denying Jesus, he wept bitterly and received forgiveness. From then on, he never mentioned his transgression. He became as if he had never sinned (Park). What an astounding blessing! To become as if one had never sinned. If the police were keeping a record of all our sins, how fearful and apprehensive would we be? Not only fearful, but also facing the dreadful consequences of our transgressions becoming evidence. Now, imagine if the Chief of Police ordered all our records to be completely wiped clean, so that we would be treated as if we were completely innocent. How would that be? Our God is the one who wipes out our transgressions. Isaiah 43:25 states: "I, I am he who blots out your transgressions for my own sake, and I will not remember your sins."

(2) The blessing that God gives us is the day of refreshing.

Look at Acts 3:19b - "... that times of refreshing may come from the Lord." What does the term "times of refreshing" refer to? The Greek translation for "refreshing" is rendered in English as "respite," meaning a temporary cessation or relief from work, pain, or duty (e.g., Acts 8:15) (Bruce). As an example, consider the judgment that God had previously proclaimed to the unrepentant people of Nineveh. The judgment was temporarily halted because the people of Nineveh repented. From this perspective, "times of refreshing" can be understood as a 'temporary pause from suffering.' However, the "day of refreshing" mentioned in Acts 3:19 carries a deeper significance. It doesn't merely denote a temporary respite from suffering. It signifies opportunities of spiritual salvation through the inauguration of Jesus (Park). This means that repentant individuals are liberated from sin and obtain spiritual peace (Park). A life liberated from sin, resulting in spiritual peace, is indeed the blessing that God desires to give us. That's why, after His resurrection, Jesus stood among His disciples and said, "Peace be with you" (Jn. 20:19, 26). This peace is not the peace that the world offers. It is the peace that only Jesus can give us.

To delve further into the concept of the "day of refreshing," I would like to refer to it as the life of God's kingdom that saints enjoy through the hope of Jesus' first and second coming. Now, what is meant by the 'life of God's kingdom'? We can cite Romans 14:17 as an example: "For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit." We, as the people of God's heavenly kingdom living between the inauguration and the second coming of Jesus, enjoy the blessing of living a life characterized by righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. This kind of life is what gladdens our hearts and souls. This is the second blessing that God desires to give you and me.

(3) The blessing that God gives us is the restoration of all things.

Look at Acts 3:21 - " He must remain in heaven until the time comes for God to restore everything, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets." Here, the phrase "restore everything" refers to the blessed age of the new heaven and new earth that will come about only through the return of Christ. The term "restoration" signifies a new era in which all things will be made new, an era of glory in the divine creation (Park). This aligns with the prophecy that Jesus had already made in Matthew 19:28a – "... I tell you the truth, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne," As Paul puts it, the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God (Rom. 8:21). Here, the "creation" refers to everything in the world apart from humans (Hodge). Although creation has decayed and suffered the consequences of human sin (v. 20), it too will reach its glory when humanity's salvation is accomplished at the return of Jesus. Regarding this restoration, the prophet Isaiah prophesied: "They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea. In that day the Root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples; the nations will rally to him, and his place of rest will be glorious." (Isa. 11:9-10). Look at Isaiah 35:10 – "and the ransomed of the LORD will return. They will enter Zion with singing; everlasting joy will crown their heads. Gladness and joy will overtake them, and sorrow and sighing will flee away."

Second, in order to receive these blessings from God, what must we do?

We can consider three things:

(1) To receive the blessings that God desires to give us, we must repent and turn to God.

Look at Acts 3:19a - "Repent, therefore, and turn to God" Already, in Acts 2:38, Peter proclaimed, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." What should we repent of? We should repent of the sins we committed in ignorance. Look at Acts 3:17 - "And now, brothers, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did also your leaders." What sins did the Jews who were listening to Peter's sermon commit in ignorance? Peter points out the sin they committed in these words: "But you denied the Holy and Righteous One, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, and you killed the Author of life ..." (vv. 14-15). In other words, the sin that the Jews committed in ignorance was the sin of killing Jesus Christ. Peter admonished those Jews who were listening to his sermon to repent of this sin. We can take the Apostle Paul as an example. Before meeting the resurrected Jesus on the road to Damascus, Paul was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent. But he received mercy because he had acted ignorantly in unbelief (1 Tim. 1:13). However, the amazing fact is that Jesus, on the cross, had already prayed to God the Father to forgive us for the sins we commit in ignorance. Look at Luke 23:34 – "And Jesus said, 'Father, forgive them, for they know

not what they do.” What we must keep in mind is that true repentance requires turning away from sin. Therefore, Peter not only preached in Acts 3:19, "Repent, therefore, and turn to God," but also proclaimed in Acts 3:26b, "... turning every one of you from your wickedness." Consider the example of the Thessalonian believers: "... how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God" (1 Thess. 1:9). True repentance means abandoning sin and turning back to God to worship and serve Him. If we claim to have returned to God without abandoning the idols we should forsake, and if we worship and serve Him while still holding on to those idols, we are actually serving two masters. When we truly repent in this way, we can receive the first blessing God desires to give us, which is forgiveness of sins. Therefore, we must heed the words of the prophet Isaiah and return to God as His servants: "I have blotted out your transgressions like a cloud and your sins like mist; return to me, for I have redeemed you" (Isa. 44:22).

(2) In order to receive the blessings that God desires to give us, we must listen to every word of Jesus Christ.

Look at Acts 3:22 - " For Moses said, "The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people; you must listen to everything he tells you." Long ago, in the Old Testament, when Moses prophesied (Deut. 18:15) that "a prophet like me" would be raised up by God, he was speaking about Jesus Christ, who serves as the mediator between humans and God (1 Tim. 2:5) (Park). Moses, who prophesied the coming of the Messiah Jesus, was truly speaking the words of the Lord (Deut. 18:22). We know this because his prophecy was fulfilled: " If what a prophet proclaims in the name of the LORD does not take place or come true, that is a message the LORD has not spoken. That prophet has spoken presumptuously. Do not be afraid of him." Therefore, the Jewish people listening to Peter's sermon had no choice but to believe Moses the prophet's words, just as they must believe in the words of Jesus Christ who was prophesied to come. Look at Deuteronomy 18:18 - " I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers; I will put my words in his mouth, and he will tell them everything I command him." However, the Jewish people did not listen to Jesus' words and did not believe in Him. Look at John 5:46-47: " If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me. But since you do not believe what he wrote, how are you going to believe what I say?" Therefore, Peter admonished that in order to receive the blessings that God desires to give, they must listen to every word of Jesus. He proclaimed that if they did not heed Jesus' words, they would be utterly destroyed from among the people (v. 23).

(3) In order to receive the blessings that God desires to give us, we must patiently await the return of the Lord.

Look at Acts 3:20 - " and that he may send the Christ, who has been appointed for you--even Jesus." The fulfillment of the three blessings God intends to give us - forgiveness of sins, the day of gladness, and the restoration of all things - will occur at the time of the Lord's return. While we have already

received forgiveness of sins, ultimately we will receive complete forgiveness when we put on the glorious body, the spiritual body, at the Lord's return. The day of gladness, though already partially experienced by us who live between the first and second comings of Jesus, will find its full realization at the Lord's return. Particularly, the restoration of all things, the era of the new heaven and new earth, will be at the time of Jesus' return. Therefore, we must exercise patience. Calvin's fifth point of the TULIP, the Perseverance of the Saints, applies here. Look at Revelation 14:12 - "This calls for patient endurance on the part of the saints who obey God's commandments and remain faithful to Jesus." Thus, Paul also says in Romans 8:23 - "And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies." The "firstfruits of the Spirit" mentioned here refer to the Holy Spirit that we have already received. The reason we have received the Holy Spirit as the "firstfruits" is because our experience of the Holy Spirit is like tasting the first fruits of heaven; it is a foretaste of the fullness of heaven we will enjoy. In this way, as we taste the first fruits of heaven, we will obtain the redemption of our bodies - the glory of the resurrection that we, as God's children, will receive. Therefore, we must be patient and endure until that time comes.

Last week, when I watched CNN's Top News, I learned about the health of Israeli Prime Minister Sharon and the explosion accident in the West Virginia coal mine. Among them, I was particularly interested in the West Virginia coal mine explosion and watched it on TV or CNN's website. Out of 13 people, 12 died, and a man who had been married for a short time at the age of 26 is currently in critical condition. Among the 12 deceased, there was a 51-year-old man named Martin Toler Jr., who had worked in the coal mine for 32 years. Before he passed away, he wrote a short message, reportedly saying: 'Tell all I see them on the other side JR. It wasn't bad. I just went to sleep. I love you.' Randy Toler, the nephew of this brother, said that the last words his uncle spoke at the Sunday church were, save your affections on things above, not on Earth, which is probably similar to Colossians 3:2: "Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things." Bill Rogers, the brother-in-law of Jerry Groves (56), who was another miner who passed away, said, 'Our only comfort would be that there was no suffering, that they would go to sleep, and there it is.'

Believing in God who desires to give blessings,

James Kim

(Anticipating the Lord's return)

The Name of Jesus Christ

[Acts 4:1-12]

During the pilgrimage to the Islamic holy site, known as the "Devil's Stoning," a tragic incident occurred in which over 340 people lost their lives, and more than a thousand were injured. What is the "Devil's Stoning"? This annual religious event, called Hajj, brings Muslims from all over the world to the holiest Islamic site in Saudi Arabia, Mecca. It involves a declaration of faith affirming the oneness of Allah, as well as five daily prayers, religious dues, fasting during Ramadan (Islamic calendar's ninth month), and other practices that Muslims are obliged to follow as long as their health and financial means allow. The Hajj pilgrims, who have gathered in Mina, a plain near Mecca, for the past few days, engage in prayers and contemplation to prepare for the actual pilgrimage. On the way back to Mecca on the 10th day, pilgrims perform a ritual where they throw seven pebbles at three pillars representing the devil in the Mina Valley. They shout "Away with you, Satan" as they do so. This ritual, considered the most perilous in the Mecca pilgrimage, often leads to physical clashes among pilgrims attempting to get as close as possible to the pillars. Unfortunately, this has resulted in fatal stampedes in the past. In 2003, during this ritual, a tragic incident occurred, claiming 251 lives. In 1990, a staggering 1,426 people lost their lives in a similar incident (Internet). Only those who make the declaration of faith affirming the oneness of Allah can participate in the Mecca pilgrimage. How many Muslims are there? Islamic countries constitute 57 out of the 191 member states of the United Nations, with a population of nearly 1.1 billion out of a total global population of 6 billion (Internet). With 1.2 billion Muslims, comprising 20% of the world's population, there are 2.7 missionaries for every million Muslims. Every day, 40,000 Muslims pass away without having heard the Gospel (Internet).

However, in today's Scripture, Acts 4:12, the Bible clearly states: "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved." The Scriptures unequivocally declare that there is no other name given to humanity by which we can attain salvation. Salvation can only be found through the name of Jesus Christ. Today, I'd like to consider what this name, "Jesus Christ," means based on Acts 4:1-12.

First of all, the name of Jesus Christ is a name that gives hope.

Look at Acts 4:2 - "They were greatly disturbed because the apostles were teaching the people, proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead." What hope does the name of Jesus Christ give us? It is the hope of resurrection. In Acts 3, Peter and John encountered a man who was crippled from birth at the Beautiful Gate of the temple during the hour of prayer. They healed him in the name of Jesus Christ and then addressed the gathered crowd in Solomon's Colonnade, proclaiming the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. What the apostles proclaimed was the resurrection of the dead in Jesus (Yoo). The phrase "in Jesus" indicates that the resurrection of the dead has become an undeniable present reality because of the gloriously risen Jesus. However, the priests and the captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees (4:1) came and arrested the apostles because they were upset that the apostles were teaching the people and proclaiming the resurrection of the dead in Jesus, so they detained them until the next day (vv. 2-3). What we need to reflect on here is the persecution by religious leaders. If we say that the audience listening to Peter's sermon in Acts 3 were Jewish people, the audience mentioned in today's passage, chapter 4, consisted of religious leaders, namely the priests and the captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees. The priests were the only ones legally authorized to teach the people in the temple, the captain of the temple guard was responsible for maintaining order and security in and around the temple, and as we already know, the Sadducees were the ones who denied the resurrection of the dead (Lk. 20:27). The reason these religious leaders arrested Peter and John and put them in jail was because two things made them extremely uncomfortable and provoked their anger (Yoo): (1) The apostles, who had no authority to teach the people in the temple, were teaching God's people (vs. the priests and the captain of the temple guard), (2) They were proclaiming the resurrection of the dead in Jesus (vs. the Sadducees). Even in the midst of persecution by religious leaders who denied the hope of resurrection, Peter proclaimed that the man who had been lame was healed and made well in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead (v. 10). Here, the word "raised" prompts us to revisit Acts 3:7: "Taking him by the right hand, he helped him up." In other words, by faith in the power of the resurrection, Peter, after telling the lame man to walk in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, took him by the right hand, helped him up, and he began to walk and jump.

The name "Jesus Christ" is a name that gives us the hope of resurrection. Jesus, who was crucified and died, rose from the dead after just three days, and ascended into heaven. The same power of resurrection that overcame death is also available to us who believe in Jesus. Therefore, anyone who believes in Jesus receives the hope of resurrection in Him.

Second, the name of Jesus Christ is a name that brings healing.

Look at Acts 4:10 - "then know this, you and all the people of Israel: It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed." Here in verse 10, Peter is responding to the question from the religious leaders in

the Sanhedrin, "By what power or what name did you do this?" (v. 7) In response to their question about "what name," Peter replied, "It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed" (v. 10). A more literal translation is 'by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, (namely) by this, this man stands before you healthy.' Ultimately, in the Sanhedrin court, Peter declared that it was the authority of Jesus' name, in the midst of being filled with the Holy Spirit, that brought about this remarkable work of salvation (Yoo).

In the Book of Acts, "Jesus of Nazareth" is mentioned about 20 times. Not just Jesus, but Jesus of Nazareth. In Acts 2:21, they called on the name of Jesus of Nazareth to be saved, and in Acts 2:38, they were baptized in the name of Jesus of Nazareth. In Acts 3:6, they received healing in the name of Jesus of Nazareth. The incidents of healing in the name of Jesus of Nazareth occur six times in the Book of Acts. Why "Jesus of Nazareth"? If we look at the book written by Josephus, a historian of Jewish history, there were many people named Jesus among the Jews at the time of Jesus. In his book, even among the leading Jewish figures, there were five people named "Jesus." There was Jesus the Scribe, and there was also Jesus from Jerusalem. There were even high priests with the name "Jesus." It is understandable that in an era dominated by Greece and Rome, the fervor of the Jews hoping for their nation's salvation led them to give their children the name "Jesus," which means "salvation" (Internet). Here, the name "Jesus Christ of Nazareth" brings what kind of healing? It brings physical healing. It refers to the healing of the lame man who was able to walk and jump (3:8). If we look at Luke 9:1-2, we will see that Jesus gave the twelve disciples the authority to drive out all demons and to cure diseases and sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal the sick. At that time, Luke reported: "So they set out and went from village to village, proclaiming the good news and healing people everywhere" (Lk. 9:6). What we need to pay attention to here is the close connection between the healing power and authority Jesus gave to the disciples and the proclamation of the gospel. In other words, in Acts 4, Peter is using the power and authority that healed the crippled man, which was given by Jesus, as an opportunity to exert strength in proclaiming the gospel and expanding the kingdom of God. The purpose of healing, then, is not an end in itself, but rather the proclamation of the gospel, the expansion of the kingdom of God.

Third and last, the name of Jesus Christ is a name that brings salvation.

Look at Acts 4:12 today: "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved." The translation in the Korean Revised Version Bible does not accurately convey the meaning. When we re-translate the Greek text, it reads, "There is no other person through whom salvation is possible; for there is no other name given to us humans under heaven by which we must absolutely be given salvation" (Yu Sang-seop).

We are currently living in an era of religious pluralism. In this era, the truth that salvation can only be obtained through the name of Jesus Christ will undoubtedly be met with criticism by the people of this age. They will criticize it as a self-righteous and arrogant doctrine, claiming that the

proclamation in today's passage that salvation can only be obtained through the name of Jesus Christ is a doctrine filled with pride and arrogance (Yoo). In this day and age, people say it doesn't matter whether you believe in Jesus or Muhammad, or even if you believe in Buddha. It's okay to believe in any religion. They believe that regardless of which religion you believe in, you can still attain salvation. Professor Sang-seop Yoo says, 'In the 21st century, Christianity will continue to face pressure from all directions in society to abandon the exclusivity of the truth of salvation. If one simply gives up the claim that salvation can only be obtained in the name of Jesus, they will not face persecution. However, if they firmly hold on to this claim, they will face all sorts of criticisms and persecution' (Yoo). However, the remarkable fact is that the gospel proclamation of obtaining salvation only through the name of Jesus Christ is bearing even greater fruit amidst persecution. The work of salvation through believing in the gospel proclaimed in the name of Jesus Christ continues to unfold. In Acts 4:4, when the apostles Peter and John proclaimed the gospel of Jesus Christ, the religious leaders disliked their proclamation (v. 2). However, the Bible says that the number of men who believed after hearing the message was about five thousand. How astonishing is this work of salvation? In Acts 2, as a result of the gospel proclamation of the apostle Peter, about three thousand were added to their number through faith (2:41). In today's passage in Acts 4, about five thousand people believed in Jesus. Ultimately, the fruit of this gospel proclamation, which began with the work of salvation in the name of Jesus Christ for the crippled man who was healed in Acts 3 and in today's passage, is astounding. When Peter commanded, "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk," the crippled man not only received physical healing to walk and leap but also received spiritual healing, which is salvation. We can see this by looking at Acts 3:8. He not only walked and leaped but also praised God. How could someone who didn't believe in Jesus praise God? A more detailed confirming verse is Acts 3:16: "By faith in the name of Jesus, this man whom you see and know was made strong. It is Jesus' name and the faith that comes through him that has completely healed him, as you can all see."

The first pastor to be martyred in Korea was Pastor Thomas, a British man. Born into a minister's family in Wales, Thomas came to Asia for missionary work at the age of 24. He first heard about Korea while in China and prepared to preach the gospel to the Korean people. When he heard that General Sherman was leaving for Korea, he boarded the ship. Upon arriving at the Daedong River, he began proclaiming the gospel to the people by the seashore, sprinkling leaflets and shouting, "Jesus, Jesus." Not knowing Korean, he simply proclaimed the gospel by calling out the name "Jesus." Unfortunately, due to the anti-foreigner policy of the Daewongun, the ship came under attack by Korean soldiers. After two weeks of fierce battles, the ship was set on fire, and people began to kill whoever they could reach. Among these soldiers was a man named Chun-geun Park. He was originally known as a ruthless person from a commoner's background. When he looked up, he saw a foreigner kneeling by the Daedong River, weeping and praying. It was Pastor Thomas. As Chun-geun Park rushed forward, Thomas saw him and shouted loudly, "Jesus, Jesus." His eyes were filled with God's love, and he wanted to share "Jesus" with the countless unfamiliar people in the Eastern land. From his embrace, he took out the Gospel of Mark and the Gospel of Luke and gave them to the soldier. However, Chun-geun Park, without accepting or rejecting them, drew his sword and struck Thomas's head forcefully.

Thomas's head rolled along the Daedong River, and at the age of 24, the young missionary had to shed his blood on foreign soil, leaving behind loving parents waiting in Wales. However, something strange happened to Chun-geun Park afterward. As the foreigner was dying, the sound of him repeatedly saying "Jesus, Jesus" began to ring in his ears. The sound became so incessant that he couldn't sleep. "Who is this Jesus that is preventing me from living?" From then on, Chun-geun Park repented and believed in Jesus. He received baptism and became a deacon. Therefore, in the 1860s and 1870s, he became one of the first deacons in the Korean church. Many pastors among his descendants were subsequently raised up (Internet).

Living today because of my resurrected Lord,

James Kim

(Thinking of the name of Jesus Christ, who brings salvation)

There is Nothing They Can Say.

[Acts 4:3-22]

When you read the column by Yong Deok Song titled 'Keumja's Word Thrown Towards the World, 'You Do It Well!,' you'll find the following text written: Keumja in the movie 'Kind Keumja' closed the mouths of the world with even mightier words. After serving 13 years of unjust imprisonment, Keumja was released, and in front of her appeared the church pastor holding tofu. The pastor, with a smile amidst the church volunteer band's performance, probably expected such words to come out of Keumja's mouth. 'Pastor, thank you so much. The reason I didn't lose hope even in the hellish prison for 13 years is solely thanks to you, Pastor. From now on, with deep faith, I will pray and serve for the suffering and marginalized neighbors.' This single letter is a 'priceless word' that is not to be discarded. However, Keumja threw this short sentence to the pastor, and to the world, in a calm tone like 'Speak softly.' 'You do it well!' This quoted phrase was seen in the column published in 'Christian Today' (January 12, 2006) under the 'Editorial Column.' In the content of the article, there is a statement like this: 'You should do well in your churches.' Of course, considering the dialogue 'You do it well!' from the movie 'Kind Keumja,' it seems that the written words are not incorrect. Pastor Chansu Ahn of the Citizen's Church, who wrote this column, mentions that there are two functions of the church in bearing the role of salt in the world. One is to create a good taste, that is, 'missionary work and evangelism of spreading the gospel,' and this is thought to be done well with full effort and capacity. However, the problem lies in the other function of salt, which is 'preventing corruption.' In this regard, each believer in the world is weak and indifferent in demonstrating honesty and diligence, which are the energies of preventing corruption, while living in the world. As a result, now people in the world are saying to us, 'You do it well!'

The members of the Sanhedrin mentioned in today's passage Acts 4:3-22 are said in the Bible to be 'astonished and unable to say anything' toward the apostles Peter and John (v. 14). In other words, the religious leaders were speechless when they saw the disciples of Jesus, Peter and John. So today, under the title "There is nothing they can say," we want to consider three ways in which we can make people in the world to be speechless:

First, in order to make people in the world speechless, we must present undeniable evidence.

Look at Acts 4:16 – “What are we going to do with these men?’ they asked. Everybody living in Jerusalem knows they have done an outstanding miracle, and we cannot deny it.” The religious leaders disliked Peter and John for healing the crippled man, so they had them arrested and the next day, the rulers, elders, and teachers of the law gathered in Jerusalem (v. 5) and questioned Peter and John, asking, “By what power or what name did you do this?” (v. 7). Boldly, Peter declared, “It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed” (v. 10). At this, the members of the Sanhedrin had nothing to say. In other words, they were left speechless. What was the reason for this? There were three reasons (Park):

(1) It was because Peter and John, whom they originally considered uneducated criminals, spoke without hesitation (v. 13).

Since Peter and John did not attend Rabbinical school nor receive Rabbinical education, the members of the Sanhedrin were astonished to see them speak boldly.

(2) It was because they knew that Peter and John had been with Jesus (v. 13).

In other words, the fact that the disciples had been under the guidance of Jesus allowed them to boldly argue their case.

(3) It was because the man who had been lame and was now standing with Peter and John was a clear testament to the miracle (v. 14).

The undeniable evidence of the man who had been lame and was now standing with Peter and John left the members of the Sanhedrin speechless. Furthermore, since this miracle had become a famous sign known to everyone in Jerusalem, how could the religious leaders deny the work of God's healing? Where else could such irrefutable evidence be found?

In an article about the DNA test results of a death row inmate from 13 years ago titled 'DNA Test Results of Death Row Inmate 13 Years Ago 'Guilty'', it is written: "The DNA test results, conducted to determine the innocence of Roger Coleman, a death row inmate who had claimed his innocence until the moment of his execution 13 years ago, have shown that the guilty verdict at the time was correct. Coleman was sentenced to death in 1982 after being accused of the rape and murder of his sister-in-law, Wanda McCoy, who was 19 years old at the time. He continued to assert his innocence even up until his execution in May of 1992. The spokesperson for Virginia Governor Mark Warner, who ordered the DNA test, explained that the DNA from the analyzed evidence matched that of the perpetrator and that

'the probability of randomly selected DNA matching the evidence is 1 in 19 million.' Accordingly, the controversy surrounding Coleman's innocence, who was sentenced to death the following year for the alleged rape and murder of his 19-year-old sister-in-law in 1981, and whose sentence was carried out, has now been laid to rest. If Coleman's innocence were to be proven in this test, it was observed that it would become the first case in the United States where a death row inmate who had been executed was found innocent, potentially sparking a surge in the movement to abolish the death penalty. To use DNA test results as evidence in court: DNA test results can be used as evidence in court with an accuracy of 99.99% (Internet). After reading this article, I thought about what undeniable evidence, similar to DNA, we as Christians should show to people. I believe it is the life of Jesus Christ. In other words, if we live out the life of Jesus Christ in this world, people will have nothing to say against us. To put it the other way around, if we do not live out the life of Jesus Christ, our spiritual DNA, people in the world will have many criticisms of us. As an example, in Acts 2:13, on the day of Pentecost, when the 120 disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit, people mocked them. In other words, when churchgoers are seen getting drunk, unbelievers will have plenty to criticize.

As Christians, we must make the people of the world speechless when they see our lives. Look at Titus 2:7-8: "In everything set them an example by doing what is good. In your teaching show integrity, seriousness and soundness of speech that cannot be condemned, so that those who oppose you may be ashamed because they have nothing bad to say about us." In everything set them an example by doing what is good. In your teaching show integrity, seriousness and soundness of speech that cannot be condemned, so that those who oppose you may be ashamed because they have nothing bad to say about us. To do this, we need to diligently strive to become more like Jesus.

Second, in order to make people in the world speechless, we must speak of what we have seen and heard.

Look at Acts 4:20 – "For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard." The members of the Sanhedrin were left speechless because, through undeniable evidence, the healing of the man who had been lame and was now standing with Peter and John had become known to everyone living in Jerusalem (v. 16). In the face of such evidence, Peter and John were questioned but threatened not to speak in the name of Jesus Christ to anyone (v. 17) and not to teach at all (v. 18). To this, Peter and John responded, "Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God's sight to obey you rather than God. For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard" (vv. 19-20). If, in the face of such threats, we do not speak of what we have seen and heard, what will happen? Perhaps there will be no persecution. There may be no suffering. However, as true witnesses of Jesus, if we hide the truth under external threats, we should feel a sufficient burden on our conscience. Yet it seems that as Christians, we do not feel this burden of conscience enough while living in hiding of the truth. In situations where the truth is threatened, we lack the compelling spirit and passion to speak the truth. Dr. Yoon Seon Park said, 'It is the most foolish act to try to block the truth with threats. The more the truth is threatened, the more it spreads. ... A conscience that moves according to truth and reality is unstoppable. Anyone who

stifles their conscience from moving in accordance with truth is, in effect, choking the agency of God's word. It is a terrible evil akin to suicide, and the result is destruction' (Park).

Peter and John, under the threat not to speak the truth in the name of Jesus anymore and not to teach, could not help but speak of what they had seen and heard. Clearly, as witnesses who had seen the once crippled man, now standing and walking, in the name of Jesus Christ, they could not yield to the threats of the religious leaders. How did Peter and John have this irresistible passion for the gospel? It can be considered in a few ways:

(1) They lived "in the sight of God."

A person who lives before people can easily succumb to human threats. However, a true believer who lives before God fears God more than people, and therefore does not compromise to human threats.

(2) Because they lived before God, they sought to hear God's word more eagerly than the words of people.

This is truly precious faith. We live a life of faith that requires challenging training. As we live among people, we must confess with praise that there is no greater joy than hearing the voice of the invisible God, apart from the voices of visible people. How difficult is this!

(3) They had sound judgment.

Peter and John clearly knew what was right and wrong. Those who live before God develop sound judgment. Therefore, they make right decisions within that judgment.

(4) They had courage.

Because of their courage, even in the face of threats from religious leaders, they boldly declared that they could not help but speak about what they had seen and heard. The determination and will to live a life of witness without yielding even in the face of threats is nothing short of true courage. As witnesses of Jesus, we need the courage to speak about what we have seen and heard. Even if there are threats and persecutions in this world that prevent us from speaking God's truth, we must be the ones who live alongside truth, ready to die with truth.

We can say that Peter and John were witnesses or eyewitnesses. Professor Hoon-taek Jung from Chongshin University said, 'The Christian leaders who initially led the church were limited to being actual disciples of Jesus who had directly met him, witnessed his activities, and heard his teachings.

They were distinguished as witnesses' (Internet). Indeed, when we look at Luke 1:2 in the Gospel of Luke, the term "eyewitnesses of the word" is mentioned. The author of Luke is referring to the eyewitnesses of the word because of the reliability of his own testimony. Whether then or now, the testimony of eyewitnesses is recognized as the highest authority in court. Therefore, authors used the verification of eyewitnesses as the ultimate validation for the credibility of their testimonies (Internet). We are the eyewitnesses of the word. Although we, like Peter and John, did not see Jesus with our own eyes or hear his voice, the Holy Spirit dwelling within us enables us to see Jesus in our hearts through the Scriptures and hear Him with our spiritual ears. From that perspective, we can say that we are witnesses or eyewitnesses of Jesus. So, what is the role of an eyewitness? It is to testify to what we have seen. In other words, we must speak about what we have seen and heard. When we do so, people in the world will have no accusations against us. If they do have accusations against us, one of the reasons might be that we do not conduct ourselves as witnesses of the word, even though we are not eyewitnesses in the literal sense.

Third and last, in order to make people in the world speechless, we must give glory to God.

Look at Acts 4:21 – “After further threats they let them go. They could not decide how to punish them, because all the people were praising God for what had happened.” Here, we can see that the members of the Sanhedrin were more afraid of the people than of God. The man who had been crippled for 40 years and was now walking in the name of Jesus of Nazareth (v. 22) became a sign known to all the people living in Jerusalem (v. 16). When the religious leaders saw that the people had witnessed this miracle and were giving glory to God, they couldn't find a way to punish Peter and John. Instead, they resorted to threats and eventually let them go. The religious leaders, despite witnessing the formerly lame man standing with Peter and John, chose to threaten them rather than give glory to God. On the other hand, all the people of Jerusalem, after witnessing the miracle, gave glory to God. Here, we can discern who was facing accusations. It was the religious leaders, who, because of the people glorifying God, had no choice but to resort to threats against Peter and John. In other words, their response to the sign was to give glory to God. They couldn't do otherwise. It exposed the darkness of the religious leaders' actions, as they chose to obscure the glory of God instead of giving Him the praise He deserved.

When the glory of God enters, we should give glory to God so that people in the world have no accusations against us. In particular, I thought of Matthew 5:16: "In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven." As children of God's light, if we live a life that reflects the light of Jesus, and if we shine His light through our good deeds, people will glorify God, just as all the people in today's passage saw the miraculous sign through Peter and John and praised God. Let us all heed the word of God spoken through the apostle Peter: "Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us" (1 Pet. 2:12).

Seeking to live a life solely for the glory of God,

James Kim

(Seeking to live a life solely for the glory of God, as genuine Christians)

The Way the Lord Builds His church

[Acts 4:19-20]

I have gained insight through studying Acts chapter 4 during the church leadership Bible study session. The revelation I received is regarding how the Lord established His church (referred to as the early church). However, what surprised me is that the pattern of how our churches are being established in this current age seems to be the opposite. I identified the pattern of how the Lord established the early church in five steps, which I have named the "Top to Bottom Method": (1) Prayer (v. 31, see also 1:14-15), (2) Being filled with the Holy Spirit (vv. 8, 31), (3) Proclamation of the gospel (vv. 8-12), (4) Increase in believers (v. 4, see also 2:47), (5) Loving community (vv. 32-37). However, I believe that the methods of the world are the exact opposite, which I have called the "Bottom to Top Method." I compared the world's methods with God's methods:

(1) Church:

In the priority of the Lord's method, being filled with the Holy Spirit comes first, but in the world's method, the emphasis is on the community of the church. While efforts are made to have one heart and one mind within the church, observing the many churches nowadays striving to establish themselves with various minds and purposes, I cannot confidently say that this aligns with God's way.

(2) Number of congregants:

The second worldly method seems to prioritize the increase in the number of church members. It is concerning to see that it might not be about people hearing the gospel and being saved, but rather about an increase in congregants due to horizontal shifts or even "sheep stealing," as described in the book 'The Sheep Thief.'

(3) Evangelism/Mission:

The third method is reluctantly engaging in evangelism and mission.

(4) Being Filled with the Holy Spirit:

Only at the fourth step do I think the seeking of being filled with the Holy Spirit comes into play. Despite it being the foremost priority, the world's approach places it at the very end.

(5) Prayer:

Even in our prayers, it often seems that we cry out more with a perspective focused on our situation, feelings, and thoughts, rather than acknowledging God's sovereignty, holding onto His promises, and praying with a posture of recognizing His authority.

Today, I fervently pray that all of us would humbly participate in the Lord's work of establishing the church, following His method. I earnestly hope that we may all be used as instruments of the Lord in His work of building His church.

First and foremost, the way the Lord establishes the church is through prayer.

Look at Acts 4:31 - "After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly." After Peter and John were released, they went to their own people and reported everything the chief priests and the elders had said to them. When they heard this, they raised their voices together in prayer to God (vv. 23-24). As we observe the united prayer of the early church saints, we encounter several challenges:

(1) Recognizing God's sovereignty as the starting point for prayer.

Look at Acts 4:24 - "Sovereign Lord, you made the heavens and the earth and the sea, and everything in them." The term "Sovereign Lord" acknowledges God's absolute authority over all creation. Even in the midst of trials and tribulations, recognizing God's sovereignty and praying in this manner demonstrates a precious foundation of faith.

(2) Clinging to the promises of God's Word in prayer.

Look at Acts 4:25-26: "You spoke by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of your servant, our father David: 'Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth take their stand

and the rulers gather together against the Lord and against his Anointed One.” The author of Acts, Luke, quotes Psalms 2:1-2, showing the fulfillment of this prophecy in Acts 4:27-28: "Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed. They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen." This emphasizes the importance of holding onto the promises of God's word in our prayers.

(3) Praying for the fulfillment of God's will.

Look at Acts 4:29-30: “Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. Stretch out your hand to heal and perform miraculous signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus.” The phrase "Now, Lord, consider their threats" signifies a plea for the actions of persecutors to ultimately serve God's purposes, particularly in the proclamation of the Gospel, as salvation is found only through the name of Jesus (v. 12). So, what were the results of this prayer?

(a) They experienced God's intervention.

Acts 4:31 states: "After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken" This shaking was a sign of God's presence (Lk. 21:26; Acts 16:26; Heb. 12:26-27; Ps. 114:7; Isa. 6:4).

(b) All the gathered believers were filled with the Holy Spirit.

Acts 4:31 states: "...they were all filled with the Holy Spirit..."

(c) They boldly proclaimed the word of God.

Look at Acts 4:31 from today's passage: "...And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly."

Just as there were adversaries who persecuted Jesus, there were also adversaries who persecuted the apostles. As disciples of Jesus, we, too, face adversaries, both internally and externally. However, this reality prompts us to pray. When we pray, we must acknowledge God's sovereignty and cling to the promises He has given us in His word. Furthermore, we should pray for the fulfillment of God's will in spreading the Gospel for the salvation of souls.

Second, the method by which the Lord establishes the church is through being filled with the Holy Spirit.

Look at Acts 4:31 and verse 8 – “After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly” (4:31), “Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them...” (v. 8). The early church leaders, who were the apostles, faced persecutors. These persecutors were internal adversaries, including religious leaders (priests, temple officials, Sadducees in verse 1), and external adversaries, which included Gentiles and peoples of Israel (nations, peoples in verse 25), as well as earthly rulers and officials (kings, rulers in verse 26). I believe that the situation is not much different today. There are external adversaries who oppose the church, as well as internal adversaries who hinder and make it difficult to establish the church. In Acts 4, we see the internal adversaries, the religious leaders, who summoned the apostles because they were displeased with the teaching of the resurrection of the dead through Jesus (v. 2). At that moment, Peter was filled with the Holy Spirit (v. 8). Here, we must keep in mind a significant fact: when establishing His church, the Lord allows the filling of the Holy Spirit, who is from the Lord Himself. This means that only with the filling of the Holy Spirit from the Lord can the church be established.

So, what does a life filled with the Holy Spirit look like? In Acts 4:1-20, we can identify three aspects:

(1) A life filled with the Holy Spirit is a courageous life.

In other words, someone filled with the Holy Spirit is a courageous person. When Peter was filled with the Holy Spirit and proclaimed the gospel of Jesus Christ, the religious leaders, who persecuted other apostles, saw him speaking boldly and were astonished, thinking of him as an uneducated offender (v. 13).

(2) A life filled with the Holy Spirit is a life lived before God.

Look at Acts 4:19: "... Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God's sight to obey you rather than God."

(3) A person living a life filled with the Holy Spirit lives with confidence.

In Acts 4:20, Peter and John say, "we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard." They had confidence because they spoke based on what they had seen and heard. In order for the church to be established, all of us need to be filled with the Holy Spirit. Therefore, we must live lives of courage, lives lived before God, and lives of confidence.

Third, the way the Lord establishes the church is through proclaiming the gospel.

Apostle Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, boldly proclaimed before the religious leaders that

salvation can be found only in the name of Jesus Christ (v. 12). Look at Acts 4:10 – “ then know this, you and all the people of Israel: It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed.” Here, Peter mentions both the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. He declares that even though the religious leaders had crucified Jesus, God raised him from the dead. He repeats to the religious leaders what he had previously said to the people after the healing of a man with a disability and at Pentecost (2:36; 3:15). The religious leaders threatened Peter and John, saying, "do not speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus" (v. 18), just as they had persecuted the apostles for speaking in the name of Jesus. They despised Jesus' name because they did not understand the mystery and love contained within it, and they tried to forbid the apostles from speaking to anyone about it (v. 17). However, for Peter and John, the name of Jesus was a name engraved on their hearts, a precious gem, a hidden joy, Jesus, oh that name, I cannot speak it, the mystery of that name, the love of that name. This is why Peter told the beggar at the temple gate in Acts 3:6, "Silver or gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk."

Fourth, the way the Lord establishes the church is by increasing the number of believers.

Look at Acts 4:4 - "But many who heard the message believed; so the number of men who believed grew to about five thousand." The fact that the number of men who believed after hearing the apostles' preaching reached about five thousand is closely connected to the miracle of Jesus feeding five thousand men with five loaves and two fish. In these two events, there are at least three similarities: (1) The appearance of five thousand people (Lk. 9:14, Acts 4:4), (2) The fact that all the crowds heard the message (Lk. 9:11 and Acts 4:4), (3) There was a miraculous healing before the event (Lk. 9:11 and Acts 3:1-10). The author, in presenting the feeding of the five thousand by the apostles as a form of the gospel that needed to be spread to the people, records the five thousand people who were saved by partaking in the form of the word from the apostles. This is by no means a coincidence. The core of the feeding of the five thousand is that Jesus, who becomes the bread of life, was divided among the people through the crucifixion, giving them the gift of eternal life (salvation). The number of men who received salvation increased to about five thousand through the apostles' preaching (v. 4). In Acts 2:47, the Bible says, "And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved." Just as this verse says, in Acts 4, we see that many who heard the message believed, and the number of men grew to about five thousand. We may not be able to increase the number of church members, but the lesson here is that only the Lord can add those who are saved.

Fifth and last, the way the Lord establishes the church is through a community of love.

Look at Acts 4:32-35: “All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had. With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and much grace was upon them all. There were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the money from the

sales and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone as he had need." It shows a similar pattern to the communal life of the Jerusalem church recorded in Acts 2:42-47. This indicates that the communal life depicted in Acts 2 was not temporary but a continuous practice. If Acts 2 describes the lifestyle of the three thousand believers who believed and were saved on the day of Pentecost, then Acts 4, which we read today, portrays the lives of five thousand new believers who believed after hearing Peter's preaching (4:4). The remarkable fact is that they all became like one person (v. 32). In other words, they became of one heart and mind. Because the five thousand people became like one person, everything they did was like the actions of one person. The concrete evidence of this fact is the communal life of sharing possessions among them. None of them claimed that their possessions were their own, but they shared everything (v. 32). This does not mean relinquishing personal property rights, but it means that they retained their property rights intact and allowed the church to dispose and use their possessions as needed (since there were still needy saints among them).

In short, it can be said that the way the Lord establishes the church is a "top-down" approach, meaning the church is established because the Lord initiates it. However, we must reflect on whether the world's methods of trying to establish the church are not the exact opposite. That is, as Christians, we should consider whether we are trying to establish the Lord's body, the church, in the way of "bottom-up." As we look at today's church, let us think about what the Lord is thinking, and let us earnestly pray that the Lord will establish His body, the church, in His way, for He has promised to do so (Mt. 16:18).

Serving the church, which is the body of the Lord established by the Lord,

James Kim

(In the way of the Lord, not the ways of the world)

Let's Pray Together with One Accord!

[Acts 4:23-31]

A faithful daughter-in-law lived under constant persecution from her unbelieving mother-in-law for her faith in Jesus. However, through tearful prayers for her mother-in-law's soul and singing hymn "Yield not to Temptation," she found comfort. One day, members of the church went to preach the gospel to her mother-in-law together. 'Grandma, believe in Jesus and come out to the church. Your daughter-in-law is praying for you with tears.' 'That's all just a show. I followed her secretly when she went to pray, and all she did was sing a song about overcoming me.' A surprised pastor asked her: 'What song was it?' 'Uh... something like... 'You, don't be discouraged by trials, gather your courage and overcome, gain new strength by overcoming trials~' (Internet). This anecdote brings a smile through the misunderstanding of praise by the mother-in-law, despite the daughter-in-law's earnest prayer and hymn. Do you remember the chorus of hymn "Yield not to Temptation," "Look ever to Jesus, He'll carry you through. Ask the Savior to help you, Comfort, strengthen and keep you; He is willing to aid you, He will carry you through." When tears flow, pray earnestly, persecuted daughter-in-law. She somehow reminds me of Hannah in 1 Samuel 1. Unable to bear a child, Hannah, who faced persecution from Peninnah, her husband Elkanah's other wife (1 Sam. 1:6-7), was deeply distressed and prayed to the Lord and wept bitterly (v. 10).

Lately, I want to be like Hannah, praying to God with the anguish in my heart. There are two things I can think about: (1) I want to have the anguish in my heart for my beloved brothers and sisters in Christ who are going through difficult and painful times around me, and I pray that the tears of my prayers will not dry up. (2) When I pray for myself, I want to have the anguish in my heart as I discover my own shortcomings, unlike the likeness of the Lord. Besides these two, I want to gather with one heart and one mind, just like all of us strive to do as in Acts 1, and pray with anguish and weep together. Therefore, I earnestly pray that we all become those who boldly proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ, filled with the Holy Spirit, just like the early church saints.

In Acts 4:23, we see the early church saints praying together with one accord to God. I wonder what they prayed with one accord. Meditating on what they prayed with one accord, let us also pray together with one accord to God, taking their prayer topics as our own.

First, we must pray together with one accord, ‘Lord, help us not to conspire against Jesus!’

Look at Acts 4:27 – “Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed.” D

The members of the Sanhedrin had nothing to say in opposition to Peter and John (v. 14) and could not find a way to punish them. So, after merely threatening them, they let them go (v. 21). Freed, Peter and John went to their companions and relayed the warnings and threats from the chief priests and elders not to preach or teach in the name of Jesus (v. 23) (Yoo). Here, who are the "companions" of Peter and John referring to? Scholars are not certain whether this term refers only to the apostles, or includes a subgroup that consists of both apostles and others, or even encompasses the entire church (Yoo). Dr. Yoon-seon Park interpreted it as referring to the "apostles," while Professor Sang-seop Yoo interpreted it as referring to the "people who came to believe in God through the healing incident." What is important here? The key fact is that these "companions" of Peter and John were, in a word, prayer partners. Just as we have seen in Acts 2:42, the early church saints, who believed in Jesus after hearing Peter's preaching, were dedicated to prayer, just like the companions of Peter and John were praying for them before their release. This pattern can also be seen in Acts 12:5, where it says, "So Peter was kept in prison, but the church was earnestly praying to God for him." Dr. Yoon-seon Park stated, ‘Believers in persecution gain strength by contacting and communicating with each other and overcome difficult trials. Their concerted prayer is a precious thing’ (Park).

When the companions of Peter and John heard everything that had happened and reported it to their fellow believers, they raised their voices together in prayer to God (v. 24). Among the contents of their united prayer were three main points:

(1) They prayed to the Creator God, who is the object of their prayer.

Look at Acts 4:24 - "When they heard this, they raised their voices together in prayer to God. 'Sovereign Lord,' they said, 'you made the heavens and the earth and the sea, and everything in them.'" Here, the term "Sovereign Lord" signifies the acknowledgment that God, the one who created everything, holds absolute sovereignty and rules over all. Therefore, the prayer partners of Peter and John, even in the face of imprisonment and persecution for proclaiming the gospel, recognize that it was all under the absolute sovereignty of God. This prayer is a prayer that acknowledges "Who is my God?" and can only be offered in faith.

- (2) The content of their prayer confesses that the prophecy of Psalms 2:1-2, which is quoted in Acts 4:25-26, has been fulfilled.

Look at Psalms 2:1-2: "Why do the nations conspire and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth rise up and the rulers band together against the Lord and against his anointed." Here, the "nations" and "peoples" refer respectively to the Gentiles and the people of Israel, and the "kings of the earth" and "rulers" (v. 26) refer to Herod and Pontius Pilate. From this perspective, the prophecy of Psalms 2:1-2 has already been fulfilled through the suffering of Jesus.

- (3) The prayer partners of Peter and John, while praying earnestly to God the Sovereign Lord in unity, confess together that the prophecy of Psalms 2:1-2 has been and is being fulfilled not only through Jesus but also through Peter and John.

Look at Acts 4:29 - "Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness." Here, "they" refers to the Sanhedrin council, the opposing force against Christ, which included Herod and Pontius Pilate (Yoo). The word "threats" is used again in verse 17 and verse 21 to describe the intimidation used by the council against the apostles, thus showing how the prayer partners of Peter and John demonstrate that the prophecy of Psalms 2:1-2 is being fulfilled and has been fulfilled under the sovereignty of God. One interesting point to note in this prayer is verse 27. It reveals that while the companions of Peter and John are united in prayer to God the Sovereign Lord, acknowledging that the prophecy of Psalms 2:1-2 has been and is being fulfilled under the sovereignty of God, Herod and Pontius Pilate, anointed by God, have allied themselves with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in opposition to Jesus and His disciples. In other words, the disciples of Jesus pray together in unity, while those opposing them join forces against Jesus and His disciples. What's remarkable is that this united opposition against Jesus was also predestined by God. Look at Acts 4:28 - "They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen." Here, we learn an important lesson: United Opposition → United Prayer → United Success. Romans 8:28 says, "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose." Therefore, we must refrain from words and actions that oppose Jesus and His Church. Instead, we should gather together and, in unity, pray to God, saying, 'Lord, do not let us oppose You, the Sovereign Lord,' 'Do not let us oppose the Church, Your body,' 'Do not let us oppose the expansion of Your kingdom.' Rather, we should pray together, with one accord, "Sovereign Lord, fulfill Your sovereign will.

Second, we should pray together with one accord, 'Lord, enable your

servants to speak Your word with great boldness!'

Look at Acts 4:29 - "Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness." The prayer partners of Peter and John are praying together with one accord to God, asking Him to put a stop to the threatening actions being carried out through Jewish religious leaders like Herod and Pilate. In other words, they are praying for immediate intervention from God, as the multitude opposing Jesus is uniting to resist Him and His disciples (Yoo). Professor Sang-seop Yoo states: 'Behind this prayer is the request for God to use Herod and Pilate as instruments to fulfill His predetermined will, just as He did with other opposition and threats from the Sanhedrin, and to turn them into something beneficial for the Church. In the content of this prayer, we see that the Church understands their difficult reality in light of the Scriptures and, based on this understanding, they pray to God. The prayer combines a precise understanding of reality, an understanding of the fulfillment of Scripture, and earnest supplication' (Yoo).

Are we offering such united prayers now? Do we truly understand our challenging reality in light of the Scriptures? Are we fervently praying in faith, using our understanding of the fulfillment of Scripture? Even when faced with various difficulties, are we praying together in faith, understanding these challenges in light of the Scriptures? We must pray together with one accord. The entire church must pray earnestly together. Regardless of what difficulties may arise, just as there were crowds that united to oppose Jesus, there may be opposition when going to the servants of the Lord or even when going to the mission field. However, we must believe that it is within God's plan and, with united supplication to God, we should ask Him, "Lord, enable your servants to speak Your word with great boldness." This was the fourth prayer topic of Peter and John's prayer partners. They prayed together with one accord for the ministry of the Word. Pastor Campbell Morgan said: '... they did not pray for the cessation of their enemies' persecution, nor did they pray to be delivered from it. On the contrary, they prayed for the power to continue their preaching activities that had provoked the enmity of their enemies' (Morgan). According to Professor Yoo: 'They did not pray to remove the difficult reality, but rather, in the face of such adversity, they prayed for even greater boldness in carrying out the mission of proclaiming the Word' (Yoo). This, I believe, is mature prayer. When a child is in pain, they might cry out to their parents to remove the pain. However, a mature child, in pain, does not demand their parents to remove it. Instead, they will strive to bear the responsibility entrusted to them, even with the pain. The prayer partners of the apostles Peter and John, having heard of their suffering and persecution, did not complain, blaming the reality that it was difficult to preach the gospel. Instead, they prayed with one accord, asking God to grant them even greater boldness to proclaim the gospel, despite the threats that said otherwise.

Faith is accepting the difficult reality of pain and hardship while kneeling down. From this perspective, our challenging reality is an opportunity for prayer. Being able to seek God's help in the midst of pain and suffering is a blessing. Dr. Park mentioned three benefits the church gains when evildoers persecute it: (1) True saints are revealed; (2) True saints become united; (3) True saints

undergo refinement to become even more pure (Park). What should we remember when the church is persecuted by evildoers? Firstly, we must continue to do good to the very end. We should not pray in anger, resentment, or pride. Secondly, we should pray not for the removal of persecution for the sake of physical peace, but rather, we should pray for the victory of the gospel. How were Peter and John, along with their prayer partners, able to pray with such boldness in the face of religious leaders' threats (v. 29)? It was due to being filled with the Holy Spirit. After the Holy Spirit descended at Pentecost in Acts 2, we see Peter in Acts 2:29 saying, "Brothers, I can tell you confidently about the patriarch David..." And in Acts 4:13, we see Peter and John being perceived as "unschooled, ordinary men" by the religious leaders, yet speaking boldly. Peter was never naturally bold. He was the one who denied Jesus in front of a servant girl. However, after receiving the infilling of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2, he was transformed. He went from being afraid of persecution to fearing God. He became captivated by the gospel of Jesus Christ and transformed into a person of courageous faith who boldly proclaimed the gospel even in the midst of persecution. The souls who, sitting at Solomon's Colonnade, witnessed the miraculous healing of the crippled beggar and gathered to hear the gospel from Peter, believed in Jesus. They prayed with one accord for the same boldness as Peter and John, so they could boldly proclaim the gospel.

What should we do? Like Peter and John, we should pray together with one accord for the ability to boldly proclaim the gospel, even in the midst of persecution. We must remember that our boldness does not come from ourselves, but from God. Look at 2 Corinthians 3:4-5: "Such confidence (boldness) we have through Christ before God. Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God."

Third and last, we should pray together with one accord, 'Let miracles be performed in the name of Jesus!'

Look at Acts 4:30 - "Stretch out your hand to heal and perform signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus." Here, in the phrase "Stretch out your hand," the term "hand" refers to "Your hand," which has already been mentioned in verse 28 in the Korean Bible, referring to the "power of God." The prayer partners of Peter and John are now praying together with one accord, asking for the manifestation of God's power through healing and other miracles. The purpose of this prayer is not just for healing or miracles in themselves, but rather, it is to pray for miracles with the intention that the preaching of the gospel may be even more effective. As Dr. Park puts it, 'This prayer was for the manifestation of miracles, not for the sake of miracles themselves, but for the purpose of aiding the spread of the gospel' (Park).

In John 4:48, Jesus spoke about human nature, saying: "... unless you people see signs and wonders, you will never believe." As Jesus stated, both in His time and in our present time, people, whether they are Jews or us living in this era, are not inclined to believe in Jesus and His gospel without witnessing signs and miracles. That's why many people have followed after signs, wonders, and

miracles. Look at Matthew 12:38-39: "Then some of the Pharisees and teachers of the law said to him, 'Teacher, we want to see a sign from you.' He answered, 'A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a sign! But none will be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah.'" God is more pleased with those who seek the truth, which is God's word (the Bible), than with those who seek signs, wonders, and miracles. He is searching for those who seek the truth (Jere. 5:1). When you seek the truth first (Jn. 17:17, God's word = the Bible) and strive to live according to the truth, signs, wonders, and miracles will naturally follow (Jn. 14:12, Mk. 16:20). The Word of God (the truth = the Bible) should not be ignored, avoided, or kept at a distance, and seeking only signs, wonders, and miracles is never right. Those believers who, instead of seeking the truth that God desires (the Bible), seek pastors who heal and perform miracles, asking for signs, wonders, and miracles while following them, are unrighteous church members belonging to an evil and adulterous generation, similar to scribes and Pharisees. They will definitely not enter the kingdom of heaven (Internet). Among the miracles, the greatest miracle is when a person hears the gospel and accepts Jesus as their Savior and Lord. Look at John 6:29 - "... the work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent" Can humans do the work of God? Believing in Jesus is doing the work of God. But can it be done according to our human will? Absolutely not. In Ephesians 2:8-9, it is stated that even faith itself is a gift from God. Therefore, believing in Jesus is the greatest miracle among miracles. It is only possible through the grace of God.

What happened when Peter, John, and their prayer partners prayed together with one accord? What was the result of their unified prayer? Look at Acts 4:31 - "After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly." Professor Yoo mentions four phenomena:

(1) The place where the saints gathered shook.

The temporary shaking of that place confirms God's supernatural intervention and presence. Just as the earth shook when God descended on Mount Sinai, God's powerful intervention was manifested through the shaking of the place where they gathered.

(2) All the gathered saints were filled with the Holy Spirit.

This implies that the purpose of God shaking the place where they gathered was to fill them powerfully with the Holy Spirit.

(3) As a result of being filled with the Holy Spirit, all the saints spoke the word of God boldly.

This shows that the boldness given to Apostle Peter was not exclusive to him but was extended to all the saints who gathered, as a result of being filled with the Holy Spirit.

(4) God responded to prayers for healing and miracles.

The works of healing and miracles were not only given to the apostles (Acts 5:12-16), but even to laypeople like Stephen and Philip (6:8; 8:4-7). The miracles that were previously manifested only through the apostles before the united prayer in this chapter began to occur through ordinary believers after this prayer, showing that God responded to the united prayer of the church (Yoo).

Receiving the grace of salvation, the greatest miracle among miracles,

James Kim

(Wishing to love the Lord with one accord)

Joint Operation, United Prayer, Collective Success

[Acts 4:23-32]

As I meditate on Acts 4:23-32, I've gained insight into the following:

First, Satan employs a "joint operation" in attacking us.

Look at Acts 4:27 - "Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed." Just as Herod and Pontius Pilate conspired against Jesus, the enemies of Jesus, here the members of the Sanhedrin who opposed the apostles Peter and John in Acts 4, also conspired together. Likewise, as disciples of Jesus, we experience joint attacks from Satan and his forces.

At times, we encounter difficult and challenging situations in life. It may feel as if everything is falling apart, much like Job's experience, where he lost all his possessions, his children, and even his health. Though we may not face such extreme trials all at once, it often seems that Satan brings severe trials and difficulties into our lives simultaneously.

Satan's joint operation against us signifies the collaboration of malevolent spiritual forces in the world, united in their effort to sway the hearts of us Christians. This is especially evident in a time where a famine of hearing the Word of God, akin to what Amos prophesied, has become a reality. Due to this lack of knowledge about God, we find ourselves ill-prepared to resist the joint operation of Satan. Our understanding of Scripture, which is the sharp sword of the Spirit, often remains dull. Thus, we become vulnerable and easily entangled in various sins of speech, action, and thought.

Second, the right response of us Christians to Satan's joint operation is "united prayer."

Look at Acts 4:24 - "When they heard this, they raised their voices together in prayer to God." The prayer partners of Peter and John heard their testimony, and together, in one accord, they prayed to God. Their prayer began not with complaints, murmurs, or requests for help, but with a confession acknowledging the sovereignty of the Creator God. In other words, their prayer began by acknowledging God as the ultimate Sovereign.

In Psalms 18:1-2, we see David initiating his prayer by confessing God's sovereignty. This is how we should begin our prayers. To do so, we need to ask ourselves, "Who is God?" and declare God's sovereignty, as spoken of in the Bible, with our lips and hearts. In Acts 4, we witness that the prayer partners of Peter and John started their united prayer in this manner. It's truly a marvelous work of the Holy Spirit. When saints in the church pray together in unity with their pastor, they should begin their prayer by confessing God's sovereignty.

Third and last, when we respond to Satan's joint operation with united prayer, we experience the blessing of "collective success."

Look at Acts 4:28 - "They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen." In other words, the suffering and persecution experienced by Jesus, as well as His disciples like Peter and John, were all part of God's preordained plan.

Just as Jesus and His disciples, including us as His followers, have hardships and trials, the joint operation of Satan is also within God's sovereign plan. Ultimately, our God, who works all things together for good (Rom. 8:28), is the One who orchestrates everything for His purpose. In the end, God allows us to experience success and blessing by working everything together.

Saints who have tasted this blessing do not fear Satan's joint operation. Instead, they view it as an opportunity for united prayer. Through experiencing collective success in such situations, they come to know and experience God's sovereignty more deeply in their lives. They grow as a people who acknowledge God's sovereignty, revere Him, and walk in righteousness.

With a heart filled with gratitude for my God who works all things together for good, I pray that this blessing may also be present in the lives of me and many others.

In the grace of my God who orchestrates all things for good,

James Kim

(Recognizing the need for united prayer)

Life of Sharing

[Acts 4:32-37]

There is a commonly heard saying that there are three types of people: those who are absolutely necessary, those who are of little consequence, and those who are better off absent. How can we limit people to these three categories? Nevertheless, it is necessary to reflect on this at least once. Which category do we currently belong to? In order to bring hope to the world, to give love to the world, to share with the world, we must become the person who is needed. How noble and beautiful would our lives be if the world could brighten even a little and undergo a new transformation because of us? Shout loudly to the world, "I am a person who is absolutely necessary" (Internet). While meditating on Jesus' act of sharing, poet Hae-in Lee prayed as follows: 'Lord, if only our lives were broken so thoroughly by a life of sharing, but how is it that our days are so breathlessly busy with possessions? Please let us reflect sincerely before You. Truly, unless it is within You, we, who do not know the true meaning of sharing, will not know. Please grant us a generous and pure heart that is as abundant as You have shown us, without any regrets' (Internet). "Sharing lies not in the abundance of possessions, but in the generosity of existence. Only those who enjoy a sense of inner abundance and inner fullness can practice sharing. Sharing is not a matter of material excess, but a matter of character. Sharing is possible when we love. There is always something to give to the object of our love. Like the hearts of lovers who give and give but are never tired, the heart that loves is the heart that practices sharing. Sharing is a principle of life. Although it begins with sacrifice, it bears fruit in abundance. Joy multiplies when shared, and sorrow becomes more bearable when shared. Just as clear water rises as you pour out deep spring water, our lives become more abundant through sharing" (Internet).

In today's passage, Acts 4:32-37, we can see the beautiful life of sharing in the early Jerusalem church. The believers in the early church, filled with the Holy Spirit in unity through their fervent prayers (v. 32), shared with one another. Therefore, I want to take the title today as "Life of sharing" and wish to practice three lessons about a life of sharing from today's passage.

First, in a life of sharing, there is unity of heart and mind.

Look at Acts 4:32 - "All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had." The companions of Peter and John in prayer (v. 23), through their united supplication to God (v. 24), were filled with the Holy Spirit, resulting in bold proclamation of God's word by all the believers (v. 31), and they lived a life of sharing possessions in unity of heart and mind (v. 32). This doesn't imply relinquishing ownership of personal property, but rather maintaining ownership while making their possessions available for use by the church as needed (Yoo). This practice of sharing possessions in the early Jerusalem church reminds us of the passage we previously meditated on in Acts 2:42-47. A very similar situation continues to be evident in the early church. What is it telling us? It tells us that the communal sharing of possessions in the Jerusalem church was not a one-time occurrence, but a continuous practice. Acts 2 describes the communal life of sharing possessions among the three thousand believers who received Jesus and heard the preaching of the apostle Peter on the day of Pentecost. In contrast, Acts 4:32 mentions about eight thousand male believers who believed in Jesus and heard the apostles' proclamation. Therefore, here in verse 32, the phrase "all the believers" is used in the past tense (Yoo).

This can only be an astonishing work of the Holy Spirit. How is it possible for approximately five thousand men to be of one heart and mind? This is a manifestation of the work of the Holy Spirit in the early Jerusalem church. In Acts 2, it was three thousand, and in Acts 4, it is about five thousand men, totaling over eight thousand believers, who shared possessions in unity of heart and mind. How is such a thing possible? I found the answer in Ephesians 4, particularly in verse 4, where the apostle Paul says: "There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called." The reason the church became one is because they all had only one wish, to be eternally saved, and they all experienced the consolation of the Holy Spirit together (Park). God has called us (Eph. 4:1). We have been called with one hope (v. 4). What is this "one hope"? In hymn "My Hope is Built on Nothing Less," we find the lyrics: "My hope is built on nothing less Than Jesus' blood and righteousness;" Our one hope is only in Jesus. Only in Him can we have one heart and one mind. So, what is our responsibility as people to have one heart and one mind? I find the answer in Ephesians 4:3, where the apostle Paul says: "Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace." We must diligently guard what the Holy Spirit has made one in us in Jesus Christ. In short, we all must be 'peacemakers' (Mt. 5:9). Consider James 3:18: "Peacemakers who sow in peace reap a harvest of righteousness." Also, see Matthew 5:9: "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God." In the life of sharing of those who are peacemakers, there is unity of heart and mind. This unity of heart and mind is simply the heart and mind of the Lord, and the desire to fulfill the Lord's will. There is no room for any other heart and mind. Do we indeed have the heart and mind of the Lord in our life of sharing? We must never entertain a divided heart or selfish ambitions within the community of the church.

Second, in a life of sharing, there were no needy individuals.

Look at Acts 4:34 - "There were no needy persons among them" Why were there no needy individuals within the community of the Jerusalem church? The reason is that they shared with one another according to the needs (v. 35). Approximately five thousand men became of one heart and one mind, sharing everything they had and not claiming their possessions as their own, but living a life of shared possessions (vv. 34-35). Now, how did they go about this sharing of possessions? It's stated in Acts 4:34-35. It means that those who had fields or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales, and put it at the apostles' feet to be distributed to anyone who had need (vv. 34-35). This doesn't imply that the congregation disposed of all their possessions and evenly distributed them, but rather, it shows that there were believers who voluntarily sold their possessions to address the urgent needs of impoverished saints (Yoo).

How should believers within the church live a life of sharing? I'd like to offer a couple of suggestions based on the Scriptures:

- (1) We need to be aware of not only our own needs but also the needs of fellow believers.

There's an instinct in us that tends to focus solely on our own needs when we find ourselves in a situation of scarcity (commonly referred to as being "self-absorbed"). However, those living a life of sharing go beyond this instinct and recognize the needs of both themselves and their brothers and sisters in Christ.

- (2) We should share according to the needs of the saints.

Wisdom is needed in the act of sharing. First, we should share from what we have. This doesn't mean giving to the point of impoverishing ourselves. In fact, the Bible speaks negatively about going into debt. Additionally, it's good to collectively contribute to help a fellow believer in need. In other words, it's better to gather together with others who can also help rather than trying to assist someone alone. Moreover, it's preferable to channel our sharing through the church. When we see that those who had material possessions brought the money to be distributed at the apostles' feet (v. 35) during the sharing of possessions among about five thousand men, it suggests that while individual help can be given, it's better to join together and pool resources through the church to aid our fellow brothers and sisters in need.

So, how were the early church saints able to share to the extent that there were no needy individuals? We find the answer in Acts 4:33 - "With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And God's grace was so powerfully at work in them all." It was made possible through "great power" and "great grace." Because the apostles bore witness to the resurrection of Jesus with great power, resulting in everyone hearing and experiencing great grace, they

were able to share with one another, leaving no needy saints. If today, through humble servants, God's great power is displayed, and if the message of God's power is being proclaimed, saints who receive great grace will be even more determined to live a life of sharing more actively, and they will bear the fruit of love through practical deeds.

Third and last, in a life of sharing, there is comfort.

Look at Acts 4:36 - "Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means 'son of encouragement')." As the apostles proclaimed the resurrection of Jesus with great power and the crowd of believers was of one heart and mind (v. 32), many people donated their possessions. In verse 36, among the many who disposed of their possessions and dedicated the proceeds to the church, the author Luke highlights a specific example, a person named Joseph. In verse 37, the Bible says, "He owned a field; he sold it and brought the money and put it at the apostles' feet." This Joseph is better known to us as Barnabas, which means "son of encouragement." In other words, Barnabas was a person of comfort and consolation.

In a community of sharing, there are many comforters like Barnabas. The church, where saints gather desiring not to receive comfort, but rather to comfort others, truly embodies a life of genuine sharing. In a community with a life of sharing, there are not only peacemakers but also no needy individuals, and instead, there are comforters. What is comfort? To comfort someone is the most important act of using one's heart and caring. Life is sometimes filled with pain, sadness, and loneliness, and there are times when people facing difficulties struggle without seeing any hope. We can and should comfort those who are on the verge of despair, facing unresolved difficulties. Of course, providing comfort does not mean taking away the pain. Instead, it means saying, 'You are not alone. I am here with you. We can endure the pain together. Do not be afraid. I am here,' while being together. That is giving and receiving comfort. We all need people who can give and receive comfort. Comforting is a life-saving act. Strive to comfort rather than seek comfort. Your moments will become even richer, and the abundant satisfaction of life will fill your soul like a subtle fragrance (Internet).

Learning that "sharing is caring,"

James Kim

(Praying to comfort those in need with the heart of the Lord)

Life of Hiding

[Acts 5:1-11]

Why do stressed women want to talk? In stressful situations, the spatial intelligence and logical reasoning of men's brains are actively engaged. In contrast, women's language function becomes more active, leading them to talk more. Therefore, when women feel stressed or upset, they seek out someone to talk to and pour out their thoughts endlessly in front of them. Whether it's discussing problems with friends for hours or going over specific details one by one, it's not about finding a solution for women, but the act of speaking itself provides comfort and encouragement. Why do women feel the need to express everything in order to feel relieved? Men's brains are highly compartmentalized, allowing them to separate and store information. As the day comes to an end, even if there are many problems, a man's brain can categorize them. However, it's different for women. Information doesn't get stored; it just keeps swirling in their minds. Therefore, for women, pouring out every thought from their hearts is a way to acknowledge the existence of a problem and remove it from their minds. So why do men hide their emotions? Modern men still carry the genes that dictate they must be strong and not show weakness. Men tend to be skeptical, competitive, and restrained. They also prefer to handle things on their own, appearing as if they have complete control over their situation and often hiding their emotions in the process. In short, men consider displaying emotions as a sign of weakness (Internet).

If we are a person faithful to the truth, what rules should we follow? There are at least four rules: (1) Never tell lies. (2) Keep in mind that hiding the truth can often be equivalent to lying. Unless there is a significant moral reason to do so, one should not hide the truth. (3) The decision to hide the truth should not be based on personal needs, meaning it should not be done to protect one's own interests out of power, favor, or challenge. (4) The decision to hide the truth should be made from the perspective of the other person (Internet).

I would like to meditate on Acts 5:1-11 under the title "Life of hiding" in contrast to the previously

meditated "Life of sharing." Through this meditation, I hope to receive the grace that God provides.

First, life of hiding lies to God.

Look at Acts 5:4 - " Didn't it belong to you before it was sold? And after it was sold, wasn't the money at your disposal? What made you think of doing such a thing? You have not lied to men but to God." How many times do we lie in a day? In April 1997, a study was conducted at the University of California, revealing that people lie approximately 200 times a day, or once every eight minutes. The study involved attaching small microphones to 20 individuals, and it found that the most common lie was about being stuck in traffic when running late for an appointment. The professions that lied the most were found to be salespeople, politicians, journalists, lawyers, and psychologists, in that order (Internet).

Today, looking at the background of the passage, we see that in the early Jerusalem church, the believers prayed together with one accord, and they lived a life of sharing, filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 4:32-37). Among them, there were exemplary believers like Barnabas (vv. 36-37). He sold his field and brought the money to the apostles' feet. However, in today's passage, the author Luke introduces a contrasting couple, Ananias and Sapphira (5:1). Unlike Barnabas, this couple didn't sell all of their possessions but only a portion (v. 1), and furthermore, they kept back some of the proceeds and brought only a part to the apostles' feet (v. 2). What is remarkable is that while everyone else lived a life of sharing with one heart and one mind, Ananias and Sapphira chose to live a hidden life with one heart and one mind, thus lying to God. Here, we need to consider what sin Ananias and Sapphira committed and how significant this sin was.

(1) The sin they committed was the sin of dispossession.

In today's passage, Acts 5:2-3, this couple is said to have kept back a portion of the proceeds from the sale, and the word 'kept back' is a verb meaning "to dispossess." This word appears twice in today's passage and also once in Titus 2:10 ("not pilfering"). In the Septuagint, it was used to describe the act of Achan, when the Israelites took possession of the city of Jericho, who embezzled some of the spoils (Josh. 7:1). In other words, the embezzlement committed by Ananias and Sapphira can be described as a New Testament version of Achan's crime. In this world, embezzlement is considered a serious crime. As an example, on January 10, 2006, there was a news article on Yonhap News, titled 'Professor Hwang Investigation, Likely to Apply Fraud and Embezzlement Charges.' It stated, 'The funds received by Professor Hwang's team from relevant ministries and local governments from 1998 to last year were 4,610,311 dollars in total, including 839,537 dollar in pure research funds and 3,770,378 dollars in research facilities, such as laboratories. It was revealed that Professor Hwang's team spent 623, 812 dollars on cloning cows for high milk production and 679,998 dollars on research for pig cloning for organ transplantation. The crime of dispossession under Article 356 of the Criminal Code stipulates that if a person who is responsible for the custody of another person's property violates his or her

duty and embezzles the property, they shall be punished with imprisonment for up to five years or a fine of up to 11,089 dollars. If the embezzled amount exceeds, the Act on Special Economic Crimes applies, and the offender may be sentenced to imprisonment for more than three years, or life imprisonment, for amounts exceeding 3,696,445 dollars' (Internet).

(2) The sin committed by Ananias and Sapphira was the sin of conspiracy.

In Acts 5:2, when Ananias sold his possession and kept back a portion of the proceeds, his wife Sapphira was aware of it. In English, the NASB version states, "With his wife's full knowledge." This means that when Ananias committed embezzlement, his wife was fully aware of it. For example, from 1978, Robert Kim, who worked for the U.S. Naval Intelligence, informed a Korean intelligence officer about the sinking of a North Korean submarine off Gangneung in September 1996. He was later arrested by the FBI. He was charged with 'conspiracy to acquire national defense information' (a type of espionage) under U.S. Criminal Code Title 18, Section 793. He was sentenced to a maximum of nine years in prison and three years of supervised release. The Robert Kim Support Committee has released Robert Kim's autobiography, titled 'Coming Home' (published by Han Gilsa), which chronicles his life journey, from being incarcerated in a U.S. federal prison for leaking classified information to being released. In the book, Robert Kim expressed his honest emotions, saying, 'I felt depressed about the lukewarm attitude of the Korean government at that time. It was inevitable to feel betrayed,' and 'I had to fight alone with the crime of conspiracy without conspirators' (Internet).

(3) The sin committed by Ananias and Sapphira can be described as the sin of not keeping one's own heart.

In Acts 4:3, we can see that Ananias allowed Satan to fill his heart without taking any action. Proverbs 4:23 advises us, "Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life." This is because life's source comes from the heart. However, despite allowing Satan to fill his heart with the intention of deceiving the Holy Spirit and embezzling a portion of the land's value, Ananias took no action. While in Acts 4:32-37, Barnabas and the Spirit-filled believers lived a life of communal sharing with one heart, Ananias and Sapphira chose to harbor different intentions and thoughts in their hearts, committing the sin of lying to God. They sold their hearts to Satan as if they had sold all their possessions. When filled with the Holy Spirit, Ananias was filled with impure thoughts opposing the thoughts of the Holy Spirit and the communal life of the church (Yoo).

(4) The sin committed by Ananias and Sapphira is the sin of hypocrisy.

These two are typical examples of Christians who fabricated (feigned) their spiritual actions to give a good impression to others. They were among the believers (v. 32) and were involved with

the Holy Spirit (v. 3), but they remained hypocrites (MacArthur).

(5) Ananias and Sapphira committed the sin of lying to God.

Looking at Acts 4:4, Peter's rebuke indicates that Ananias did not lie to mere humans, but to God. This cannot be anything other than a Satanic act. The father of lies, Satan, tempts our hearts, ultimately leading us to lie to God. Let us not lie to God. Let us strive to live a truthful life before God.

Second, life of hiding tests the Holy Spirit.

Look at Acts 5:9 - "Peter said to her, 'How could you conspire to test the Spirit of the Lord?'" Here, Peter points out that Ananias and Sapphira tested the Spirit of the Lord. To 'test the Spirit' means to see if He can be escaped before He brings judgment. In other words, testing the Spirit means using Him. It is about seeing if He will carry out His word. It is about pushing Him to His limits (Bible Knowledge). As an example, in Exodus 17, when the Israelites camped in Rephidim and there was no water to drink, there is a scene where they test the Lord in the wilderness. Look at verse 7: "...or shall we say, 'Did the Lord bring us up here only to let us and our livestock die of thirst?'" We often find ourselves testing God, just like the Israelites. When we are in desperate situations, in times of hardship and suffering, doubting whether God is with us, not believing in God and doubting Him - this is testing God, as the Bible states. In Acts 5:4, Apostle Peter points out that while Ananias initially acted under the guidance of the Holy Spirit when he sold his possession, he later chose the tempting guidance of Satan, rejecting the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, he lied to the Holy Spirit of God. What is surprising is that Ananias's wife, Sapphira, also tested the Holy Spirit. In verse 9, the term "conspire" refers to them acting together in unity to commit evil, as if conspiring as one spirit (Park). Ananias and Sapphira, in perfect unity, rejected the guidance of the Holy Spirit and instead deceived the Holy Spirit of God with one accord. Even the Spirit-filled Apostle Peter, who knew they were lying, could not have known that they had conspired together to tempt the Holy Spirit of God. They tested the Holy Spirit and deceived Him (v. 3). Testing the Lord's Spirit means that, in their doubt and suspicion of the Spirit's unerring nature, they acted against the will of the Spirit (Park).

When we commit hidden sins and try to conceal them, aren't we also, like Ananias and Sapphira, doubting the unerring nature of the Holy Spirit and going against His will? Jesus said in Matthew 6:18 that our God sees everything done in secret. There is no way that the omniscient God would be unaware of us committing sins in secret. That's why Paul says in Ephesians 5:11-12, "Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. It is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret." Much of the misery in this world begins with wanting to appear as someone different from who we really are, just like those people (MacDonald). It seems that everyone faces such temptations. The temptation to want to appear as a better person, and among Christians, there are even those who, with wrong motives, try to create acts of faith that are only possible when the Holy Spirit is present, without relying on the Spirit, doing so artificially. This is an act of resisting the Holy Spirit. Even though it is foolish to artificially create

something without relying on the Holy Spirit, we commit this act countless times. We must live according to the guidance of the Holy Spirit. We should not commit the sin of deceiving and testing Him. When the Holy Spirit makes us aware through God's word, we must believe that word and live a life of obedience.

Third and last, in life of hiding, there is the discipline of God.

Look at Acts 5:5, 10-11: "When Ananias heard these words, he fell down and breathed his last. And great fear came upon all who heard of it. ... Immediately she fell down at his feet and breathed her last. When the young men came in they found her dead, and they carried her out and buried her beside her husband." The punishment that Ananias and Sapphira received was death. Upon hearing Peter's rebuke (vv. 3-4), Ananias died instantly. This demonstrates God's immediate judgment. Dr. Park stated, 'Ananias' death was the result of God's supernatural power. This power was brought about through God's word spoken by Peter. This fact is evidenced by the statement "When Ananias heard these words, he fell down" God's word brings death to the perishing (Isa. 11:4; 2 Cor. 2:16)." In Acts 5:6, the Bible says that when Ananias died, the young men of the church wrapped him up and carried him out for burial. This swift burial was due to the Jewish custom of burying the deceased within 24 hours. In cases where death was attributed to suicide, treason against the state, apostasy, desertion, rebellion, or criminal behavior, the deceased was considered judged by God, and if the evidence was clear, the appropriate burial procedures were bypassed, and the body was promptly interred (Yoo). Ultimately, the immediate burial of Ananias illustrates that the Jerusalem church understood his death as God's swift judgment. About three hours later, Ananias' wife, Sapphira, came to the place where the apostles were. She was unaware that her husband had died as a result of God's immediate judgment (v. 7). Like her husband, she also fell down and died immediately, as she had conspired with him to test the Holy Spirit (v. 10).

In the end, the initial reaction of the early church saints to the deaths of Ananias and Sapphira can be summed up in one word: fear. Look at Acts 5:5 and 11: "When Ananias heard these words, he fell down and breathed his last. And great fear came upon all who heard of it. ... And great fear came upon the whole church and upon all who heard of these things." Professor Yoo stated, 'Being struck down by immediate divine judgment for the same sin within a span of three hours was indeed an event that could bring about great fear. The entire church, having witnessed this solemn event of God's judgment, would have gained a deep awareness of the church as a community of the Holy Spirit. Additionally, they would have ingrained in their hearts the understanding that deceiving the apostles within this community is equivalent to deceiving the Holy Spirit. Thus, the authority of the apostles was confirmed by God, and no one would lightly disregard them' (Yoo). Dr. Park mentioned several insights that can be gleaned from the incident involving Ananias and Sapphira: (1) It is more appropriate to stand before God as an honest individual without seeking popularity and honor through deceiving others. (2) The wickedness of those who receive swift punishment is extremely severe. (3) Anyone who disrespects the church when it is filled with the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven. (4) It is dangerous to disregard leaders who have been established by God to carry out righteous deeds in the church. (5) The Holy Spirit does not infringe upon the freedom of believers. Coercing individuals is not an operation of the Spirit; the decision to give or not to give was entirely voluntary (Acts 5:4).\

Life of hiding tells lies to God. Life of hiding tests the Holy Spirit. And in life of hiding, there is God's punishment (discipline). We should not live life of hiding. Instead, we should live life of sharing.

Desiring life of sharing rather than life of hiding,

James Kim

(While hating lies)

The Believers

[Acts 5:12-16]

Do you know William Carey, the Father of Indian Missions (1761-1834)? William Carey went to India with a dream of mission work after studying Greek, Hebrew, Latin, and other languages. He received his commission from the Baptist Missionary Society in England. He studied the Indian languages, compiled an English-Indian dictionary, and then introduced a printing press from England to publish the Bible in Indian languages. However, while Carey was away on a missionary tour, a fire broke out, and the printing press and manuscripts were completely burned. Nevertheless, Carey did not lose hope. He knelt on the ashes and offered a prayer of thanksgiving. He sought faith, patience, and courage to start again. Finally, starting with the Bengali Bible in 1801, the Bible was translated and published in 24 Indian dialects. Success and failure depend on the attitude with which we face the problem. The greatness of a believer lies not in never failing, but in rising every time he falls. We call those who believe that God is with them Christians (Internet).

Today, in Acts 5:14, the Bible says, " Nevertheless, more and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to their number." With this verse as the focus, I want to meditate on what it means to be a believer in four aspects, desiring to receive God's grace.

First, the believers are all with one accord.

Look at Acts 5:12 – “At the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were taking place among the people; and they were all with one accord in Solomon's portico.” In Acts 4:30, we see one of the prayers of the apostles was, " while You extend Your hand to heal, and signs and wonders take place through the name of Your holy servant Jesus." We can see that this prayer from Acts 4 was answered in Acts 5:12. Because of this response to prayer, many people gathered together in Solomon's Portico with one accord, while the rest dared to associate with them (v. 13). These "rest" were likely hypocrites among the believers, like Ananias and Sapphira. Due to the fear generated by the events involving Ananias and Sapphira, they couldn't dare to join those who believed, even after witnessing God's signs and wonders.

Christians who gather with one accord receive praise and commendation from people in the world. In Acts

5:13, the Bible says that when the believers gathered with one accord in Solomon's Portico, even though there were some who dared to associate with them, however "the people held them in high esteem." We can also see from Acts 2:47 that the early church saints received praise from all the people. What a beautiful image of the early church community, being a church praised by people in the world.

However, look at the churches nowadays. Are they truly receiving praise from people in the world? How about our church? Are we receiving praise from people in the world? The decline of a church often starts with the scattering of the hearts of believers (Park). What do you think about the statement that when the hearts of the saints are scattered, the church weakens? A church that does not pray with one accord will scatter. A church that does not pray together in faith has double-mindedness (Jam. 1:6-8). In the end, it can only be unstable (verse 6).

In Ephesians 4:5, the apostle Paul says, "one faith." Like the early church saints, when we pray in faith, we can come together with one heart. However, if we pray in doubt, we can only scatter in the midst of church instability. We must remember: God is not only a God who gathers, but also a God who scatters. Look at Deuteronomy 28:64 - " Moreover, the LORD will scatter you among all peoples, from one end of the earth to the other end of the earth; and there you shall serve other gods, wood and stone, which you or your fathers have not known." When God scatters, it leads to the sin of idol worship. This is especially true when one makes money an idol and lives for money. Consequently, churches end up divided, fighting, and scattered over money matters. Therefore, as believers in Jesus Christ, we must strive to gather together in one faith.

Second, the believers are constantly added to their number.

Look at Acts 5:14 – “And all the more believers in the Lord, multitudes of men and women, were constantly added to their number.” As God answered the united prayers of the early church saints and performed many signs and wonders through the hands of the apostles, believers came together with one accord, receiving praise from the people. This is a clear work of God. We already know from our meditation on Acts 2:47 that the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved.

Think about it logically. In which church would people gather? In a church where everyone is united in faith, where people are praised, or in a church where doubting saints keep scattering? On the internet, I found a post titled ‘What Makes a Church Attractive and Appealing?’ and I'd like to share it: ‘The church as the body of Christ possessing the spirituality of community, and every saint experiencing this, is also the essence of the church. We often find Paul referring to the church as another family. Yes, the church is like another family. Men and women, old and young, the poor and the rich, masters and slaves, sometimes people of different races. They all come together to form a family. Of course, love is the force that bridges the gaps between them, the consciousness of brotherhood among people who look to God as their Father. The attractiveness of the church comes from here. Once you experience the irresistible charm, you can't leave. It's like savoring something intensely rich, just like the saying blood is thicker than water. Community, it is

the power of being one with diversity' (Internet). In this community of love, coming together with one heart and one mind, there is a work of the Lord adding believers.

In such a community, the work of believers coming out to the Lord takes place. We earnestly pray that our church becomes such a church. A church where it is not by human effort, but by the saving work of the Lord, a church where those being saved are added every week, a church where people come out to the Lord just as He is. This is the kind of church I dream of and pray for.

Third, the believers hope.

Look at Acts 5:15 – “to such an extent that they even carried the sick out into the streets and laid them on cots and pallets, so that when Peter came by at least his shadow might fall on any one of them.” Because God enabled the apostles to perform many signs and wonders, many people gathered in Solomon's Portico from the surrounding villages of Jerusalem. They even brought the sick out into the streets, laying them on beds and mats, hoping that Peter's shadow might fall on some of them (v. 15). Why did they do this? Professor Sang-seop Yoo explained, ‘They did this because they thought that when the shadow of Apostle Peter passed by the sick, they might receive healing’ (Yoo). The early church saints had already witnessed and heard of the miraculous power of God manifested through Peter, who had raised up a man lame for 40 years, and so they had the expectation that perhaps even Peter's shadow could bring healing. In the time of Jesus, people in towns, cities, and villages where Jesus entered would lay the sick in the marketplaces, hoping to touch even the fringe of His garment, and all who touched it were healed (Mk. 6:53-56). Additionally, when Paul preached the gospel in Ephesus, people would take handkerchiefs or aprons that had touched Paul's body and place them on the sick, and their diseases left them (Acts 19:11-12).

I'm reminded of Hebrews 11:1 - "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." The believers hope. The believers have faith. The believers are those who, even in the midst of the seemingly impossible, continue to hope. Just like our faith forefather Abraham, who in hope believed against hope (Rom. 4:18). Look at verse 3 and chorus of hymn “My Hope is Built on Nothing Less”: “His oath, His covenant, His blood, Support me in the whelming flood; When all around my soul gives way He then is all my hope and stay. On Christ, the solid Rock, I stand; All other ground is sinking sand, All other ground is sinking sand.” Living a life where even when all we once held dear is severed and gone, our hope in Jesus only grows stronger is the essence of a life of faith.

Fourth and last, the believers receive healing.

Look at Acts 5:16 – “Also the people from the cities in the vicinity of Jerusalem were coming together, bringing people who were sick or afflicted with unclean spirits, and they were all being healed.” The original meaning of the phrase "they were all healed" here is "whatever kind of disease, all were cured." This means that there was no ailment that the apostles couldn't cure (Park). Grosheide remarked, ‘The ability of the apostles to heal all diseases shows that the work of Christ continued through them. Their ability to do

such work was due to Christ's resurrection and the giving of the Holy Spirit, and it was a fulfillment of the mission and promise given by Christ. It is clear that God was with them' (Park).

The first verse of the hymn "Heal me now, my Savior, Jesus! Touch and mend my ailing frame. I will heal all thy diseases. That promise, Lord, I claim. See me, Lord, expectant kneeling, Confident in faith appealing. Now, Thy mighty pow'r revealing, Lord, Heal! in Jesus' name!" This healing ministry is available to the believers.

The believers come together with one accord. The believers are constantly added to their number. And the believers hope. In other words, the believers have faith and hope. In the midst of such, the believers receive healing. I hope and pray that this ministry of healing will be present in your life as you believe in Jesus.

In faith and hope,

James Kim

(Only by faith!)

The Obedient People

[Acts 5:17-32]

"What does the word "obedience" mean? In English, the word "obedience" has its origin in Latin, meaning 'hear.' On the other hand, the Latin origin of the English word 'absurd' is 'deaf.' A life of obedience is a life that inclines its ear to God, while a life of absurdity is a life deaf to the voice of God (Internet). Dietrich Bonhoeffer said this about obedience: 'Only those who obey can believe, and only those who believe can obey.' Faith and obedience are inseparable. God does not delight in a life that speaks without action (Internet). Obedience is the expression of faith. If we truly believe in Jesus, we must obey His words. It is the duty of Jesus' disciples to humbly and promptly listen to the Lord's words and live in obedience to them. But are we really obeying the absolute obedience of the Lord's words? Richard Foster said this in 'The Simple Life': 'The moment material becomes a priority, thorough obedience becomes impossible' (Internet). Today, the worship of wealth is rampant. It is a time that directly violates the Fourth Commandment, which commands rest on the Sabbath. Although taking a rest when one can surpass everyone by working more might be very difficult, there is nothing more urgent than the freedom of laying down this burden. The prohibition of coveting is in the Tenth Commandment, and there is inner greed in the midst of sin. Possession itself is not wrong, but excessive greed, inner obsession, and unrestrained desire are sins. The problem is, like alcoholics who cannot recognize their illness once the disease swallows us, we cannot recognize the disease (Internet). The insight obtained from the simplicity of the Old Testament is thorough obedience. Nowhere is it more vividly revealed than when Abraham received the command to offer his son Isaac. God spoke, and Abraham obeyed. He did not devise emergency measures or attach conditions or excuses. Through the long process of agony, Abraham learned one truth in his life, that is, the obedience to the voice of the Lord. This 'holy obedience' is the conduit for a simple life (Internet). Today, in Acts 5:29, Peter and the other apostles are speaking to the religious leaders threatening them: 'We must obey God rather than men.' Under the title "The Obedient People", I would like to meditate on three aspects of what people of obedience are like.

First, the obedient people listen and act.

Look at Acts 5:19-21: "But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and brought them out, and said, 'Go and stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this Life.' And when they heard this, they entered the temple at daybreak and began to teach." The background of this passage is when God, through Spirit-filled apostles, was performing many signs and wonders, resulting in the increase of believers coming to the Lord (v. 14). In contrast to God's work through Spirit-filled apostles, the work of Satan, motivated by jealousy, was manifested through the high priest and the Sadducees, leading them to arrest the apostles and put them in prison (v. 18). We have previously reflected on the interrogation of Peter and John by the religious leaders in Acts 4, where their discomfort and anger were fueled by the apostles' lack of authority to teach the people in the temple and their proclamation of the resurrection of the dead in Jesus (vs. 'priests and the captain of the temple'). However, the second interrogation of these religious leaders, as seen in today's passage, targeted not only Peter and John but all the apostles, motivated by one common factor, which the author Nuga describes as "jealousy."

There is a Jewish folk story about jealousy, as shared by Rev. Dong-won Lee in his book 'Repentance Acts': "One day, an angel appeared to a woman and said, 'I will bless you. Moreover, I will give a blessing to your friend that is greater than the blessing I give to you. Do you have such a friend?' The woman suddenly thinks of a friend she is jealous of and excitedly says, 'Angel, there is someone who will give me more blessings than you will give me.' When the angel asked, 'Then what blessing do you want for yourself?' She replied, 'Please make one of my eyes blind.'" ... The end of the story is that, in the fervor of jealousy, she ends up asking the angel to make both eyes of the friend she is jealous of blind (Lee). How about that? Haven't you or I experienced jealousy? It's like the biblical story of King Saul being jealous of David. As Rev. Lee says, jealousy is (1) a sin that limits the potential of humans and (2) a sin that takes away everything from the daily life of humans (Lee). Jealousy makes us unable to concentrate on anything other than the object of jealousy. Ultimately, as we are consumed by jealousy, we deteriorate and collapse, ending in destruction. Thus, "jealousy" or "envy" is not just to be seen as a simple psychological emotion. The reason is that behind jealousy is the "spirit of jealousy," or in biblical terms, the "evil spirit" (Lee). Therefore, a person who is jealous is being used as a tool of Satan.

In the end, the religious leaders mentioned in today's passage, the high priest and the Sadducees, were filled with jealousy in their hearts. This jealousy extended not only to Spirit-filled Peter and John but to all the apostles, leading them to arrest and imprison them. However, unlike the first interrogation, the second interrogation shows divine miraculous intervention. This is none other than what we see in Acts 5:19 - "But during the night, an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and brought them out." After that, the command given to the apostles by the Lord's angel was to "Go and stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this Life" (v. 20). The apostles' response to this command was, "And when they heard this, they entered the temple at daybreak and began to teach" (v. 21). How amazing is this? On the previous day, at "night," the angel of the Lord opened the prison doors, freeing the apostles, and the very next day, at "daybreak," the apostles, without even going home, went straight to the temple and began teaching the "words of this Life." In the midst of the miraculous liberation by the angel of the Lord, the apostles became free individuals, and in their immediate obedience to the angel's command, we see a reflection of 2 Timothy 2:9: "For the word of God

is not bound, despite my chains." Although the apostles were freed from prison by the angel of the Lord, we witness them immediately obeying the angel's command and becoming vessels for the word of life.

Second, the obedient people do not fear people.

Look at Acts 5:26 - "Then the captain with the officers went and brought them, but not by force, for they were afraid of being stoned by the people." Freed by the help of the Lord's angel, the apostles were sent by the high priest and those with him to bring them forcefully as they actively convened the Sanhedrin to plan to capture the apostles (v. 21). However, when the officers entered the prison, they found it securely locked, and the guards were standing at the doors, but the apostles were not there (vv. 22-23). Perplexed and unsure of what to do, the temple officials were informed by someone else that "the men whom you put in prison are standing in the temple and teaching the people" (v. 25). Hearing this, the temple officers went to the temple with the guards to arrest the apostles, but they couldn't do it forcibly because they were afraid of being stoned by the people (v. 26).

How interesting is the sight of these religious leaders? Instead of fearing God, they were afraid of the people, preventing them from forcefully capturing the apostles, who were teaching the word of life in the temple. It is remarkable that while many people in Jerusalem came to the Lord through the power of God demonstrated by the Spirit-filled apostles, these religious leaders, filled with jealousy, tried to resist the power of God by convening the council and attempting to arrest the apostles (v. 21). In this way, we cannot deny that the prophecy of Psalms 2:1-2 is being fulfilled: "Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord and against his Anointed." Even during Jesus' time, the religious leaders and rulers, in their joint opposition, were acting in vain (Acts 4:25-27). Moreover, the efforts of the religious leaders of that time to oppose the apostles, Jesus' disciples, were ultimately in vain. Pastor Sang-seop Yoo said, 'Their plan to eliminate the apostles turned into futility because God turned their threats in response to the united prayer of the church (Acts 4:29)' (Yoo).

The wise one imparts this lesson to us in Proverbs 29:25 - "The fear of man lays a snare, but whoever trusts in the Lord is safe." Seeking safety from people is truly dangerous and foolish. Our safety lies only in the Lord. Therefore, we should not fear people; we should fear God alone. Joy Dawson, in her book 'Intimate Friendship with God,' said this about "fearing God": 'The only way to be liberated from fearing people is to have a heart that fears God. Anyone who is honest will admit that at some time in life, he or she has been ensnared by fearing people. Thus, fearing people lays a snare as God's word naturally proves: 'The fear of man lays a snare, but whoever trusts in the Lord is safe' (Prov 29:25). Fearing people means being more conscious of their reactions than of God's reactions to our activities. That becomes a snare. If we have a heart that fears God, we will be conscious only of God's reaction. At that time, we are freed from worrying about how people will think. This is freedom, and this is liberation! It gives a great sense of security' (Dawson).

Those who obey God's word fear God, and they are conscious only of God's reaction. When thinking about God's reaction to the apostles who heard and obeyed the call (voice) of the Lord's angel, I was reminded

of 1 Samuel 15:22 - "And Samuel said, 'Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to listen than the fat of rams.'" The Bible states that those who hear God's voice, that is, those who obey, are pleasing to God. However, those who do not fear God and fear people, disobeying God's word, cannot please God. The one who fears God, therefore, does not fear people.

Third and last, the obedient people receive the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Look at Acts 5:32 - "And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him." The apostles, who stood before the Sanhedrin council, responded to the question posed by the high priest, "Did we not strictly command you not to teach in this name? Yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching" (v. 28). In today's passage from verses 29 to 32, we can see how they answered in accordance with the guidance of the Holy Spirit: (1) The first answer is found in verse 29: "But Peter and the apostles answered, 'We must obey God rather than men.'" As early as the first trial before the religious leaders, as recorded in Acts 4:19, Peter and John boldly confessed, "...whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge." Those who receive the guidance of the Holy Spirit boldly declared before the Sanhedrin that obeying God is more fitting than obeying men. (2) Those guided by the Holy Spirit testified to the Word of God, which is the gospel. Look at Acts 5:30-31: "The God of our fathers raised Jesus, whom you killed by hanging him on a tree. God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins." Here, Peter and the other apostles, gathered before the Sanhedrin, proclaimed before all the religious leaders and elders of Israel, "You killed Jesus by hanging him on a tree." Furthermore, they declared that God raised Jesus, exalted Him as Leader and Savior, to grant repentance and forgiveness of sins to Israel. After proclaiming the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus, the apostles affirmed the purpose of His death and resurrection, stating that it was for the repentance and forgiveness of sins in Israel. The apostles, guided by the Holy Spirit, could not help but proclaim the gospel that the Holy Spirit bore witness to within them. As they had declared in Acts 4:20, "For we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard," the witness of the life of a disciple is characterized by confessing and proclaiming what they have seen and heard. In conclusion, those who obey God receive the Holy Spirit as their guide, leading them to prioritize obedience to God over human commands and boldly testify to the gospel, being witnesses of what they have seen and heard.

In order to become excellent witnesses, what must we do? The esteemed Leroy Eims, who served as the president of Navigators, stated, 'To be excellent witnesses of Christ, one must possess the following five essential elements': (1) Be patient. If you don't succeed initially, keep trying. Giving up is always too quick. (2) Treat others kindly. Do not become a nuisance. Instead of driving them away, you must win them over. (3) Obey under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Surrender yourself through the channel through which the Holy Spirit is working. (4) Clearly deliver the message. Use words that people can easily understand. (5) Live a life worthy of the gospel. By observing your life, they will come to know the truth of the message you convey (Internet).

Let's conclude with a reflection on the Word. In the book "A Life God Rewards" by Henry & Richard Blackaby, they state, "A life of obedience is life!" and share the following story: 'The first funeral I conducted was for a little child. It was the first child of a couple in our church and the first grandchild for the grandparents. One day, when I visited their home, I observed that the child blatantly ignored the parents' words. When told to come, the child went; when told to sit, the child stood up. The parents found such behavior cute rather than disobedient. One day, the front yard gate was left open. The daughter was seen leaving the yard towards the road. From the other side, a car was approaching at a terrifying speed. The daughter slipped through the parked cars and ran straight towards the oncoming car. 'No! Come back!' the parents urgently shouted to their young daughter. The child paused for a moment, smiled at the parents, and then turned back, running straight into the path of the approaching car. The car struck the child violently. The parents' wailing at the child's death was truly heartbreaking. It was a tragedy that occurred because the child was not trained to obey the parents' words. I learned a great lesson through that incident – that God's people must be taught to obey immediately when they hear His voice. Recognizing God's voice and obeying Him immediately is indeed life!'

Desiring to humbly obey the Lord's commands,

James Kim, Sharing

[Remembering God's word, "To obey is better than sacrifice" (1 Sam. 15:22)]

A Respected Person

[Acts 5:33-42]

In South Dakota, USA, there is a landmark called 'Mount Rushmore.' It features the faces of former U.S. presidents such as George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln, and Theodore Roosevelt carved into a massive 18-meter cliff, revered by the American people. Recently, there was a survey asking, 'If you were to carve the face of a person you admire on Mount Rushmore, whose face would you choose?' The top choice among college students was Martin Luther King Jr. The U.S. annually selects a respected figure through surveys. Jesus has consistently been the undisputed first choice. Following Jesus, it used to be Abraham Lincoln. However, this year, Martin Luther King Jr. has become the second choice after Jesus. The youth of America have chosen to admire black civil rights activist over Hollywood stars or popular singers. Why did they choose him? The reason is that Martin Luther King Jr. was a person who made the world more beautiful. In other words, he was a servant. Because of him, America became a better and more just society (Internet). What is engraved on Mount Rushmore is not because of the position of being a president, but because of those who served. It's not about becoming a president, but about how one lives. We must serve with love. It is about serving willingly, not as slaves, but as volunteers. These are the people represented on Mount Rushmore. They are people of great authority and respect.

A theologian once said, 'Korean Christians are people who live their lives with Christian faith, Buddhist ways of thinking, and Confucian habits ... There is no doubt that this is a truly reasonable statement. ... It is clear that these three elements are mixed. Among them, Korean church pastors enjoy the greatest blessing from traditional culture. It is that they are highly respected by their congregants. This has nothing to do with their personality. Sometimes it has nothing to do with their character. I think that the respect and even reverence for the title of pastor is a reverence that cannot be found in any other country' (Internet). However, it seems that reverence for pastors is now declining. I believe this is because of the failure of Korean church pastors to resemble Jesus in their character. Conflicts within the church, conflicts between former and current pastors, conflicts between congregants standing with former pastors and those standing with current pastors, pastors from various denominations standing in the same arena. Can pastors truly receive respect, especially from non-believers, amidst these conflicts?

In Acts 5:34, we see Gamaliel, a Pharisee who was respected by all the people. Additionally, in

verses 41-42, we see the apostles whom we respect. So, in this age where pastors and believers are not receiving respect, I want to consider how we can become people who are respected. I would like to contemplate and learn today based on Acts 5:33-42, focusing on three points.

First, the respected person considers carefully.

Look at Acts 5:35 - " Then he addressed them: "Men of Israel, consider carefully what you intend to do to these men." Filled with the Holy Spirit and obedient to the Lord's word, the apostles boldly proclaimed the gospel before the Sanhedrin, saying, "you had killed by hanging him (Jesus) on a tree" (v. 30). The religious leaders, the high priest and the Sadducees (v. 17), and the elders of the Israelite people (v. 21) "were furious" and sought to kill the apostles (v. 33). Here, "were furious" should be translated as 'were cut to the heart' (Park). An interesting contrast can be seen when we compare this with Acts 2:37, where some were "cut to the heart" and repented after hearing Peter's sermon. In contrast, the members of the Sanhedrin were instead 'cut to the heart' and sought to kill the apostles (Park). At that time, Gamaliel, a Pharisee who was respected by all the people, stood up in the council and advised the members of the Sanhedrin to be careful about what they were going to do with the apostles (vv. 34-35). Gamaliel was the grandson of Hillel, a prominent figure in Jewish legal tradition and a teacher of Paul (22:3). He was known as a scribe, which means an interpreter of the law. When he passed away (18 years before the destruction of the Jerusalem temple), people mourned, saying, 'The glory of the law has departed, and purity and holiness have died' (Park). He was known as Gamaliel the First, the grandson of Hillel, the founder of the Hillel school among the Pharisees, and he was renowned in later generations (Yoo). Gamaliel cited two other messianic movements as examples, both of which ultimately failed. The leaders of these movements were Theudas and Judas of Galilee (vv. 36-37). The movement led by Theudas claimed that he was the Messiah (v. 36), but in the end, it was evident that it was not of divine origin and therefore it collapsed. Another example is Judas of Galilee, who also led people astray, but when he perished, his followers scattered. After hearing about these incidents, Gamaliel advised the members of the Sanhedrin to "Leave these men alone! Let them go!" (v. 38). The reason is that if the apostles' beliefs and actions were merely of human origin, they would eventually crumble. But if they were of divine origin, opposing them would be futile, and they would end up opposing God (vv. 38-39).

The lesson we learn here is that a respected person considers carefully because he fears becoming an opponent of God. We remember from Acts 4:27 that Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, conspired together against Jesus. We must not commit the sin of coming together as a mob to oppose Jesus, just like they did. What are the things that oppose God?

(1) It is opposing God's servants.

The high priest and the Sadducees, filled with jealousy, opposed the apostles, who were disciples of the Lord filled with the Holy Spirit (v. 33).

(2) It is opposing the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The statement in the apostles' proclamation, " you had killed by hanging him (Jesus) on a tree" (v. 30), greatly angered the high priest and the Sadducees. Because it pierced their consciences (hearts), they were greatly angered and sought to get rid of the apostles (v. 33).

(3) It is opposing the Holy Spirit of God.

Opposing the apostles, who bear witness to the gospel under the guidance of the Holy Spirit of God (v. 32), means opposing the Holy Spirit of God. In fact, religious leaders, filled with jealousy, opposed the Holy Spirit of God and the apostles filled with the Holy Spirit, as well as the gospel they proclaimed.

A respected person is one who fears God. And one who fears God considers carefully because they fear opposing God. Those who are respected by all the saints do not rashly oppose God's servants, go against the gospel of Jesus Christ, or disobey the guidance of the Holy Spirit of God.

Second, a respected person persuades others.

Look at Acts 5:40 – “His speech persuaded them. They called the apostles in and had them flogged. Then they ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus and let them go.” The members of the Sanhedrin, who had sought to kill the apostles after hearing Gamaliel's speech, were unable to kill them. Instead, they had them flogged and ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus. The reason is stated in Acts 5:40a, " His speech persuaded them."

Let's consider how Gamaliel persuaded the members of the Sanhedrin:

(1) He persuaded them through historical facts.

In other words, Gamaliel did not persuade the members of the Sanhedrin, who were greatly angered, through the same emotions, but rather through the historical fact of the events involving Theudas and Judas.

(2) Gamaliel used Biblical logic to persuade the members of the Sanhedrin.

As mentioned in verses 38-39, he emphasized the Biblical logic that if the beliefs and actions of the apostles were of human origin, they would crumble. However, if they were of divine origin, they would be unstoppable.

(3) Gamaliel persuaded the members of the Sanhedrin through his character.

The first and second methods of persuasion were combined with the character of the persuader. If a person's reputation is not good, their persuasiveness will be diminished. However, Gamaliel was a person of such character that he was respected by all the people. Therefore, his words carried even greater weight.

In Blaine Lee's book 'The Power Principle,' there is a chapter titled 'Earn Respect to Gain Influence': 'Blaine Lee asserts that future leadership depends on respect. He emphasizes that true leadership comes from principle-centered leadership based on respect, not on schemes, strategies, negotiations, or threats. Analyzing the most popular topic in Western society today, 21st-century leadership, from the perspectives of management and organization studies' (Internet). We, as Christians, are losing our influence over people in the world. The reason is that, like Gamaliel, we are not being respected by the people of the world. Instead of gaining respect, we are receiving criticism. We must heed the words of the apostle Paul in Titus 2:7-8: "in all things show yourself to be an example of good deeds, with purity in doctrine, dignified, sound in speech which is beyond reproach, so that the opponent will be put to shame, having nothing bad to say about us." We must demonstrate a model of righteous living, teaching with integrity, seriousness, and sound speech. This way, our lives will have persuasiveness. Now, it is no longer enough to persuade people with words alone. We must persuade them through our lives. When thinking about how we can persuade people through our lives, I was reminded of Romans 4:21, where the word "persuaded" is mentioned: "being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised." To persuade others, whether fellow believers or people of the world, we must first be thoroughly persuaded by God's promises. Just as Abraham believed and hoped against hope (v. 18), even in the face of adversity, difficulties, and crises, if we live a life of faith, being thoroughly persuaded by God's promised word, our lives will be that much more persuasive to others. The gospel must be manifested through the lives of today's evangelists. This is because their lives are the most persuasive face of the gospel to the people they are preaching to (Internet).

Third and last, a respected person sets an example in life.

Look at Acts 5:41-42: "The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name. Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Christ." After the members of the Sanhedrin, who were respected by all the people, heard the advice of the Pharisee Gamaliel and were persuaded, they called the apostles back, had them flogged, and ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus. At that moment, the apostles left, rejoicing that they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the name of Jesus. Even then, they did not cease to teach and proclaim that Jesus is the Messiah.

The lesson we learn here is that a respected person sets an example in life. What kind of example are the apostles showing us? What kind of exemplary life should we live?

- (1) We should rejoice in being considered worthy of suffering disgrace for the name of Jesus.

Why should we rejoice? Are we happy when we believe in Jesus? Are we happy when we receive material blessings from serving Jesus well? Are we happy when our children do well? We should rejoice in participating in the suffering of Jesus for the sake of the gospel. Look at Moses mentioned in Hebrews 11:26. He considered the reproach he received for the sake of Christ greater than all the treasures of Egypt. In Philippians 3:10, Paul expressed his desire to know the fellowship of sharing in the sufferings of Jesus Christ. We must never say that we seek happiness in Jesus without the joy of participating in the sufferings of Jesus. The reason is that there can be no happiness in a life of faith without the joy of participating in the sufferings of Jesus.

(2) The exemplary life we should live is to make every effort to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ, wherever we are, every day.

The released apostles did not cease to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ, whether they were in the temple courts or at home, day after day. However, we sometimes wonder if we are confused about what we should rest in and what we should not rest in. In other words, we may be unclear about what we should rest in and what we should not rest in. Truly respected Christians, who are admired by many people, radiate the fragrance of Jesus Christ in their lives. A life that brings out the aroma of Jesus Christ through one's life and lips is nothing short of the exemplary life of a true Christian.

There are several people whom I respect. Among them is Priest Henry Nowen. As I came across his writings, I grew to respect him. His writings, along with his life of service, have had a significant impact on my spiritual life. However, the person I respect the most is my father. The way he lives his life has a profound influence on me. I strive to follow the example of my father, whom I deeply respect, in my heart. Likewise, I hope to become such a father to my three children at home. I aspire to be a father who considers carefully, one who holds persuasive power as an exemplary figure in life. Above all, I want to be a small Christ who reminds my wife, children, church members, brothers and sisters in Christ.

Desiring to be a person who reminds others of Jesus,

James Kim

(Pursuing an exemplary life that earns respect)

May the Word of God Keep on Spreading!

[Acts 6:1-7]

From an educational perspective, how is the current state of the Korean church? If the focus of the Korean church in the 20th century was 'church growth,' in the 21st century it is shifting towards 'church maturity.' True church growth can only occur in a matured Christian who listens to the words of Christ and obeys them, embodying a matured Christian character (Internet). Are our churches truly receiving the guidance of God's word? Genuine church growth originates from the growth of the word. Revival and growth of a true church occur where the power of God's word is manifested. Therefore, we must draw closer to God's word.

The statement "So the word of God spread" in Acts 6:7 appears three times in the book of Acts (6:7, 12:24, 19:20), and this is the first occurrence in Acts 6:7. It signifies the powerful growth brought about by the word of God. In other words, there was significant growth of God's word as a blessing from God on the pastoral policies chosen by the apostles. Consequently, the number of disciples in Jerusalem increased. We earnestly hope for such a powerful work of the word in our church. Therefore, I would like to meditate on Acts 6:1-7, focusing on how we can allow the word of God to keep on spreading in our church, seeking to receive the grace given to us.

First, in order for the word of God to keep on spreading, we must not neglect God's word.

Look at Acts 6:2 – “So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, ‘It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables.’” Why do we set aside God's word? In other words, why don't we read the Bible regularly? Perhaps the reason is not because the Bible is difficult to read or hard to understand. Students might say they don't read the Bible because it's not interesting (Internet). The first reason people don't read the Bible is likely not because they're too busy.

When we're occupied with various tasks, reading the Bible becomes challenging. Especially if we don't prioritize reading the Bible in our lives, we won't be able to keep God's word close. The twelve apostles mentioned in today's passage were almost swept up in conflict (vv. 1-2). Here, conflict arose due to complaints stemming from financial disputes between Hellenistic and Hebraic Jewish widows (v. 1, Park). The term "Hellenistic Jews" refers to Jews born in foreign lands who used the Greek language. They resented the Hebraic Jews, who were Palestinian Jews using Aramaic (v. 1). The reason for this resentment was that in the daily distribution for support, the widows of Hellenistic Jews were being overlooked. Logically, this happened because the Hellenistic Jews were a minority compared to the Hebraic Jews who used Aramaic, so they were marginalized in the daily distribution program (Yoo). The term "to wait on tables" in verse 2 reveals that they were responsible for this daily distribution. In reality, most believers at that time lived near Jerusalem and were able to attend daily gatherings (2:46-47, 5:42). During these gatherings, the church provided meals for widows and supplied food for the next meal. At that time, it was known that Judaism had two support programs for those on the brink of poverty. This involved providing food daily for those who were destitute and couldn't afford a meal, as well as providing food and clothing for the urban poor once a week (J. Jeremias, Yoo). The widows of Hellenistic Jews were being overlooked in this relief effort, leading to resentment from the Hellenistic Jewish community towards the Hebraic Jewish community. It raises the question of why the widows of Hellenistic Jews were overlooked in the relief effort. The cause was the creation of two antagonistic factions within Judaism (Mollgan). These two groups, which had differences in language and culture, ultimately became embroiled in schismatic conflicts in which those involved in the relief work were Hebraic Jews, not Hellenistic Jews. The cause of the schismatic conflict was showing partiality based on appearance, or favoritism. Favoritism within the church ultimately leads to division. For example, if a senior pastor favors certain members of the congregation over others who follow associate pastors, it can lead to division within a church, creating essentially two separate churches within one. This kind of division ultimately tears apart the body of Jesus Christ. Another example is if the lead pastor shows favoritism towards a particular elder among the board members, it can lead to jealousy, rivalry, and strife, inevitably resulting in division within the board. God does not show favoritism based on appearance (Rom. 2:11). Therefore, we should not show favoritism towards others based on their appearance.

In the end, in the early church, besides the sin of Ananias and Sapphira mentioned in Acts chapter 5, there were also divisions and complaints within the church stemming from favoritism. How did the apostles address this issue? They immediately gathered the entire church and made it clear that they should not be involved in the church's relief program any longer, emphasizing that prioritizing the ministry of the word was more fitting (Acts 6:2). They warned all the disciples that it was not appropriate to neglect God's word in favor of the relief effort (v. 2). Dr. Yoon-seon Park states: 'This was the apostles' proper administration (Rom. 12:8). The role of an apostle is a spiritual duty to proclaim God's word, specifically the gospel (Mt. 28:19-20). However, as the apostles took charge of the relief effort, it hindered the original purpose of their ministry" (Park).

If a pastor sets aside God's word in favor of other tasks within the church, what will happen? In short, it leads to ruin. The pastor and the flock both perish. The church falls apart. Look at Hosea 4:6-9: "My

people are destroyed for lack of knowledge Because you have rejected knowledge, I also will reject you from being My priest Since you have forgotten the law of your God, I also will forget your children. The more they multiplied, the more they sinned against Me; I will change their glory into shame. They feed on the sin of My people And direct their desire toward their iniquity. And it will be, like people, like priest; So I will punish them for their ways And repay them for their deeds.” Therefore, pastors must prioritize God's word. Relief efforts or anything else should not take precedence. In order for God's word to spread, we all must prioritize it. We should never neglect God's word and get swept up in various tasks.

Second, in order for God's word to keep on spreading, we must be dedicated to prayer and the ministry of the word.

Look at Acts 6:4 in today's passage: "We will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word." The apostles, after gathering the entire church and proclaiming that neglecting God's word in favor of the relief effort was inappropriate, delegated the task to seven individuals who were filled with the Holy Spirit and wisdom to handle the relief work, receiving praise. In a sense, they selected seven deacons to take charge of this work, while the pastors proclaimed that they would focus on prayer and the ministry of God's word.

Pastors must know how to delegate. If a pastor tries to do everything in the church without delegating to elders, deacons, or lay ministers, or if they constantly interfere and prevent lay ministers from doing their jobs properly, it is not acceptable. Such a church can never be considered a healthy church. Why do pastors hesitate to delegate to lay ministers? In my opinion, there are at least two reasons. The first reason is authoritarianism. As long as the pastor's authoritarianism exists, it is difficult to foster an atmosphere in the church that values expertise (Internet). When the pastor's authority is abused and they pastor within an atmosphere of authoritarianism, they are unwilling to delegate as much as possible to lay ministers. Another reason is distrust. In other words, I think the pastor does not delegate because they do not trust lay ministers. This, in a way, shows that the pastor only trusts themselves. They do not believe that anyone else can do the job properly.

However, the apostles delegated the relief work to seven deacons and declared in front of the entire church that they would be dedicated to prayer and the ministry of the word. Here, the ministry of the word refers to feeding the believers with God's word just as feeding widows in the relief work, and also includes preaching the gospel to non-believers. What's interesting is that in verse 2, the apostles had already announced that they would be dedicated to prayer and the ministry of the word. But in verse 4, there is an additional statement that they would be dedicated to prayer before preaching the word. The fact that prayer comes before preaching the word teaches us that a preacher must first and foremost be a person of prayer (Park). Without striving to become a person of prayer, a pastor or a servant cannot emerge, and even if they do, it will not be right. It would be almost like obscuring the glory of God. The apostles' decision and declaration to be dedicated to prayer and the ministry of the word reflect Jesus' pastoral philosophy directly from the perspective of the author Luke. One crucial aspect that Jesus demonstrated to the apostles was that He placed the ministry of prayer before the ministry of preaching the word (Lk. 5:15-16) (Yoo).

Do pastors today have this pastoral philosophy of the apostles? When we look at the Korean church, we are faced with the unfortunate reality that the prayer life and preaching ministry of pastors are weakening due to the overload of administrative tasks in the church. We cannot deny this fact. Therefore, one of the things many full-time co-workers say is that they cannot pray properly or study the word properly because of the many administrative tasks (work) in the church. I find Professor Sang-seop Yoo's advice helpful: 'In order for the modern church to restore the pastoral philosophy of the apostles of the early church, pastors must boldly entrust what should be entrusted to lay ministers, and it is absolutely necessary for pastors to return to the essential ministry of prayer and the word' (Yoo). In order for God's word to keep on spreading, we all must be dedicated to prayer and the ministry of the word.

Third and last, in order for God's word to keep on spreading, there must be faith and fullness of the Holy Spirit.

Look at Acts 6:5 – “This proposal pleased the whole group. They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit; also Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas from Antioch, a convert to Judaism.”

When the apostles declared that they would be dedicated to prayer and the ministry of the word, the whole assembly accepted it with joy (v. 5). So, the apostles told the whole congregation to choose seven deacons. The criteria for selecting the seven deacons are mentioned in verse 3:

- (1) A man full of Spirit and wisdom, which refers to someone who is spiritually wise (Grosheide).

The work of providing relief in the church is not merely a worldly, secular task of caring for the physical needs. Since the church's relief work can be considered a spiritually centered activity centered on Christ, spiritual wisdom is necessary (Park). Full of the Spirit and wisdom denotes the amount of wisdom needed to handle the responsibilities well.

- (2) A person known to be full of faith.

Here, being known to be full of faith refers to being recognized by people as possessing virtue and credibility (Park). One of the qualifications for a deacon, as stated in 1 Timothy 3:10, is to be a person who has no charge against them. This implies that the qualification of a deacon candidate is the fact that they are recognized by the congregation. One interesting thing is that when we look at the names of the seven chosen individuals who are full of the Spirit, wisdom, and faith, they all have Greek names. This indicates that the Hellenistic Jews at the time had resented the unfairness in the church's relief work. The fact that these seven Hellenistic deacons were appointed was a very fair and generous treatment (Park). The names of these seven Hellenistic deacons are Stephen, Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas, a convert to Judaism from Antioch (Acts

6:5). As we know, Stephen and Philip are mentioned in Acts 6-8. These seven deacons are men full of faith and of the Holy Spirit (v. 5). The apostles entrusted the entire relief work to them.

When thinking about the early Jerusalem church, with the twelve apostles full of faith and the Holy Spirit alongside the seven deacons, we can't help but ask ourselves what our own church should be like. We must seek to be filled with faith and the Holy Spirit. To achieve this, we must dedicate ourselves to prayer and the ministry of the word, just like the apostles. One cannot become a person full of faith and the Holy Spirit by neglecting prayer and merely observing the word. Pastor Tozer expressed it this way: 'To live a life filled with the Spirit, one must live in God's word, just as fish live in water. Living in God's word doesn't simply mean studying the Bible or attending doctrinal classes. It means meditating on His word day and night, loving it, and fully digesting it. When various issues of life try to infiltrate our hearts and capture our minds, we must react almost reflexively according to the word' (Tozer).

In his book, " That Incredible Christian" Pastor Tozer stated: 'When examining the history of the church over the centuries, every revival of the church has always been accompanied by obedience to the truth. The touchstone that distinguishes a revived church from a dead one is how the members of the church respond to the truth. A dead church does not obey the truth; it merely attaches itself to the outer shell of truth. On the other hand, a church desiring to do God's will immediately receives the blessing of spiritual empowerment' (Tozer). Through today's message, we have been shown God's will: (1) We must not set aside God's word for other matters. (2) We must dedicate ourselves to prayer and the ministry of the word. (3) Therefore, we must become people filled with faith and the Holy Spirit.

May God's word keep on spreading within our church!

James Kim

(Full of the Word, Full of the Spirit!)

The Number of Believers Increased?

[Acts 6:1]

Last night, I began reading Acts chapter 6, which is the Bible passage I'll be using for today's morning prayer meeting. As I started reading from verse 1, my attention was immediately drawn to the phrase "In those days" (6:1). I found myself wondering, "What was happening at that specific time that led to an increase in disciples (believers)?" So, I turned back to Acts chapter 5 and focused on verses 17 onwards. In these verses, the apostles were arrested and put in jail (v. 18), brought before the high priest and the Sadducees (v. 27), and sternly ordered not to teach in Jesus' name anymore (v. 28). They even intended to kill the apostles after hearing their message (v. 33). However, in the end, they were released with a flogging and a strict command not to speak in Jesus' name (v. 40). The apostles left the council rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer disgrace for the name of Jesus. And from that point on, they did not cease teaching and proclaiming Jesus as the Christ, whether in the temple or in private homes (vv. 41-42). It was in those days that the number of believers greatly increased (6:1). In essence, "In those days" refers to a period when Jesus' disciples faced persecution and hardship for His name, yet they continued to boldly teach and proclaim Jesus Christ. As a result, the number of believers in Jesus grew significantly.

Reflecting on this, I asked myself, "What about 'in these days'? How are we handling the challenges and opportunities presented to us?" In the present context, as we hear news of declining numbers of believers in Korean churches, I believe there are three key factors to consider.

First, it's possible that as Christians, we may not be actively teaching and proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ in the midst of challenges and persecution.

The power of the gospel and the Holy Spirit might not be as evident, which could be a contributing factor to the decreasing number of believers. To reverse this trend and see an increase in believers in Korean churches, we must diligently teach and proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ, even in the face of challenges and persecution, relying on the power of the Holy Spirit. This is when we can expect to witness

an abundance of both the Holy Spirit's power and the gospel's transformative impact, resulting in a growth of believers in the church (Acts 2:47).

Second, I reflected on the fact that in the early church, even when there was an increase in believers, there were also complaints and grievances within the community.

The Hellenistic Jews were resentful of the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food (6:1). When I contemplate this passage, it seems to me that as the number of believers in the church increases, the likelihood of conflicts and complaints also rises. This thought is influenced by Hosea 4:7: "The more priests there were, the more they sinned against me; they exchanged their glorious God for something disgraceful" (Contemporary Korean Bible). Applying this verse to our current situation, I believe that as the number of pastors increases, so does the likelihood of them committing more sins against God. Instead of humbly praying to God, as the psalmist says, "Not to us, O LORD, not to us, But to Your name give glory Because of Your lovingkindness, because of Your truth" (Ps. 115:1), some pastors may fall into the trap of pride, seeking their own glory from the praise of people and robbing God of His rightful honor. Consequently, God turns the glory of these proud pastors into shame.

Therefore, an increase in the number of pastors may not always be a positive phenomenon. The same can be said for an increase in believers. While it is certainly a positive development for the gospel of Jesus Christ to be taught and shared, I believe that not all believers are the same. If the number of believers who do not live lives worthy of the gospel of Jesus Christ (Phil. 1:27) increases, what will become of the church? If a multitude of believers, each with their own agendas and contentious hearts (due to vanity), fail to stand together with one mind and one purpose for the faith of the gospel (2:3, 4:2), it cannot be considered a good situation. No, it is a detrimental situation. It is a sin against God. This is why the church struggles to fulfill its role as the light and salt of the world. It is why the church is subjected to scorn from worldly people. Yet, despite this, we seem oblivious to the shame. There appears to be no sign of repentance. In this context, what meaning or purpose does it serve to artificially increase the number of congregants through various contrived methods of evangelism? If the number of congregants increases, it will only lead to more sinning against God (Hosea 4:7). What should we do?

First and foremost, we, the pastors, must live lives worthy of the gospel of Jesus Christ. In this context, we must teach the gospel of Jesus Christ to the saints in the church. Moreover, we should also teach the gospel to our family members at home. Within such a community, the entire church should stand firmly united in the Lord, proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ and cooperating in the ministry of evangelism. In the process of collaborating for the work of evangelism, we must also faithfully manage the ministry of benevolence. While it is indeed crucial to engage in external benevolent work to serve the local community, we must also handle internal benevolence within the church wisely and faithfully, so that saints facing trials do not emerge. We must handle the ministry of benevolence with love and wisdom.

However, it is crucial in benevolent work not to seek glory from people, as if trying to win their praise, just like hypocrites (Mt. 6:1).

Jesus addressed this in Matthew 6:2-4, saying, "So when you give to the poor, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be honored by men Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. But when you give to the poor, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving will be in secret; and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you." The reason Jesus spoke in this manner is that the Pharisees sought to gain righteousness by observing the law, and one of the laws they diligently observed was benevolence. However, the issue was that they practiced benevolence with hypocrisy. In other words, they gave to be seen by others, seeking honor from them. Therefore, Jesus instructed His disciples not to practice benevolence like the Pharisees, but rather to do so secretly, because their heavenly Father, who sees what is done in secret, would reward them. Here, Jesus' teaching emphasizes that God's children, who obtain righteousness through His complete grace by believing in Jesus Christ, are to live a life of righteousness, which includes secretly helping those in need. Living a life of benevolence as a righteous person is a result of God's grace, not an attempt to obtain righteousness, as the Pharisees did. Therefore, we must not engage in benevolence with the intention of obtaining righteousness, like the Pharisees. We must abandon the habit of seeking recognition in benevolent work. Instead, we should humbly and faithfully manage the ministry of benevolence with a sense of gratitude for God's grace. In those days, the church will receive praise from all people (Acts 2:47, Contemporary Korean Bible).

Third and last, what comes to mind for me is that when there was resentment and complaints within the church, the twelve apostles appointed seven deacons.

The apostles themselves stated, "It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables" (Acts 6:2, ESV). When conflicts and complaints arise among the congregants, pastors and associate pastors often find themselves in a position of not knowing how to resolve the disputes, why the congregants are complaining, what is causing their dissatisfaction, and how to satisfy them. There are moments when they earnestly seek God for guidance. However, in the passage we read today, Acts 6:1-4, the Bible doesn't mention that when the Hellenistic Jews complained against the Hebraic Jews (v. 1), the twelve apostles attempted to address their dissatisfaction and ensure that the Hellenistic and Hebraic Jews could live together in harmony without further complaints. Instead, the Bible records that the twelve apostles, after calling all the disciples, said to them, "It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables" (v. 2, ESV). Why did the twelve apostles speak in this way? It's because they chose seven individuals from among the disciples who were full of the Spirit and of wisdom (v. 3, ESV) and commissioned them to oversee the work of benevolence, while they themselves devoted their time to prayer and to the ministry of the word (v. 4, ESV). When the disciples heard this proposal from the twelve apostles, the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith (v. 7, ESV). So, while verse 1 states, the disciples were increasing in number, in verse 7, the Bible says, the number of the disciples multiplied

greatly in Jerusalem. In conclusion, amidst external troubles and internal conflicts, the early church not only preached the gospel of Jesus Christ daily but also organized the church structure internally, distinguishing the responsibilities of the apostles and the appointed deacons. They dedicated themselves to their respective roles, resulting in a significant increase in the number of believers.

In the world today, there is much to harvest, but there are few laborers in the church (Mt. 9:37). Why are there few laborers in the church? One reason is that our church members, while pursuing a better and more comfortable life in this world, may have limited dedication to suffer and sacrifice for the body of Christ, the church, and the kingdom of God. Therefore, we pray to the Lord to send laborers for the harvest, just as Jesus instructed (v. 38). So, what kind of laborers should we pray for the Lord to send? We should pray for laborers who sow the seeds of God's word, diligent and wise laborers who gather the harvest when the time comes, joyful laborers who know the pleasure of harvesting and can enjoy it (Isa. 9:3), and faithful individuals who refresh the Lord's heart as laborers (Prov. 25:13). However, a serious issue arises when we appoint individuals within the church who may lack the qualifications. There seem to be justifications within us for our decisions, such as, 'If we appoint that person as a church laborer, they may be insufficient now, but they will do well in the future,' or 'Even though their faith is lacking now (knowing that their character is also lacking), if we appoint that person to a position, their faith will grow, and they will serve more diligently.' However, when such individuals assume church roles, do they actually grow in faith and transform in character as we expected? Could it be possible that we appointed the wrong person to a position, and they are causing problems within the church? Personally, I am increasingly convinced that we should not appoint individuals to church positions haphazardly. No matter how scarce laborers may be, and no matter how urgently we need them, I believe it is wrong to be swayed by the circumstances and appoint someone lacking the qualifications. I believe it is not only detrimental to the church but also not in the best interest of that individual. The reason for this growing conviction is that, as someone who has attended church for quite some time and has reached a certain age, I see advertisements in Christian newspapers, especially on occasions like church anniversaries, where elders, ordained deacons, and deacons are appointed. Almost everyone seems to be an elder, an ordained deacon, or a deacon. This has led me to wonder why so many of them do not resemble Jesus in character, and why they do not live like true believers, resulting in them facing criticism not only within the church but also particularly outside the church, in their families, workplaces, and society. It seems like there might be a few reasons for this. The unfortunate reality is that when we see conflicts and disputes within the church, it is often not among pastors, elders, ordained deacons, or deacons. It is unlikely that they were appointed to encourage quarrels and conflicts. We need to be very cautious when appointing individuals to positions.

In Acts 6:3, the twelve apostles instructed, " Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them." Even considering just this instruction, shouldn't we at least choose individuals who are praised by the congregation if they are to become deacons? In 1 Timothy 3:7, regarding overseers (pastors and elders), it is mentioned that they should have a good reputation with those outside the church. In verse 8, it is stated that deacons should be dignified, not double-tongued, not lovers of money, not greedy for dishonest gain.

When I think about this, I wonder how many deacons who love alcohol there are, to the extent that the term "alcohol deacon" has emerged. The Bible clearly states that those to be appointed as deacons should first be tested, and if there is nothing against them, they should serve in that capacity (v. 10). If someone is appointed as a deacon who receives reprimands rather than praises from the congregation, what will be the result of that choice? The Bible also addresses deacons' wives, stating that they should be dignified, not slanderers, but sober-minded, faithful in all things (v. 11). However, nowadays, deacons' wives are said to engage in lobbying or campaigning within the church to make their husbands elders. Truly perplexing events are taking place within the church. Therefore, one of the most serious problems I see in the church is the elders. Here, "elders" refer to both teaching elders, who are pastors, and ruling elders, who manage and govern. As someone who has grown up within the Presbyterian church, I cannot dismiss the idea that one of the issues in the Presbyterian organization lies with the elders. Why is there so much talk, conflict, and discord in the "Session," which is composed of pastors and elders? Why do elders argue with each other, not just with pastors? Why don't they show leniency to one another (v. 3)? The Bible says that overseers (pastors, elders) must not be lovers of money (v. 3), but why are they increasingly becoming slaves to their greed for money? How can pastors and elders who don't know how to manage their own households take care of God's church (v. 5)? I don't want to say more. The responsibility lies primarily with our pastors. The responsibility of our pastors is greater than that of elders or deacons. It's because they are not leading properly. It's because they are not loving properly. It's because they don't know how to do things right (even if they think they know how and even if they do know how). If they understood this, they would prostrate themselves before God like the twelve apostles in Acts 6, prioritizing prayer and the ministry of the word. However, in reality, the pastors are too busy with various ministries due to the circumstances and situations, and they may not be able to exert themselves in prayer and the ministry of the word. The result of this can be seen in the unfortunate events happening in Korean churches through the news, wouldn't you agree? What should we do? First, our pastors need to recognize things that are not appropriate (undesirable) in the church through conflicts, difficulties, and even crises, just like the twelve apostles did in Acts 6:2. Then, we must make it a priority, even through conflicts, difficulties, and even crises (or, if there are none, by maintaining a sense of crisis before God), to exert ourselves primarily in prayer and the ministry of the word, just like the twelve apostles did (v. 4). To do this, the pastors should delegate tasks to the elders and ordained deacons who are full of the Spirit and wisdom (v. 3). In doing so, the word of God will spread widely, and the number of believers will increase significantly (v. 7). Then "our mouths will be filled with laughter and our tongues with shouts of joy. ... Then the nations will say, 'The Lord has done great things for them'" (Ps. 126:2).

Praying for the church to grow in numbers, and even through the challenges and crises that come with it, may there be even greater dedication to prayer and ministry of the Word.

James Kim

(Believing in faithfully carrying out one's responsibilities and entrusted tasks, prioritizing them as a servant, and seeking praise not only from people but also from the Lord, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit through faith)

Satan's Face and Angel's Face

[Acts 6:8-15]

Do you know Treacher Collins Syndrome? On the evening of March 1, 2005, TV viewers were surprised to see 'The Faceless Child'. This three-year-old girl lives in Orange Park, Florida, USA. Her name is Julieanna. The child was born with only 30% of the bones that make up the upper jaw, cheeks, eye sockets, and pinna. This symptom of a 'faceless state' due to the lack of proper bone structure is called 'Treacher Collins Syndrome,' and the medical staff agreed that Julianna's condition is the worst among all cases so far. The child underwent 14 surgeries. She will have to undergo at least 30 surgeries in the future. However, her parents, who serve in the navy, are grateful, saying, 'This lovely daughter is a gift from God.' Her dad, Tom, said, 'God never gives us what we can't handle. My daughter has a lot to show to everyone.' Even if she doesn't have a face, her father says he is thankful for her and says that she is a gift, how unfortunate it would be if we considered the gift as a valueless commodity (Internet). Among the reactions to an Internet article about Julianna suffering from Treacher Collins syndrome, the best remark was, 'In our country, children would be abandoned. Or even if they were raised by their parents, kindergartens or schools would not accept them.' The next remark was 'My daughter says this: When I sleep today and wake up tomorrow, I hope that our country, Korea, will become a country like that country without prejudice. ... Somehow bitter and shy .. Conversation with daughter ... Reflected ... '. The next remark was 'We should be thankful': 'Every time I see people with disabilities or people in need, I think about it, and we should be grateful even if our hands and feet are intact and our bodies are intact. Am I the only one who thinks so?' (Internet)

What about our faces? Aren't we 'faceless Christians' just like 'a faceless child'? Let us listen to Lincoln's famous words: 'If you are over the age of forty, you must take responsibility for your face.' 'The Chinese New Year water bucket, where all the dross has settled, looks like clear water. But if you turn the inside of the stick once, everything that has sunk, such as bean sprouts, rice grass, and radish pieces, will float up. A person's personality can also be known by turning it inside out. Only when you are at peace and when you receive grace are all the faces of angels. But when you are upset, you can only know what is inside. What came to mind when you turned Stephen's stomach upside down? An angel's face came to mind. It was a face that no one dared to touch' (Internet).

In Acts 6:15, we are going to meditate on the angel's face and Satan's face, focusing on the words of today's text, looking at the word that Stephen's face was like "the face of an angel." In the midst of this, we want to be taught what kind of face we should and shouldn't be.

First, let us think about the face of Satan.

Satan's appearance is perfect in beauty (Ezek. 28:12-13). Charles Stanley said in his book "When the Enemy Strikes": "The Bible introduces Satan as an angel of light (2 Cor. 11:14). Satan hides his face and comes wearing someone else's mask. The Bible describes this as a ferocious wolf in sheep's clothing (Mt. 7:15) (Internet). Who is Satan? See the names of Satan: Satan, the devil (slanderer), Lucifer (son of the dawn), Beelzebub [the prince of demons (Mt. 12:24)], and Belial [the wicked (2 Cor. 6:15)], the evil one (1 Jn. 5:19), the tempter (1 Thess. 3:5), the ruler of this world (Jn. 12:31), the god of this age (2 Cor. 4:4), the prince of the power of the air (Eph. 2:2), the accuser of our brethren (Rev. 12:10), an angel of light (2 Cor. 11:14), the serpent (Rev. 12:9) and the dragon (Rev. 12:3). Look at Satan's attributes: Satan is a created angelic being. He had been created as part of the realm of angels (Eph. 6:11-12; Ezek. 24:18). And he is the highest in the ranks of all of them (Ezek. 28:12-14). What are Satan's actions? Satan is trying to go against God's plan by making it as evil as possible in every way. The indirect action is that Satan is acting indirectly through the world [where Satan is extremely free and powerful (Jn. 12:31; 1 Jn. 5:19)] and through the flesh. The world, the flesh, and evil are not the three separate enemies of Christians. Rather, Satan is working through the system of the evil world (1 Jn. 2:13-15) to use the fleshly nature within us (Rom. 7:18; Gal. 5:19-21). The direct action is that Satan acts directly by depicting, seducing, attacking, and possessing. The work in the believer (1) Satan tempts the believer to conceit (1 Chron. 21:1-8), to be secular (Jn. 2:15; Jam. 5:1-7), to be immoral (1 Cor. 7:5), to lie (Acts 5:3), to be discouraged (1 Pet. 5:6-10), to be unforgiving (2 Cor. 2:10-11). (2) Satan hinders the work of believers (1 Thess. 2:18; Rev 2:10). (3) Satan promotes false teachings among believers (1 Jn. 4:1-4). (4) Satan promotes anger, sorrow, and wrath (Eph. 4:26-27; 2 Cor. 2:5-11) (Internet).

Who are the servants of Satan in today's text and argue with Stephen? They are "the Freedmen" (v. 9), that is, "the Synagogue of the Freedmen," former captives and freedmen, scattered Greek-speaking Jews from Cyrene, Alexandria, and Cilicia, respectively (v. 9, Yoo). How did Satan's servants attack Stephen? In a word, they incited people to give false witness. Look at verse 11: "Then they secretly persuaded some men to say, 'We have heard Stephen speak words of blasphemy against Moses and against God.'" The word "secretly persuaded" is the only Greek word used here, and it means the act of instigating people to do as they are instructed (Yoo). The people in the synagogue of the freedmen who oppose Stephen were using people to represent them with false evidence. In other words, they made for false propaganda. What was that false evidence or false propaganda? "We have heard Stephen speak words of blasphemy against Moses and against God" (v. 11). The important thing here is that those they bought and built had never heard Stephen say anything, but they put forward as if they were eyewitnesses to what Stephen said (Yoo). The servants of Satan who attacked Stephen lied and bribed those who had never heard Stephen say that Stephen had committed the sin of blasphemy and gave them false witness. Eventually, when the bribed go out in public and Stephen speaks blasphemy against the temple and Moses, they incite or "stirred up" the people, the elders, and the scribes (v.

12) so that they all become one and made them flock to Stephen. Isn't it interesting? Those who oppose Jesus and those who oppose the apostles work together, and those who oppose the ordained deacon of Stephen in today's text, the freedmen in the synagogue, the people, the elders, and the scribes all united to defeat Stephen by giving false testimony to get rid of him. Furthermore, these satanic servants even made the bribers serve as false witnesses in court (v. 13). They were false witnesses before the Sanhedrin court, saying, "This man does not hesitate to speak against this holy place and against the law, saying, "This fellow never stops speaking against this holy place and against the law. For we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs Moses handed down to us" (vv. 13-14, Yoo). These satanic servants, bearing false witnesses with a false heart, attacked the truly holy deacon, Stephen, under the guise of the holy temple and the holy Law of Moses.

The unholy people, who pretend to be holy, live false witnesses and give false witness. Like the false witnesses in verse 11, they lie that they have heard things they have not heard. They are not quick to hear the voice of God, but rather lie in the midst of hearing the voice of Satan. The same work of Satan can exist within the church. We can commit the sin of accusing each other by speaking as if we have heard it without even hearing it directly. In 3 John 1:9-10, there is a person named "Diotrephes", who gossiped maliciously about the apostles. In modern saying, there is Diotrephes kind of people within church who are slanderers of a pastor. These souls are largely wrong souls. In the church, the saints gossip and criticize the pastor is a person with a wrong soul, like Diotrephes. Members of the church should never slander not only the pastor but also each other. It is the act of falling into the devil's temptation and acting as the devil's agent. If they slander each other, the relationship will be broken. That's the devil's goal. This is the devil's tactic to cause division by causing the church to be engulfed in chaos. If there is a person in the church who slanders and frames the Lord's brothers and thus promotes division and strife, that person is like Diotrephes with a wrong soul (Internet). It is malicious to slander the Lord's brothers (v. 10). We need to be wary of such person. Such a person is like a root of bitterness that disturbs the church and harms the peace of the church. Therefore, we must be very vigilant (Internet). And we must be on guard against Satan's servants who incite people by giving false witness. In other words, in the church, we must be very careful about accusing the members of the church, as they accuse the pastor, the elders, and the church members. If it is good to lead people who are not yet ready in any field, it is incitement to secretly fan the naive public with false ideas with written words or actions to cause them to be suspicious, distrustful, or angry about the beliefs of their community. In the church, if there are many leaders, it is peaceful. But if there are persistent agitators who are active in an organized way, they will be involved in division and power-defying tricks. The natural enemies that destroy the community are the instigators. The instigators are those who hide their true identity and play tricks on others with plausible words (Internet).

We must be wary of wolves in sheep's clothing. Even though they may appear as gentle as a sheep, we must be wary of those who oppose Jesus because they incite and frame people and thus oppose the servants of God. Even though their faces look beautiful outwardly like Satan, and they look like the faces of a bright angel, we must be careful and beware.

Second, let us think about the face of angel.

Look at Acts 6:15 – “All who were sitting in the Sanhedrin looked intently at Stephen, and they saw that his face was like the face of an angel.” Here, what does it mean by that Stephen’s face was like the face of angel? This shows that Stephen resembles Jesus already in the glory of the resurrection. He shows that the glory of God is with him (Yoo). This refers to Stephen's face shining with peace, love, and joy (Park). How is this possible? With all the people around him accusing him and threats from those in power at the time, he could be terrified. Instead, how did Stephen's face look like an angel? I find the cause in Acts 6:8, 10. That is, Stephen was full of God’s grace and power, and his adversaries were not able to stand up against Stephen’s wisdom or the Spirit by whom he spoke. That is, since Stephen was full of grace, power, wisdom, and the Holy Spirit, even in the face of threats, the true radiance of an angel appeared. This radiance reminds us of Moses in the Old Testament. Moses' face was radiant when he met God from Mount Sinai and came down with the stone tablets inscribed with the Ten Commandments. And the Israelites saw Moses, they were afraid to come near Moses. So Moses put a veil over his face. The reason that Moses had the radiant face, that is, an angelic face, was because Moses spoke with God like a friend and obeyed His command (Internet). The word radiance is the Hebrew word 'karan', which symbolizes the glory of God. The radiance, a symbol of God's glory, appeared on Moses' face, indicating the climax of his faith. The radiant face means a human figure reflecting the glory of God. It can be said that it is a word that expresses the state of being filled with the Holy Spirit by the grace of God. Then, the radiant face means that it has reached the highest level in God's eyes, and that it is the most perfect human form that has restored the image of God (Internet).

But what is the face of Christians? If we look at an Internet article written under the title ‘The Two Faces of American Christians,’ an American pastor (Anthony B. Robinson) said these words in a sermon: “The traditional Trinity of Christianity has been replaced by the modern trinity of ‘Me, Myself and Mine” (Internet). This is a rebuke that we, Christians, are living selfish life rather than living the Trine God-centered life. In the end, Christians living in the United States seem to have one face that resembles Jesus, but the other face is drowning in selfishness in which ‘my face’ that only I know is becoming more and more clearly visible. Like Stephen, we must be full of grace, full of power, full of wisdom, and full of the Holy Spirit, so that the radiance that reveals the glory of God appears on our faces. Therefore, even those who oppose and persecute us may see “the face of an angel” in our faces, like Stephen.

We need to restore the face of Jesus. An Internet article titled ‘Restoring the Face of Jesus’ states: Leonardo da Vinci invited his acquaintances to unveil ‘The Last Supper’, which he worked hard for several years. Finally, the fabric was removed and the work was revealed. For a moment, exasperation flowed from the people's mouths. A friend said with a recalled expression. ‘It’s a really great piece of work. Look at that shiny glass in Jesus' hands. Isn't that great?’ Then Leonardo da Vinci picked up his brush and smashed the part of the glass. Leonardo da Vinci said to the startled people: ‘This work is a failure. I wanted your attention to be focused on the face of Jesus. But if my eyes were focused on the glass, it was beyond my intentions.’ He completed the painting by repainting the glass so that it did not obscure the expression of Jesus. Modern people often make the mistake of cheering at the gleaming glass in Jesus' hand.’ Faith is the process of finding the essence of life. Faith is the restoration of the face of Jesus hidden in a glass (Internet).

Hoping to have a face like Stephen's, like that of an angel,

James Kim

(Hoping not to be a two-faced person)

The God of Abraham

[Acts 7:1-8]

A promise is a promise. President Lincoln was a man who kept his promises, especially those made to his mother. One day, President Abraham Lincoln was riding in a carriage with a Union colonel who had come from Kentucky. The colonel took out a bottle of whiskey from his pocket and offered President Lincoln a drink. President Lincoln declined, saying, 'Thank you, but I do not drink whiskey.' A little while later, the colonel pulled out a pipe and offered it to President Lincoln. Again, President Lincoln declined, saying, 'No, thank you, Colonel.' Then, President Lincoln explained, 'Let me tell you why I do not drink alcohol or smoke. When I was about nine years old, my mother called me to her bedside. She was very ill. 'Abe,' she said, 'the doctor tells me I may not recover. I want you to be a good man. Promise me that you will never put alcohol or tobacco in your mouth as long as you live.' I made that promise to my mother, and I have kept it ever since. Do you think it would be right for me to break that promise now?' The colonel took President Lincoln's arm and said, 'Sir, I promise you that I will do my best never to break that promise. It is one of the finest promises a person can make. If I had made that promise to my mother and kept it, I would have saved at least a thousand dollars by now, and I would be a far better man than I am today' (Internet). What is the meaning of a promise? Keeping a promise is a mature act of taking responsibility for one's own words, and it also reflects the nature of God, who unfailingly fulfills His promises. Therefore, promises are sacred. The significance of a promise lies not in its weight of value, but in the sincerity and diligence with which it is kept (Internet). Do we truly understand the meaning of a promise and make sincere efforts to keep them?

In today's passage, Acts 7:1-8, Stephen begins his speech, and he talks about Abraham. I want to reflect on the title "The God of Abraham" centered around Acts 7:1-8. In the midst of this, I want to consider our responsibility for faithful living, growing in faith along with knowledge of knowing God.

First, the God of Abraham is a God who is visible.

Look at Acts 7:2 – “To this he replied: "Brothers and fathers, listen to me! The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham while he was still in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran.” When Stephen was accused of blasphemy by the leaders and elders of the synagogues of the Freedmen (who belonged to the

synagogues of the Cyrenians, Alexandrians, and others from the provinces of Cilicia and Asia), the high priest of the Sanhedrin questioned Stephen, asking, "Are these charges true?" (v. 1). Stephen's lengthy speech in response to this question is recorded in Acts 7:2-53. In this speech, Stephen speaks about Abraham in Acts 7:2-8. Stephen does not defend himself but rather begins by explaining the history of Israel, starting with their ancestor Abraham, and culminating in the present generation accusing him (Yoo). Notably, in verse 2, when Stephen addresses the crowd as "Brothers and fathers," he subtly reminds them that he himself is still one of them. He conveys that the history of the Israelites began with the glorious God appearing to Abraham, leading up to the present generation (Yoo). What is interesting here is the connection between Stephen's previously mentioned "face like an angel" (6:15) and "the God of glory" mentioned in Acts 7:2. The word for "glory" used here is "karan" in Hebrew, signifying the radiance that symbolizes God's glory. Therefore, a glorious face represents a human countenance reflecting the glory of God. When it is said that Stephen's face appeared like an angel, it means that his face was radiant. This statement implies that Stephen's face reflected the glory of God, much like Moses, who came down from Mount Sinai with the stone tablets bearing the Ten Commandments, with his face shining (Yoo). Then, in verse 2, the statement that "the God of glory" appeared to Abraham indicates the connection between Abraham and Stephen. In other words, Stephen, while defending himself against the accusations of the Jewish leaders, clearly states that he is also a spiritual descendant of Abraham. However, what is evident is that while Stephen is a true spiritual descendant of Abraham, the Jewish leaders accusing him are not the genuine spiritual descendants of Abraham as we understand it.

Indeed, are we truly the genuine spiritual descendants of Abraham? If we answered "yes" in faith, then we must reveal the God of glory to the people of this world through our faces and lives. This means that God's glory should be reflected through our faces and lives. To achieve this, what must we do? We must listen to His voice in the midst of His presence and obey. Living in the shelter of the Lord means advancing in a way of life where all our desires, thoughts, and actions constantly receive His guidance, as Henry Nouwen notes in his book "In the Name of Jesus": 'Living in the shelter of the Lord means moving toward a life in which all of our desires, thoughts, and actions are constantly guided by the Word of the Lord' (Nouwen).

So, what was the command of the God of glory that Abraham heard? Look at Acts 7:3 - "Leave your country and your people, God said, and go to the land I will show you." The God of glory appeared to Abraham and commanded him to leave his homeland, Ur of the Chaldeans, and depart from his relatives. "Leave your country and your people ... and go ..." Would it have been easy to obey this command? Who would willingly leave behind a stable life and beloved homeland to become a wanderer in a foreign land forever? However, Abraham followed through with this command because God had ordered it. Although he did not know the outcome of all future challenges, he cheerfully set out on the path, thinking as if God's command had already solved all future problems (Park). This is faith. It is the belief in holding onto God (by His word), moving according to His lead (Gen. 12:4), believing that God accompanies in this movement, and trusting that as a result of this action, one will reap all the blessed fruit (Ref.: Heb. 11:8) (Park).

We must reveal the God of glory to the world. It can no longer be just through words. By listening

to God's word and obeying it, we must bring forth the glory of God into this dark world.

Second, the God of Abraham is a God who moves.

Look at Acts 7:4 - "So he left the land of the Chaldeans and settled in Haran. After the death of his father, God sent him to this land where you are now living." The God of glory appeared to Abraham in Ur of the Chaldeans and commanded him to leave your country and your people (v. 3). In obedience to this command, Abraham left the land of the Chaldeans, dwelt in Haran until the death of his father, and then came into the land of Canaan (v. 4). The "land I will show you" in verse 3 and "this land" in verse 4 refer to the land of Canaan. It is the very place where Stephen and the Jews who accused and reviled him are now living. God, in His glory, called Abraham out of the land of the Chaldeans and, after dwelling in Haran, brought him into the land of Canaan. Why did God call Abraham out of the land of the Chaldeans to dwell in Haran and then move him into the land of Canaan? The reason is so that God could fulfill the promise of blessing He gave to Abraham. This blessing is stated in Genesis 12:1-3: "The Lord had said to Abram, 'Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.'" God wanted to bless Abraham, and to do so, He called him out of the land of the Chaldeans to dwell in Haran, and from there, brought him into the land of Canaan.

Our God is a God who moves us in order to bless us. Look at John 5:24 - "Very truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life." Those who hear Jesus' gospel (word) and believe in God the Father who sent Him have already crossed over from death to life. God has moved us from hell to heaven. We are no longer heading towards eternal death in hell. By believing in Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection, we are already on the path to eternal life in heaven. Therefore, as those who have received new life, we have the responsibility to remove all idols from our lives. The reason God called Abraham out of the land of the Chaldeans into the land of Canaan was not only to bless him, but also to rescue him from a city of idol worship. The land of Haran, where Abraham was, was a city of idol worship. "Haran was a city in Aram where the moon-god "Sin-and-Nikkal" was worshiped" (Baker's Encyclopedia of the Bible). God moved Abraham from the city of idol worship, Haran, to the land of Canaan. Look at 1 Samuel 7:3: "And Samuel said to all the house of Israel, 'If you are returning to the Lord with all your heart, then put away the foreign gods and the Ashtaroth from among you and direct your heart to the Lord and serve him only, and he will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines.'" We must put away (move away) all idols from our hearts and serve only God. Look at Job 22:23 - "If you return to the Almighty, you will be restored: If you remove wickedness far from your tent." We must remove wickedness and idols. We have already moved from a life of unrighteousness to a life of righteousness. Therefore, we must live a life of righteousness. To put it more theologically, we are already partially living the life of heaven. We, as the people of the kingdom, have already been moved from this sinful world, akin to Egypt, to the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, we must partially live the heavenly life according to the guidance of the Holy Spirit. This is our life.

Third and last, the God of Abraham is a promise-making God.

Look at Acts 7:5 - "He gave him no inheritance here, not even enough ground to set his foot on. But God promised him that he and his descendants after him would possess the land, even though at that time Abraham had no child." After God moved Abraham from Haran to the land of Canaan, He promised Abraham, "He gave him no inheritance here, not even enough ground to set his foot on. But God promised him that he and his descendants after him would possess the land" (vv.5-7, Gen. 15:13-16) (Yoo, Park). In this land of Canaan (Acts 7:7), God promised Abraham that he and his descendants would serve (worship) Him. Dr. Yoon-seon Park mentioned a couple of characteristics of God's promise: (1) God's promise is not fulfilled in a short period of time. The promise was fulfilled about 400 years later. (2) God's promise treats the future grand plan as if it already exists, even if there is no practical basis. God promised Abraham that he would have many descendants, even though he had no children at the time (Gen. 15:5, 16). Why does God make such promises to Abraham, and also to us, promises that are not fulfilled in a short period of time and may seem unrealistic without any practical basis? The reason is that He makes promises in this way to show His omnipotence and to cultivate in people a faith that believes without seeing, so that when the promise is fulfilled, people may come to know His almighty power and have a faith that is truly believing (Park).

Do we truly have a faith that believes without seeing? Do we truly have the confidence that our Lord, who has made us promises, will fulfill them? Are we praying, expecting, and waiting with this confidence for the fulfillment of the promises of our Lord? From today's passage, Acts 7:6-7, we can see that it took about 400 years for the promise of God to be fulfilled. However, in Genesis 25:7, we learn that Abraham died at the age of 175. Therefore, it can be concluded that Abraham passed away without witnessing God's fulfillment of the promise. Will you, like Abraham, hold on to God's promise, even if it does not come to pass in your generation? Abraham held on to and believed in God's promise until the end, without wavering or doubting. Instead, he died in faith, not having received the promises, but seeing them from afar and welcoming them (Heb. 11:13). This is true faith. True faith is to die in faith, to welcome the fulfillment of promises from afar, even if they are not received in one's own generation.

How can we have a faith like Abraham's, a faith that believes without seeing? The only way is through receiving the covenant of circumcision from God. Look at Acts 7:8 - "He gave Abraham the covenant of circumcision. And so Abraham became the father of Isaac and circumcised him eight days after his birth. Later Isaac became the father of Jacob, and Jacob became the father of the twelve patriarchs." The statement, "He gave Abraham the covenant of circumcision," means that God commanded Abraham's descendants, as a sign of the covenant, to practice circumcision (Gen. 17:10-14) (Park). Abraham performed this circumcision on his son Isaac, and it became a practice for his descendants thereafter. Therefore, Isaac circumcised Jacob, and Jacob circumcised his twelve sons. Why did God command Abraham's descendants to practice circumcision, a sign of the covenant proving that they were God's people? The reason is that God wanted Abraham's descendants to remember His promise, which was that through Abraham's descendants, the land of Canaan would be possessed, and through them, all the nations of the earth would receive the blessings of salvation (Gen. 12:1-3, 18:18, 22:17-18) (Park). Because of this sign of the covenant, circumcision, Abraham

was able to have a faith that believed without seeing. So, what kind of circumcision do we, the true descendants of Abraham living in the New Testament era, have? We have the circumcision of Jesus Christ. Look at Colossians 2:11 - "In him, you were also circumcised with a circumcision not performed by human hands. Your whole self-ruled by the flesh was put off when you were circumcised by Christ." This circumcision of Christ, as mentioned in Romans 2:29, is not outward, but inward; it is of the heart, not by the written code: "No, a person is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code" (Rom. 2:29). The one who has received the circumcision of Christ in their heart has the assurance that God will fulfill His promises. Look at Romans 4:21: "being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised." Furthermore, the one who has received the circumcision of Christ in their heart, even in seemingly hopeless and impossible situations, does not doubt God's promises, but rather grows stronger in faith, giving glory to God (v. 20).

In the article titled 'Promise Beyond Impossibility,' the following passage is written: 'Those who firmly grasp God's promise may appear foolish and powerless. However, in the face of God's promise, their weakness becomes strength. Therefore, spiritually, seizing God's promise is to become infinitely powerless concerning oneself. A person who calculates and reasons everything before God is almost incapable of moving toward the land of God's promise. This is because that land can only be entered by leaving the remaining journey in the midst of thoroughly acknowledging one's own weakness and entrusting it to God's promise. ... Abraham was greater than anyone. He became great through the strength he called his own weakness. The one who encounters promise encounters impossibility. The one who holds onto the promise in every impossible situation sees the possibility hidden within it' (Internet).

Seeing, carrying out, and believing in the God who sees, carries out, and promises,

James Kim

(With a heart of gratitude to the faithful God who continues to fulfill His promise even to unfaithful sinners)

The God of Joseph

[Acts 7:9-16]

The text discusses the concept of 'Brick instead of Bread' and quotes a saying attributed to the famous news anchor David Brinkley. The saying illustrates that sometimes life presents us with challenges (symbolized by a brick) instead of comfort (represented by bread). How we handle these challenges can determine whether they become the foundation of happiness or the cause of unhappiness. The text then mentions biblical figures who encountered the brick of suffering in their lives, including Joseph from the book of Acts (Acts 7:9-16). Unlike some, Joseph did not reject the brick of suffering; instead, he accepted it with faith. Despite committing no wrongdoing, Joseph faced various trials, such as being sold to merchants by his brothers and later being unjustly imprisoned in Egypt.

The text advises that when we go through the passage of suffering, we should look to Jesus, who is familiar with suffering (Isa. 43:3). By doing so, we can navigate the path of suffering with faith. The text references a quote by Henry Nouwen from his book "The Living Reminder," emphasizing that healing is not about eliminating pain but about connecting our wounds with God's pain. True healing occurs when we look at Jesus' cross until our own wounds are completely healed. This is possible only through faith, as without it, we only focus on our own wounds and become consumed by them. Ultimately, through the gift of faith given by God, we can look to Jesus and truly understand and experience healing within the wounds and suffering of the cross.

I would like to meditate on Joseph's God under the title "The God of Joseph," focusing on the second part of Stephen's speech in Acts 7:9-16.

First, the God of Joseph is a God who is with him.

Look at Acts 7:9 - " Because the patriarchs were jealous of Joseph, they sold him as a slave into Egypt. But God was with him." Stephen stood before the Sanhedrin, accused of blasphemy by members of the synagogue of the Freedmen, who were acting as agents of Satan. When the high priest, who presided over the Sanhedrin, asked, "Are these charges true?" (v. 1) Stephen began his response. He had already

spoken about the God of Abraham in Acts 7:2-8, and now in Acts 7:9-16, he speaks of the God of Joseph. In this passage, he explains how Joseph's ten brothers, who were the ancestors of those falsely accusing Stephen, were jealous of Joseph and sold him into Egypt (v. 9). While Joseph's brothers were jealous and sold him into Egypt, Joseph's God was with him, making him prosper in all things (Gen. 39:2, 3, 23). How did God being with Joseph lead to his prosperity in all things in his life? We can consider three key points centered around Acts 7:10:

(1) God delivered Joseph from all his afflictions.

Look at Acts 7:10 - "and rescued him out of all his afflictions" What does "all his afflictions" refer to? When Joseph went to where his brothers were tending the flocks, they intended to kill him (Gen. 37:18-20). As a young boy, Joseph was sold into a foreign land and lived as a stranger (vv. 25-28, 39:1). He was thrown into prison due to Potiphar's wife's false accusation (39:10-20). He spent years in prison even though he had committed no crime (39:21-40:23). However, our Savior God delivered Joseph from all these afflictions. Thus, Joseph's life was often moved from one adversity to another (Park). Here, we can understand the mysterious way in which God saves His saints. It is a way of moving from adversity to adversity, much like Joseph's journey. What do you think about Dr. Park's words that God's way of saving saints is to move them from adversity to adversity, like Joseph? This word is nothing short of fascinating. It goes beyond our usual expectations. Isn't it an entirely unexpected statement? When we think that God saves us, we mainly expect an end to pain, suffering, and adversity. Thus, we cry out to God for the grace of salvation, hoping for an end to tears, pain, and suffering. At least once, we should deeply contemplate Dr. Park's word. The reason is that the ultimately unexpected way of God's salvation is not adversity, but blessing. After all, didn't Joseph become the ruler of Egypt? Look at Psalms 105:18-19: "They bruised his feet with shackles, his neck was put in irons, till what he foretold came to pass, till the word of the Lord proved him true."

(2) God bestowed grace and wisdom upon Joseph.

Look at Acts 7:10 - " and rescued him from all his afflictions, and granted him favor and wisdom in the sight of Pharaoh, king of Egypt, and he made him governor over Egypt and all his household." In Genesis 41, when Pharaoh had a dream that no one could interpret, Joseph was able to interpret it. In response, Pharaoh said to Joseph in verse 39: "...Since God has shown you all this, there is none so discerning and wise as you are." Even if God's method of salvation involves moving from one adversity to another, He grants grace and wisdom to overcome them. As Apostle Paul stated in 1 Corinthians 10:13, "No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it." Even when we find ourselves in adversity like Joseph, the God who is with us enables us to bear that adversity through His grace and wisdom. The same God who bestowed grace and wisdom upon

Joseph is the same God who bestows it upon us, allowing us to endure the adversity we face.

(3) God appointed Joseph as the governor of Egypt.

Look at Acts 7:10 - " and rescued him from all his afflictions, and granted him favor and wisdom in the sight of Pharaoh, king of Egypt, and he made him governor over Egypt and all his household." The God who was with Joseph not only delivered him from adversity, moving from one trial to another, but ultimately, through the grace and wisdom given by God, Pharaoh appointed him as the governor of Egypt. As a result, Joseph named his sons "Manasseh" and "Ephraim." The name "Manasseh" means "God has made me forget all my hardship and all my father's house" (Gen. 41:51). The first son was named Manasseh, which signifies "to forget." The name "Ephraim" means "God has made me fruitful in the land of my affliction" (v. 52). The second son was given a name that signifies "to be twice fruitful." The God who was with Joseph, even in the midst of his adversity, ultimately blessed him with the astonishing blessing of being the governor of Egypt, causing him to forget all the memories of adversity and hardship. This God of Joseph is indeed our God. When He is with us, even in the midst of adversity, He grants us grace and wisdom, enabling us to overcome and adding His blessings upon us. The God who is with us imparts this word to us: "And Jesus came and said to them, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age'" (Mt. 28:18-20). Our Immanuel God is the God who is always with us. Therefore, we have a responsibility to obey His command. Like Stephen, we must proclaim the gospel to those who falsely accuse and bear false witness against us, making disciples of them.

Second and last, Joseph's God is a God who brings poverty.

Look at Acts 7:11 - "Now there came a famine throughout all Egypt and Canaan, and great affliction, and our fathers could find no food." Our God is a God who brings poverty. As an example, consider the parable of the prodigal son in Luke 15:11-32. The son received his share of the inheritance from his father, went to a far country, and squandered it all in reckless living. Eventually, a severe famine arose in that land, and he began to be in need (v. 14). Ultimately, it was God, the Creator, who brought about a severe famine in the land where the prodigal son was residing. As a result, the son said, "But when he came to himself, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have more than enough bread, but I perish here with hunger!'" and he returned to his father's embrace (vv. 17-20). The same God who was with Joseph also brought about a famine in the land of Canaan, where Joseph's brothers were living. Can you imagine it? A famine in a land where milk and honey flowed, like Canaan. No matter how abundant it may seem to us, if it is God's will, even a place like Canaan can experience a famine. Egypt also experienced a famine, but God had already sent Joseph, giving him wisdom and discernment, to prepare and store grain so that Jacob's entire family could eat and survive. Therefore, when Joseph's ten brothers came to obtain grain, he said to them, "And

God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors" (Gen. 45:7). Due to the famine, Joseph's brothers, the ancestors of the Jews who accused Stephen, experienced great distress because there was no food (Acts 7:11). Isn't it interesting? Both Joseph and his brothers experienced hardship. What's different? Joseph's hardship ("all his afflictions") was caused by his brothers' jealousy, but ultimately, God made Joseph governor of Egypt and, in turn, allowed his brothers and their entire families to migrate to Egypt. Look at Acts 7:12-16. When Jacob heard that there was grain in Egypt, he sent out our fathers on their first visit. And on the second visit Joseph made himself known to his brothers, and Joseph's family became known to Pharaoh. And Joseph sent and summoned Jacob his father and all his kindred, seventy-five persons in all. And Jacob went down into Egypt, and he died, he and our fathers, and they were carried back to Shechem and laid in the tomb that Abraham had bought for a sum of silver from the sons of Hamor in Shechem. The God who had moved Abraham from Ur of the Chaldeans to Haran, then from Haran to the land of Canaan, had now moved Jacob and his entire family from the land of Canaan to Egypt. The God who orchestrates all things ultimately aims for the salvation of His chosen people. As Dr. Yoon-seon Park stated: 'The famine, too, was something God did to fulfill the promise He had given to Abraham (Gen. 41:25). When we see these facts, we can understand that everything in this world revolves around the salvation aimed at God's chosen people' (Park). How great a blessing it is for us to know that even famines, orchestrated by God's will, ultimately aim for our salvation! Our God, who coordinates all things to achieve good, is working for our salvation, whether in times of famine or abundance. Look at Genesis 50:20- "As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today." Despite Joseph's brothers intending to harm him by selling him as a slave in Egypt, God turned all the trials and tribulations Joseph endured into good. Through Joseph, He saved the people of Israel.

This God of Joseph, in order to save us, sent His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, to this earth. And because of His poverty, God made us rich. Look at 2 Corinthians 8:9 - "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich." Jesus, who made us rich, is also Immanuel, God with us. He is the Lord who makes us prosper by being with us.

How do you and I react to the bricks of adversity in life? Are we too busy trying to break those bricks? Or are we using those bricks as building blocks to construct a home? God allows the bricks of adversity in our journey of faith to both impoverish and enrich us. However, God, in His power, uses all of this to bestow upon us the grace of salvation. Therefore, we must hold on to the promise of God's Word. God, in the era of Joseph, the fourth generation from Abraham, who, in order to fulfill the promise given to Abraham in Genesis 12:1-3, came to be with him, ultimately raised him to be the governor of Egypt amid adversity. This led to the eventual salvation of his impoverished brothers, the ancestors of Israel, and their families. Our Lord is working within our community to fulfill the promise of Matthew 16:18 that He gave to our church. In the midst of that, no matter what bricks of adversity are thrown before us, instead of trying to kick them away, we must use them as cornerstones to build up our church.

Believing in Immanuel, God with us, who is with us, let us give thanks for God's impoverishment and enrichment.

James Kim

(Thanking God for His impoverishment)

Moses (1)

[Acts 7:17-29]

In 2004, during the 9th Spiritual Retreat of the Pastors' Council for Church Renewal (PCCR), Pastor Han-heum Ok, who was the chairman of the PCCR, stated: 'In the 1910s to 1930s, the Korean church experienced a tremendous revival, with the congregation growing from a few thousand to 300,000. The focus of that revival was repentance. People heard the word of God, repented, and their lives were transformed. Then, from the late 1950s to the mid-1980s, the congregation, which was only around 300,000, suddenly reached 10 million. The theme of this revival was blessing. It was prosperous. However, it was mentioned that the allure of prosperity and blessing led to the revival of millions, but ultimately played a role in making the church more secularized and corrupt, pointing out the causes of the current crisis in the Korean church' (Internet). Pastor Ok emphasized, 'True leaders are born out of adversity. Therefore, if we use this crisis we are facing now, unprecedented leaders can emerge. However, if we fail to perceive this crisis and simply overlook it, the future of the Korean church can only be bleak,' urging pastors to take the lead in renewal (Internet).

I believe there is truth in Pastor Ok's statement, 'True leaders are born out of adversity.' Especially within the church today, it seems that true leaders should be emerging, but unfortunately, it's not happening. We are in a situation where leaders are lacking. It's a time when there is plenty of harvest but a shortage of laborers. Especially qualified church workers are in great demand. Dr. John Stott, a world-renowned Christian leader from the UK, confessed that even after traveling all over the world, it's so difficult to find true Christian leaders who, like Paul, openly reveal their weaknesses and foolishness. Today's Christian leaders have all become too strong, too wise, and too wealthy. I don't know if many churches today have become like the Laodicean church, boasting, 'I am rich' (Internet).

In Acts 7:17-29, we read the story of Moses, whom the Jews regarded as a great leader. As I meditate on Moses, I hope and pray for a challenge to understand how God establishes leaders for His purposes in various situations.

First, Moses was a lovely child in the sight of God.

Look at Acts 7:20 – “It was at this time that Moses was born; and he was lovely in the sight of God, and he was nurtured three months in his father's home.” D

We are currently meditating on Stephen's speech in Acts 7:2-53. A week ago, we reflected on the first part of his speech, "The God of Abraham," and last Sunday, we meditated on "The God of Joseph." In today's passage, Acts 7:17-29, Stephen speaks of how God fulfilled His promise to Abraham, saying, "But as the time of the promise drew near, which God had granted to Abraham, the people increased and multiplied in Egypt" (v. 17). This is also a fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham. Look at Genesis 15:5: "And he brought him outside and said, 'Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them.' Then he said to him, 'So shall your offspring be.'" When the time came for God to fulfill His promise to Abraham, the people of Israel prospered greatly in the land of Egypt. At this time, another word of God was also being fulfilled, which was that the Israelites would be afflicted for about 400 years. Look at Acts 7:6 – “And God spoke to this effect—that his offspring would be sojourners in a land belonging to others, who would enslave them and afflict them for four hundred years.” God, in the process of fulfilling the promise He made to Abraham, allowed the Israelites to multiply greatly in the land of Egypt. At the same time, a new king who did not know Joseph came to power in Egypt (v. 18), using means to thwart God's promise by afflicting the Israelites, even going so far as to order the killing of male infants so they would not live (v. 19). It was at this time that God, in His plan to save the Israelites from Egypt, caused Moses to be born in the land of Egypt. And when Moses was born, as Acts 7:20 states, “he was lovely in the sight of God.” An interesting point to note is that when the time of the fulfillment of God's promise drew near, along with prosperity, there also came extreme affliction. As God was bringing to pass His promise to Abraham, the Israelites endured severe oppression in Egypt for about 400 years. The Israelites, who were only about 75 people when they lived in Egypt, multiplied to around 2 million. However, at the same time, Satan's work became even more intense. Pharaoh, who did not know Joseph, came to power and began to oppress the Israelites. Why did Pharaoh oppress the Israelites? The reason is stated in Exodus 1:10 - "... Come, let us deal shrewdly with them, lest they multiply, and, if war breaks out, they join our enemies and fight against us and escape from the land." Pharaoh began to persecute the Israelites out of fear that if they continued to multiply, they might become a threat to Egypt. They might side with Egypt's enemies in the event of a war, and Pharaoh was afraid of that. Therefore, he began to afflict the Israelites (v. 11). However, what is astonishing is that Exodus 1:12-13 reveals, "But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and the more they spread abroad. And the Egyptians were in dread of the people of Israel. So they ruthlessly made the people of Israel work as slaves." The more the Israelites were oppressed, the more they multiplied. The more they multiplied, the more Pharaoh intensified their affliction. Take a look at this pattern: God's promise fulfilled → Persecution of the Israelites → Even greater multiplication → Even more intense affliction.

In the midst of such trials and suffering, Moses, who was lovely in the sight of God, was

born in Egypt. When the plan of the Egyptian king to secretly kill male infants through the midwives failed, he attempted to openly have all the male infants of Israel thrown into the Nile to die. It was in the midst of this crisis that Moses was born (Yoo). The saying comes to mind: 'Times of trouble produce heroes, and heroes lead in times of trouble.' It seems that exceptional individuals are born in times of crisis. When a great crisis befell the Israelite people, Moses, as a figure, was born. Interestingly, in such a time of crisis, the Bible refers to Moses, who was born, as "lovely in the sight of God." In Exodus 2:2, the infant Moses is described as "beautiful" in the Hebrew translation. Here, the term translated as "beautiful" is a Hebrew word that means 'good.' This word likely extends beyond the physical beauty of Moses' face. When Stephen says, "lovely in the sight of God," it is likely an expression signifying that Moses received the grace of God from the moment he was born (Park). Moses' loveliness is a testament to the fact that he was graced by God's presence. Born in a time of severe pain and hardship, Moses' loveliness stemmed from the fact that God's grace was with him.

Here's my brief testimony. There was a time when my wife looked most lovely and beautiful to me. It was on April 26, 1997, our wedding anniversary. After Sunday service and afternoon Bible study, we went to L.A. Children's Hospital. Our first baby Charis looked pale, as if the blood wasn't flowing properly, and it seemed like she was dying. My wife was standing about 6 feet away from where the baby lay, crying. In that moment, I saw that God was with my wife, and because of that, she looked very beautiful and lovely. It means that God sees the beauty and loveliness of our children. It's the grace of God that accompanies us even in the midst of suffering. I hope and pray that such beauty and loveliness may be present in you and me.

Second, Moses was abandoned.

Look at Acts 7:21 - "When he was abandoned, Pharaoh's daughter adopted him and brought him up as her own son." In the time close to the fulfillment of God's promise, Moses, who was lovely in the sight of God, was born. His parents raised him at home for three months (v. 20). Moses' parents, through faith, identified his lovely (that he received God's grace) and did not fear the king's command (Exod. 2:1-2; Heb. 11:23) (Park). After being secretly nurtured for three months, baby Moses was eventually abandoned. Exodus 2 shows that baby Moses was placed in a basket (made of papyrus) and set afloat on the Nile. He was discovered by Pharaoh's daughter when she came to bathe, and through Miriam, he was nursed by his own mother until he grew up, after which Pharaoh's daughter adopted him as her own son (Exod. 2:3-10). However, Stephen does not go into these details and simply states that when Moses was abandoned, Pharaoh's daughter adopted him and brought him up as her own son (Acts 7:21). Stephen then introduces Moses as being adopted by Pharaoh's daughter and educated in Egyptian knowledge, saying, "Moses was educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians and was powerful in speech and action" (v. 22). Stephen's claim that Moses learned from the most distinguished Egyptian scholars of his time demonstrates how highly he regarded Moses. This fact exposes the groundlessness of the accusations against Moses by those who opposed him (Yoo).

Moses, the abandoned baby in the providence of God, was nevertheless graced by His presence. This is why Moses, as his name suggests, was rescued by God through Pharaoh's daughter from the water. Look at Exodus 2:10 - "...and he named him Moses, saying, 'I drew him out of the water.'" The God who rescued the abandoned baby Moses from the water is the same God who, about 400 years later, would use Moses to lead the abandoned Israelites out of Egypt. Moses, who experienced God's grace in his abandonment, became the instrument through which the Israelites, who might have felt abandoned in the world, received salvation. Through Moses' abandonment, the Israelite people obtained their deliverance.

I came across an interesting editorial in an online article titled 'Changing Perceptions of International Marriage and Biracial Children': 'International marriages are on the rise. According to statistics released by the Korea National Statistical Office on the 30th, the number of marriages with foreigners increased by 21.6% compared to the previous year, totaling 43,121 cases. International marriages account for 13.6% of all marriages, with 14 out of 100 couples being international marriages. Particularly in rural areas, last year, four out of ten men married foreign women. The rate of international marriages has been rapidly increasing, from 3.7% in 2000 to 8.4% in 2003, and 13.6% in 2005' (Internet). Among such international marriages, biracial children born face abandonment not only by their parents but also by society. Especially in homogeneous Korean society, they are often not accepted and may face ostracism. I also read an article titled 'Hero's Return... Interest in Biracial Children' (Internet): 'Foreign media introduced that Hines Ward, the Most Valuable Player (MVP) of the NFL Super Bowl, is receiving national hero treatment in Korea. AP, Reuters, and others reported on the scene of Ward's arrival at Incheon Airport, which was broadcast live on Korean TV, and described it as the hero's return. Foreign media also reported that he is being portrayed as 'a source of pride for Koreans' (Internet). In a way, Hines Ward, a Korean-American biracial NFL player, is giving great hope to Korean-American biracial children scattered around the world, many of whom may have felt rejected by Korean society.

For us Christians, there is grace in being abandoned. Moses, though abandoned in his infancy, became the means through which the Israelites were obtained. Although he was abandoned in the midst of adversity as a baby, he was not abandoned by God. He was prepared to become a leader to rescue the Israelites from Egypt within the providence of God. He became Pharaoh's daughter's adopted son amid abandonment and received all his training in Egypt. In the end, he was used by God as a tool to save the Israelites. We also seem to be abandoned in the pain and suffering that is discarded by the world. There are 21 words that a Christian must absolutely discard (Internet): addiction, selfishness, worry, prejudice, greed, laziness and complacency, stagnation and depression, blame, complaint and resentment, impatience, pride, gluttony and hypocrisy, quarreling and conflict, giving up, debauchery. God desires to eliminate these sinful things within us. Therefore, in the midst of the pain and suffering that we may feel abandoned in the world, God seems to make us look at the cross of Jesus and repent of our sins. So, as we discard the sins of our hearts, we are being prepared to become vessels used by the Lord.

Third and last, Moses considered looking after his brethren.

Look at Acts 7:23 - "When he was forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his brothers, the children of Israel." Baby Moses, who was abandoned by the Nile River, was taken in and raised as Pharaoh's daughter's own son. Moses, who grew up in Egypt for about 40 years, at the age of forty, thought to visit his brethren, the children of Israel (v. 23). Here, "visit" means God's intervention in a person's life (Ps.89:31-32; Jere. 9:9, 25, 11:22) (Park). God's intervention for the children of Israel was to rescue them from the hand of Pharaoh and establish Moses as their leader. Therefore, when Moses turned forty, he was moved to interfere in the life of one suffering compatriot (Acts 7:24). In other words, Moses, moved by a sense of justice, saw an Egyptian oppressing one of his own people and took action to avenge him by striking down the Egyptian (Park). Moses, driven by a sense of justice, killed the Egyptian oppressing one of his own people, but his method was wrong (Park). He acted out of human passion, desiring to save his compatriot by striking down the Egyptian. Interestingly, Moses was mistaken. Look at Acts 7:25 - "He supposed that his brothers would understand that God was giving them salvation by his hand, but they did not understand." Moses, having struck down the Egyptian, thought that the Israelites, his brethren, would realize that God was giving them salvation through him. He also hoped that the Israelites would see him as their deliverer. However, Moses was not yet prepared. God's plan to intervene in the lives of the Israelites for salvation and Moses' plan to save the Israelites through his human act of striking down the Egyptian were different. The day after this murder, when two Israelites were fighting, Moses tried to reconcile them, saying, "You are brothers; why do you wrong each other?" (v. 26). The one who was harming his neighbor rebuked Moses, saying, "Who made you a prince and a judge over us? Do you mean to kill me as you killed the Egyptian yesterday?" (vv. 27-28). Eventually, because of these words, Moses fled to the land of Midian, where he became a stranger and even had two sons there (v. 29). When Pharaoh heard of this, he sought to kill Moses, so Moses fled from Pharaoh's presence and settled in the land of Midian (Exod. 2:15).

Here we see Moses, who was not recognized as a leader by the Israelites. Professor Sang-seop Yoo's words: 'Stephen directly turns Moses' fleeing incident into an event where the Israelites rejected him, emphasizing that the ultimate reason he had to flee to Midian was because the Israelites ultimately did not recognize him' (Yoo). Lovely Moses, abandoned Moses, he was not acknowledged as a savior (leader) by the Israelites. The reason for this is that Moses was not yet prepared. Look at 2 Timothy 2:21 - "Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from what is dishonorable, he will be a vessel for honorable use, set apart as holy, useful to the master of the house, ready for every good work." Moses was not yet a vessel suitable for the master's use. He needed another 40 years of wilderness training.

How can we consider looking after our brethren? A prepared heart is needed. That is, we need the heart of God. God's concerns should become our concerns. We should also intervene in what God intervenes in.

Today is Palm Sunday. Palm Sunday originates from when Jesus entered Jerusalem on a donkey with palm branches being used (Jn. 12:13). The week known as "Holy Week" began on Palm Sunday and ended on Easter Sunday, known as Resurrection Sunday. This period was a time of suffering and agony for our Savior. Jesus knew that the cries of "Hosanna" on that day would soon change to cries of "Crucify Him." Knowing this, Jesus entered Jerusalem. He was the only begotten Son who was forsaken by God the Father. And it is through His forsakenness that we have received salvation. God the Father intervened and orchestrated in human history, ultimately allowing Jesus to be born in Bethlehem about 2000 years ago, and through His life, culminating in His crucifixion on the accursed tree, He bestowed upon us the grace of salvation.

Believing in the beautiful and beloved Son, Jesus Christ, who is pleasing to God,

James Kim

(While seeking a life obedient to the word of the Lord).

Don't be Mistaken.

[Acts 7:25]

As I meditated on this Scripture, one word I said to myself was 'James, do not be mistaken.' The reason is that Moses, before he attended the church in the wilderness (Acts 7:38), during his 40 years of life in Egypt, remembered to consider his fellow Israelites. When he saw an Israelite being mistreated by an Egyptian, he struck down the Egyptian in defense (v. 24). After this incident, Moses mistakenly believed that God had used him to save the Israelite by his own hand (v. 25). To put it in modern terms, a pastor like me could mistakenly believe that the church has grown because of my good preaching, effective administration, good interpersonal relationships, and so on.

Of course, it would have been natural for the Israelites not to realize. The reason is that Moses' human nature and his own abilities were displayed, rather than God's salvation work and His power. In other words, instead of God's divinity being revealed, it was Moses' humanity that was revealed. How could the Israelites think that God saved an Israelite who had been mistreated through Moses killing an Egyptian? Does God's salvation come from human bloodshed?

It seems that we humans are easily mistaken. The reason is that we do not know God well and do not understand our own nature well. No one is truly competent. What do we have to offer God? We have no righteousness, no ability to save anyone, and no worth if the Lord does not dwell within us. Therefore, if someone feels loved, comforted, and uplifted through us, it is not our doing, but the work of the Lord who dwells within us. That is why we have no one to boast about except the Lord.

Although they may dwell in misconception, those who know the truth believe they can find freedom even in misconception. I desire to abide in the truth without being mistaken.

Even if I dwell in misconception, I believe that the Lord will rescue me from that misconception, so I remain,

James Kim(Embracing freedom from misconception)

Moses (2)

[Acts 7:30-35]

Last year, TIME magazine selected the 100 most influential people in the United States, and among them, the first place was not Bill Gates, not former President Clinton, nor President Bush. It was reported to be a female talk show host named Oprah Winfrey. The viewership of her program averages over 10 million, and Americans are moved by her every word. If she says, 'I visited a poor orphanage and they need help' for just 10 seconds, the next day, tens of billions in donations arrive at that orphanage. If she says, 'I read this book,' the book becomes a bestseller in the U.S. the next day. The answer to her influence lies in the four life philosophies mentioned in her autobiography, 'This Is My Mission':

- (1) Having more than others is not a blessing, but a mission.
- (2) If there is pain greater than others, it is not suffering, but a mission.
- (3) If there is more excitement than others, it is not delusion, but a mission.
- (4) If there is a heavier burden than others, it is not coercion, but a mission.

Only those who have experienced pain can volunteer to serve those who are suffering.

She was born as a biracial child, grew up in poverty and pain, and testified that she achieved her current self through studying alone, relying on Moses from the Bible.

A person with a sense of mission has four characteristics (Internet):

- (1) Because fulfilling the mission is the highest priority in life, they choose a single path.

Paul lived his life pursuing the goal of God's upward call in Christ Jesus, forgetting what was behind and straining toward what is ahead (Phil. 3:14). Because they pour all their energy into one goal in front of them, they have no time to glance at what others are doing, be entangled in past regrets, or complain about current difficulties. To a person captivated by a sense of mission, any surrounding obstacle is a target to break through, not a source of fear or complaint. That's how Paul lived, and that's why he fulfilled his mission as an apostle preaching the gospel to the ends of the earth.

- (2) They have a positive attitude toward the mission and a proactive belief in accomplishing it.

Therefore, Paul says, "I can do all things through Him who strengthens me" (Phil. 4:13). With such a proactive, positive attitude, he completed the mission with a sprint like a 100-meter runner striving for the finish line.

- (3) A person with a sense of mission sacrifices themselves for the mission.

For Paul, even his own life was not considered precious in order to accomplish the mission (Acts 20:24).

- (4) A person with a sense of mission takes responsibility without making excuses for the results.

In today's passage Acts 7:30-35, we see Moses receiving a mission. I hope that by meditating on how God raised and used Moses, you can hear the voice that God speaks to each of us.

First, Moses, whom God raised up and used, experienced the presence of God.

Wesley said this about the presence of God: 'The best thing in the world is the fact that God is with us.' What are the benefits of living in the presence of God? The benefits we gain when living in the presence of God are truly remarkable. First, our faith comes alive and moves powerfully in all aspects of our lives, especially when we are in difficulties. As we become accustomed to living by faith, we can realize that God is near, even if we just turn our heads a little. And eventually, we not only believe in God, but we can see and experience God with our own eyes. Living in the presence of God gives us hope and strengthens us even more. Our hope grows in proportion to our knowledge of knowing God, becoming more firm and our lives become filled with joy. When living in the presence of God, our will is set on fire with God's love. God's love completely consumes everything that opposes the will of God. In the presence of God, we come to know God more, love God more, serve God more, praise God more, and worship God more. However, the problem is that there are too many people who believe in the existence of God but do not believe in the presence of God. Furthermore, there are even fewer people who actually live in the presence of God. Those who strive to enter into the presence of God are even fewer. If only people realized the amazing and great benefits that come from the presence of God, there would be no reason not to seek it (Internet).

In Acts 7:30, we read about Moses, who fled from Egypt and became a stranger in the land of Midian. After living in Egypt for 40 years, God appeared to him when the appointed time of 40 years in Midian was fulfilled (v. 30). While living as a stranger in Midian for 40 years, God appeared to him in a burning bush. Here, the "burning bush" symbolizes 'Israel,' and the "flame" represents the 'hardships' that the people were enduring at that time (Park). Just as the fire clung to the bush but did not consume it, Israel, despite suffering

hardships due to the Egyptians, did not completely perish. It was at this moment that God appeared to Moses on Mount Sinai. In other words, when the Israelites were flourishing in Egypt but also experiencing suffering and hardship, God caused Moses to be born. However, it was only after 80 years had passed that God appeared to Moses on Mount Sinai. Moses approached the burning bush on Mount Sinai, which symbolized Israel, and the flame symbolized the hardships that the people were going through at that time (Park). When Moses approached to investigate, he heard the voice of the Lord (v. 31). The Lord said to him, "I am the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob" (v. 32). When Moses heard this voice of the Lord, he was afraid to look up (v. 32). At that moment, God spoke to Moses and said, "Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground. I have indeed seen the oppression of my people in Egypt. I have heard their groaning and have come down to set them free. Now come, I will send you back to Egypt" (v. 33-34). From this passage, we can learn four lessons about the presence of God:

(1) We should seek the presence of God when we are in distress.

The place where God appeared to Moses was in the wilderness of Mount Sinai, specifically within the burning bush of thorns (v. 30). An interesting point is that the term "Mount Sinai" means the "mountain of thorns." This means that God appeared within the burning bush of thorns. When we consider the repeated mention of "thorns," it signifies that God is not indifferent to our suffering when we are going through hardships. He sees our afflictions and hears our cries, and thus, He comes down to rescue us. Look at verse 34: "I have indeed seen the oppression of my people in Egypt... and have come down to set them free" This reminds me of what the Apostle Paul mentioned in 2 Corinthians 12:7 about the "thorn in the flesh." He said that God allowed this thorn in his flesh to prevent him from becoming conceited. He prayed to the Lord three times to take it away, but the Lord's response was, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Cori. 12:9). Our Lord is the same God who provides us with sufficient grace even when we are suffering due to various forms of "thorns" in this world.

(2) To those who seek God's presence, our Lord will speak to them.

When Moses approached the burning bush on Mount Sinai, which symbolized Israel, he heard the voice of the Lord (Acts 7:31). We should always seek God's presence, especially when we are in distress. Therefore, we must draw nearer to the Lord, and we must seek to hear His voice. Henry Nouwen, in his book "The Way of the Heart," speaks about the spirituality of the desert fathers who lived in the deserts of Egypt in the 4th and 5th centuries. He says, 'Solitude is not simply a means to an end. Solitude is its own end. Silence is its own speaking' (Nouwen). These desert fathers did not consider solitude as being alone, but rather being with God, and they did not view silence as not speaking, but as listening to God. Are we truly pursuing this solitude and silence, or have we not yet encountered the crisis in our prayer life? This crisis arises when our hearts are far from God, and our intellect (mind) is filled with notions about God (Nouwen). Our confession should be 'Apart from Thee, I find no joy; In Thee all good I see.'

(3) We must repent of our dirty sins in the holy presence of God.

The voice of God that Moses heard was, "Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground" (v. 33). In the region of Kendo, it was a custom for priests to remove their sandals when performing temple service. 'Sandals' symbolize impurity. God, who dwells in the holy presence, always exposes our sins. Therefore, like Moses, we must humbly obey the word of God in fear and repent of our dirty sins before the holy God. When we experience God's presence amid suffering, we need to approach God in a spiritually bare state, exposed before Him, due to our sins that are revealed.

(4) We must embrace God's heart as we repent of our sins.

Just as God saw the suffering of the Israelites in Egypt and heard their cries (v. 34), we too, as we repent of our dirty sins in the holy presence of God, must see and hear what God sees and hears. This means we need to look at our brothers and sisters who are suffering and listen to their cries. In doing so, our God will use us as instruments of salvation, just like He did with Moses.

To enter into the presence of God (to experience it), what should we do? Refer to the internet article titled 'How to Enter into the Presence of God?' (Internet):

(1) To enter into the presence of God, strive for purity.

Avoid any actions, words, or thoughts that would displease God. However, we constantly find it challenging and occasionally stumble. When this happens, immediately repent and humbly seek God's forgiveness. Cultivate the habit of repenting promptly, without delay, if you believe you have committed a wrong. As Aquinas said, 'God, who forgives the repentant, did not promise that He would give him a tomorrow to repent.'

(2) To enter into the presence of God, focus your heart on Him and seek His presence.

Seek God's presence in quiet faith and humble love. Let go of worldly worries and anxieties that hinder the path to God's presence.

(3) To enter into the presence of God, determine to always look to God, no matter what you do.

Practice looking to God before doing anything, even amidst busy tasks. Always engage in conversation with God, asking Him to supply what you need. God will lead your life step by step.

Second and last, Moses, whom God chose and raised up to use, was sent.

Look at Acts 7:34 - "I have surely seen the oppression of My people who are in Egypt; I have heard their groaning and have come down to deliver them. And now come, I will send you to Egypt." Stephen, in his speech, divides the mention of Moses into three periods based on forty years: (1) The first period, in Egypt for forty years (vv. 23-29), (2) The second period, in Midian for forty years (vv. 30-35), and (3) The final period, in the wilderness during the exodus from Egypt (v. 36). In today's passage, Acts 7:30-35, it is stated that when the forty years in Midian were fulfilled, God appeared to Moses within the burning bush and gave him a mission in His presence. In other words, Moses received a mission from God. Where? To Egypt.

We need to be aware of our mission. According to a survey by the American Society of Training and Development, 48% of salespeople make one call and then give up, 25% make two calls and then give up, and 15% make three calls and then give up. In other words, 88% of salespeople give up after one to three calls. However, the remaining 12% persistently make calls and end up making 80% of the total sales. I think the same goes for our evangelism as Christians. A few people always make up the majority of the church's evangelism efforts. To save a single precious soul, what do we need to do? We must be aware of the mission of evangelism and make a determination to proclaim the Gospel (Internet).

Interestingly, when Moses contemplated looking back at his Israelite brothers when he turned forty in Egypt, they rejected him. However, God sent Moses to Egypt after forty more years in the Midian wilderness and appeared to him in the burning bush, calling him "a deliverer and leader" (v. 35). Moses, who had been rejected by the Israelites forty years before, was shown by God in the burning bush in the Midian wilderness forty years later to be sent as "a deliverer and leader" to Egypt. The term "deliverer" may not seem fitting for Moses because it implies paying a price for the redemption of people and Moses seemed an unlikely candidate for this title. The reason is that redemption entails paying a price for the salvation of a people (Park). However, Moses deserves this title because he personally bore a considerable burden for the sake of the Israelite people. But the greater significance is that Moses points to Jesus, the true Deliverer. God sent His only begotten Son into this sinful world, like Egypt, to redeem His people, and the price paid was the life of Jesus. He redeemed us through His death on the cross. The true Deliverer is not Moses, but Jesus Himself.

What does a life that fulfills its mission to the end look like? Under the title 'Grace, Stepping into Salvation' by John Piper, there is the following passage: 'William Carey crossed from England to India in 1793. He lost his five-year-old son there, and his wife suffered from mental illness. After seven years of ministry, he led his first convert, only to lose years of translation work in a fire. However, he served steadily for 40 years without a single vacation. Adoniram Judson, the first American foreign missionary, went to Myanmar in 1814. He lost his six-year-old son, was imprisoned in a death cell for a year and a half, and his wife died of fever. He suffered from mental breakdown and had to wait five years to meet his first convert. But he did not stop his ministry. It was because the mission was more precious than life itself. Robert Morrison was the first Protestant missionary sent to China. He lost his wife and toiled for seven years to win his first convert. Yet, he continued his ministry without interruption. They faced numerous difficulties but did not yield; they moved forward because they considered the mission given to them by God more precious

than life itself' (Internet).

Looking at the sent Son, Jesus, who received God's mission,

James Kim

(Praying and hoping to fulfill the will of the Sender, my Lord Jesus Christ)

God's Presence

[Acts 7:30-35]

1. When we are in distress, we must seek God's presence.

God descended amidst the burning bush on Mount Sinai, which was covered in thorns. Considering that the word "thorn" is mentioned twice, it implies that God is not indifferent to our suffering, but rather, He sees our distress and hears our cries. Therefore, He comes down to rescue us.

2. Those who seek God's presence will hear His voice.

When Moses approached the burning bush in the wilderness of Mount Sinai, he heard the voice of the Lord. We should always seek God's presence, especially when we are in distress. Therefore, we should draw closer to the Lord and seek to hear His voice.

3. In the sacred presence of God's refuge, we must repent of our sinful deeds.

The voice of God that Moses heard was, "Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground" (Exod. 3:5). God's sacred refuge always exposes our sins. Therefore, like Moses, we should humbly obey God's word in fear, and repent of our sinful deeds before the holy God.

4. As we repent of our sins, we must embrace God's heart.

Just as God saw the suffering of the Israelites in Egypt and heard their cries, when we repent of our sins in the sacred presence of God's refuge, we too must see and hear what God sees and hears.

In this way, Moses, who experienced God's presence, embraced God's heart and eventually received

the commission to go to Egypt, as God saw and cared for the Israelites with interest. Similarly, I also desire to receive a commission in the presence of God. I want to be sent with the heart of Jesus Christ. And I want to share the gospel and love of Jesus Christ.

Desiring to fulfill the will of the Lord who sent us with the heart of Jesus Christ,

James Kim

(Who seeks God's presence)

Moses (3)

[Acts 7:36-38]

The leadership of Pastor Nakjoong Choi at Sunrise Church is intriguing: A leader is like a conductor of an orchestra. He must harmonize the diverse individuals in the world to become one. They are not one in uniformity, but one in harmonizing diversity. Nothing different is wrong. A spiritual leader is someone who, regardless of age, gender, social status, or wealth, brings people together in unity through the Holy Spirit. Our society needs efforts to acknowledge and achieve harmony in diversity. “Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace” (Eph. 4:3) (Internet). I believe this is a fitting definition of leadership for our church. It is the responsibility of both myself and our church leaders to harmonize Korean ministry, English ministry, and Hispanic ministry brothers and sisters in Christ, making them one.

In Pastor Han-heum Ok's book ‘Those Called by Mission Do Not Lose Heart,’ there is a wonderful quote from President Harry Truman: ‘What is a leader? A person who gets others to do what they don't want to do, and later makes them like it and feel happy about it.’ ‘Leadership is having the foresight to pull people into what the general congregation doesn't want to do. Then, allowing them to taste happiness and joy through the very thing they initially didn't want to do. Therefore, those who exercise leadership are characterized by being ahead of others’ (Ok). Leadership is about having influence. If one can exert influence, then they can be considered a leader.

Today, in Acts 7:36-38, the passage discusses Moses. He was considered the greatest prophet for the Jews. Today, I want to meditate on Moses in three aspects and receive the valuable lessons that God wants to give us.

First, Moses was a leader.

Look at Acts 7:36 –“This man led them out, performing wonders and signs in the land of Egypt and in the Red Sea and in the wilderness for forty years.” A leader, or to put it in more relatable terms, someone who "leads," how should they lead people? I believe the best way is through being an example. In other words, showing the image of Jesus so that one can lead. When thinking about what kind of

people our church leaders should be, I am reminded of Henry Nouwen's book title: "The Living Reminder." The leaders should be people who remind us of Jesus. In Numbers 12:3, the Bible says, "Now Moses was a very humble man, more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth." Jesus is meek and humble in heart (Mt. 11:29). In other words, Moses was a leader who resembled Jesus. Just as Jesus was humble, so was Moses. He was humble, yet he excelled above all men on the face of the earth. This fact emphasizes the importance of character in leadership. When it comes to leaders, character is essential, more so than skill or ability. Among the aspects of character, humility, like Jesus and Moses, is crucial in leadership. Why is humility important in leadership? It is because God gives grace to the humble (Jam. 4:6). Then, what was the grace that God bestowed upon Moses? It was the ability to lead the people of God, the Israelites, from Egypt, through the Red Sea, and in the wilderness, to the promised land of Canaan. This ability was none other than the miracles and signs he performed over forty years (Acts 7:36). What are the "miracles and signs" mentioned here? They are the ten plagues that God sent in Egypt, the parting of the Red Sea in the wilderness as if it were dry land (Exod. 14:1-31), the water that gushed out when Moses struck the rock with his staff in Rephidim (17:1-7), and the destruction of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram (Num. 16:1-40) (MacArthur).

Here we find a valuable lesson that our leaders must learn: that a leader must first be a person of character, not just a person of skill. In other words, our leaders must understand that God's power is manifested when they are humble. However, in this day and age, our pastors and church leaders are often too focused on acquiring skills and abilities. In previous generations, church leaders, like those in our parents' generation, sought God's voice in the quiet chamber, just as Moses experienced God's refuge on Mount Sinai. They served the church with faith, listened to God's voice through prayer and scripture, and led the congregation. However, in my generation and others like mine, the emphasis is not on the quiet chamber, but on places like the library, seminar rooms, and computer labs, where skills are honed. Skill without character support only leads to pride in those who follow, but it cannot transform their lives. It cannot lead them to green pastures or still waters. However, a leader who seeks to emulate Jesus, a humble leader, is accompanied by the grace of God, allowing the power of God to manifest, not human or worldly abilities. Our leaders must take to heart the truth that Paul spoke of: "And He has said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.' Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Cor. 12:9-10). God chooses the foolish things of the world to shame the wise and the weak things of the world to shame the strong (1 Cor. 1:27). The confession of Asaph, the psalmist, in Psalms 77:10, "... It is my grief, ..." should be our confession. A truly humble person acknowledges their weakness and is willing to confess it before God and others. Furthermore, a person who acknowledges their weakness while trusting and relying on God's strength is a truly humble person of character. Our leaders absolutely need this.

Second, Moses was a prophet.

Look at Acts 7:37 – “This is that Moses who told the Israelites, 'God will send you a prophet like me from your own people.’” Here, Stephen is quoting the prophecy of Moses recorded in Deuteronomy 18:15 from the Old Testament. Of course, the phrase "a prophet like me" in Moses' prophecy refers to the Messiah, namely Jesus Christ. As we know, for the Jews listening to Stephen's sermon at this moment, Moses was the greatest prophet. There was no prophet as great as Moses for the Jews. Yet Stephen is saying that this greatest prophet, Moses, prophesied of a "prophet like me." The audience of Jewish listeners already knew from Peter's sermon in Acts 2 that Jesus Christ, who performed great wonders, signs, and miracles (Acts 2:22), was a prophet (v. 30). So, they understood from Stephen's sermon that the "prophet like me" prophesied by Moses was referring to Jesus Christ (Yoo). Here, we need to consider the prophetic roles of Moses and Jesus. The role of a prophet means that both Moses and Jesus acted as intermediaries between God and His people. The role of this intermediary is to proclaim God's word to God's people. For example, just as Moses received the Ten Commandments from God on Mount Sinai and proclaimed them to the Israelites, Jesus proclaimed the two greatest commandments of loving God and loving one's neighbor. The difference between Moses and Jesus, however, is that if we were to say Moses was the "mediator of the law," then Jesus is the "mediator of grace" (Park). The prophetic proclamation of Moses led to salvation through obedience to the law, while the prophetic proclamation of Jesus leads to salvation through faith in Him as the gospel.

Here, we must also consider the prophetic role necessary for leaders. In other words, all of us have the responsibility to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ as prophets of God.

(1) The first responsibility is that the proclamation of the gospel should not only be with lips.

In other words, our lives themselves should be a proclamation of the gospel. Our leaders should strive to resemble Jesus. In other words, it is truly dangerous for someone who has not become a person of character to proclaim the gospel. It becomes an obstacle to the gospel, not its proclamation. Because of us, someone may choose not to come to the church. I wrote an article titled "Let's Not Evangelize Carelessly!" and I'll share a part of it here: "I think our actions, our existence, in the midst of failing to remind people of Jesus, often reflect the zeal of preaching like the Pharisees, or like Saul, also known as Paul, before he believed in Jesus. A life and heart filled with falsehood and hypocrisy, surprisingly, are exposed by God before unbelievers. That's why I think Christians often commit the sin of hindering evangelism. Evangelism without a heart of love is inevitably ineffective. Lips may shout love, but if the recipient cannot feel that love, it's just clanging cymbals. However, we have become too familiar with evangelism training received from church evangelism programs or Christian organizations. Instead of trying to witness through our lives before attempting to do it as a testimony, we often try to testify before living a life as a witness. Attempting to evangelize zealously while not living as a witness, in the end, may lead people to the church, but they may eventually become souls who, after being hurt and leaving the church due to trials, never

look back or step into a church again.”

(2) The second responsibility is that one should not fear the rejection of the other person after proclaiming the gospel.

In today's sermon by Stephen, we see in verse 35, "Moses, whom they rejected," and in verse 39, the word "rejected" is repeated twice. This points out the sin of the Jews who were listening to Stephen's sermon, as they regarded Moses as their greatest prophet but rejected Jesus, whom Moses prophesied as the "Prophet like me." Look at John 1:11, "He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him." Despite the fact that the Jews were eagerly waiting for the Messiah, Jesus, whom they had been waiting for, came to them, and yet they did not receive him. They not only did not believe, but they also crucified Jesus and sent him away. Therefore, as disciples following the path of Jesus, we do not need to fear when others reject us while we proclaim his gospel with our lives and words. What is embarrassing is that while heretical individuals, even when faced with opposition, fervently continue to spread their 'gospel'(?), we Christians, on the other hand, may become discouraged and hang our heads when we face rejection even though we are faithfully proclaiming the true gospel of Jesus. I believe this may be due to a lack of passion for the gospel. We should not fear the rejection of others and faithfully fulfill the prophetic role of proclaiming the Gospel.

(3) Third and last, Moses was a pastor of the wilderness church.

Look at Acts 7:38 - "This is the one who was in the congregation in the wilderness with the angel who spoke to him at Mount Sinai, and with our fathers. He received living oracles to give to us." What is the responsibility of a pastor? What type of pastor do the members desire? In the "General Layperson's Consciousness Survey Report on the Presbyterian Church in Korea's Ecclesiastical System" (June 27, 1997, Planning Department of the Kyogang Conference) it says (Internet): What kind of pastor are the lay members of the Korean Presbyterian Church looking for today? After surveying their consciousness, the results are as follows. Above all, a pastor must be a spiritually insightful preacher. When asked about the top priority among the roles of a pastor in the Presbyterian denomination, 67.3% of the respondents answered 'preaching,' far surpassing the next highest response of about 12.1%, which was 'prayer.' 'Bible study' (8.1%), 'counseling, care' (4%), 'evangelism, mission' (3.1%), 'education' (2.3%), and others (3.1%). The lay members demand pastors who are fully dedicated to their calling. I asked the respondents, "What type of pastor is requested in the Korean Presbyterian Church today?" The top choice among the respondents was 'a type who completely dedicates themselves for the church' at 32.3%, followed by 'a type that compassionately cares for the congregants' at 24.2%. Other pastor types received about 10% each, with 'a type that demands absolute obedience and submission through exceptional spirituality' (12.1%), 'a type that takes responsibility and makes all decisions'

(11.7%), and 'a type that entrusts congregants to practice their faith autonomously' (10.3%). However, the peculiar fact was that the response to 'a type that entrusts to congregants or elders' was only about 3.6%. This can be seen as a result reflecting the lay members' basic consciousness that at least 'pastors should be leaders.' Ultimately, pastors requested in the present era should be leaders who proactively present the purposes and directions that the spiritual community should achieve while having a dedicated attitude. It can be seen here that pastors with an extreme dominating or extreme neglectful attitude are no longer welcomed by congregants in reality.

The responsibility of a pastor, as mentioned in the Bible, is to lead God's people (the saints). How do they lead? They must faithfully proclaim the word of God and guide the flock, as stated in Acts 7:37. In these two verses, the pastor's responsibility can be summarized in one word: guiding the saints with the word of God. In today's passage, Stephen says that Moses was the one who received the "living oracles" to give to the people (Acts 7:38). This teaches us that in order to faithfully proclaim the word of God, pastors must first receive the word of God, which is the path of life. How then, can pastors receive the word of God? They must enter the wilderness. In Henry Nouwen's book "The Way of the Heart: Desert Spirituality and Contemporary Ministry," there is a passage that says: 'We enter into solitude first of all to meet our Lord and to be with Him and Him alone. Our first task in solitude, therefore, is not to pay undue attention to the multitude of things that clamor for our attention, but to turn our minds and hearts to Him who is our Lord' (Nouwen). We can only face our sins in the situation of grace, reveal our wounds in the place of healing, and give up our entrenched fears of Christ in true devotion. It is when we realize that Christ living within us is our true self, that we can gradually dissolve our compulsions and experience the freedom of being children of God." In the lonely wilderness, pastors must encounter the Lord, seek His thoughts and hearts through grace, humbly listen with a heart that longs for His voice, and face their own true nature. In this process, we must confront our sins through His word. In other words, we must face our true selves (Nouwen). In this context, we must approach the cross with humility, bearing our sins, and confess with faith that it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. When we experience true freedom in the truth, we can boldly proclaim the word of God. In this perspective, pastors, like Moses, must shepherd in the wilderness.

Christian Today" (May 17, 2005) - 9th Anniversary Special Interview with Pastor Jung-chil Jo. In the interview, there was a question that resonated with me: 'If you were to diagnose the Korean church based on your 50 years of ministry experience?' The church should have a positive image that welcomes many people. We need to reflect on the image of the church now. The good image of the church is deteriorating continuously. The problem with today's church is that the presence of God is not felt. As a pastor myself, I often think, 'Is God present in today's church?' ... When a Korean church regains a form that seems to have been anointed by God, it will become a true church. Who is responsible for this image of the church? It is the responsibility of the pastor if the presence of God is not felt. If the pastor does not convey the thought that there is a God, then the congregation cannot think that God exists. How should the Korean church change? Looking at our lives, there should be such a

fragrance of Christ that people hear that God is present (Christian Today).

In the pursuit of the spirituality of the wilderness,

James Kim

(Praying to lead the entrusted flock under the guidance of the Lord)

Abandoned by God

[Acts 7:39-43]

Stomach cancer accounts for about one-fourth of cancers in Koreans and is one of the most common cancers. It is about twice as common in men as in women. In fact, in the early stages, stomach cancer often does not show any specific symptoms. Early symptoms of stomach cancer include discomfort in the upper abdomen and abdominal pain. Other symptoms after meals such as indigestion, post-meal bloating, and loss of appetite can also occur. These symptoms are similar to those commonly seen in acute or chronic gastritis, duodenal ulcers, and gastric ulcers. Therefore, when patients experience these symptoms, they often dismiss them as minor indigestion and end up using digestive aids or antacids for a long time, missing the right timing for treatment. If stomach cancer is detected in its advanced stages and left untreated, patients usually die within 1-2 years, and the younger the patient, the faster the progression. The prevention of stomach cancer is primarily possible through improvements in diet. The Korean diet includes a lot of salty kimchi, spicy foods, hot foods, and charred foods, and it is advisable to reduce the intake of such foods. Additionally, it is recommended to consume ginseng and milk, which are believed to have preventive effects against stomach cancer, and to increase the intake of fresh green vegetables and fruits rich in vitamins A and C to boost vitamin intake (Internet). When thinking about stomach cancer, we realize that instead of consuming healthy foods in our diet, which can prevent cancer, we often consume foods that can lead to cancer. When cancer is discovered and left untreated, it ultimately leads to death within 1-2 years. Reflecting on this, I applied it to our spiritual lives as well. In our spiritual lives, if God does not hold onto us and simply leaves us, we may eventually face death due to the sinful and corrupt instincts within us, like cancer cells. No one would knowingly leave a cancer untreated; they would do everything they can to try and cure it, no matter what it takes. Similarly, we should make every effort to address the spiritual "cancers" within us, seeking healing and restoration through God's grace.

In today's passage, Acts 7:42, the Bible tells us that when the Israelites sinned against God, He eventually abandoned them. In other words, it emphasizes that God is a God who allows abandonment. Focusing on Acts 7:39-43, I reflected on why God abandoned the Israelites and received a lesson. We should strive not to sin like the Israelites, so that God does not abandon us.

First, we must not commit the sin of disobedience to God's word.

Look at Acts 7:39 - "But our ancestors refused to obey him. Instead, they rejected him and in their hearts turned back to Egypt." The Israelites did not obey Moses, whom God had chosen to give them the words of life. Instead, they rejected the words of life that were conveyed through Moses. Why did the Israelites, who considered Moses the greatest prophet and leader, disobey his words? Why did they reject the words of life? It was because their hearts turned back to Egypt (v. 39). Even though God heard their cries when they were in pain as slaves in Egypt and sent Moses to save them, they kept looking back and complained about Moses and God whenever they faced hardships and difficulties in the wilderness. They would say, 'Life was better in Egypt.'

We are not so different from the Israelites. Despite being made a new creation, our hearts often dwell on worldly matters rather than heavenly ones. Though Paul clearly instructs us to set our minds on things above, not on earthly things (Col. 3:2), we find ourselves constantly wavering between heavenly and earthly concerns. The term "earthly things" can also be understood as the deeds of the "old self" (Eph. 4:22). For example, living according to our sinful desires (v. 22), lying (v. 25), allowing anger to lead us to sin and harboring bitterness (verse 26), stealing (verse 28), engaging in corrupt speech (v. 29), clamor (v. 31), slander (v. 31), and refusing to forgive (v. 32), and so on. If we become captivated by these deeds of the old self, we will, like the Israelites, reject the words of life and ultimately live a life of disobedience to God's word. Ultimately, if we reject the love of truth, God will allow deception to work in us, leading us to believe falsehood (2 Thess. 2:11). If God abandons us, we will believe in falsehood. It is one of the two: either we love the truth or reject it, and therefore believe in falsehood.

We must choose the truth. We must never reject or refuse the words of truth. To do so, we must not turn our hearts towards the world. If our hearts are gradually taken away by this world, we will end up living a life of disobedience to God's word. In that case, God will abandon us in our sin.

Second, we must not commit the sin of making idols.

Look at Acts 7:40 - "They told Aaron, 'Make us gods who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses who led us out of Egypt—we don't know what has happened to him!'" Why did the Israelites during the time of the exodus ask Aaron, Moses' brother, to make them gods when Moses was on Mount Sinai communing with God? I believe it was due to the Israelites' anxiety about their uncertain future, stemming from a perceived absence of leadership from Moses. In the end, their lack of faith led them to request from Aaron an idol to lead them in the future out of their fear and uncertainty. Could there have been such a great deficiency in Moses' leadership during the exodus? Then, was Aaron not a leader? Unlike Moses, Aaron did not receive direct communication from God to convey to the Israelites; rather, he was led by the people more than he led them with the word of God. A leader who is not led by the word of God but instead led by people, ultimately leads those who follow him to sin before God. In the

end, as Exodus 32:25 states, Aaron allowed the Israelites to become out of control, becoming a laughingstock to their enemies. The more accurate answer as to why the Israelites made idols is found in Romans 1:21: "For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened." The reason the Israelites rejoiced in making the idol of a calf and offering sacrifices to it with their own hands (Acts 7:41) was because their thinking became futile, and their hearts became foolish and darkened. So why did the thoughts and hearts of the Israelites become so futile, foolish, and darkened? The cause was that they knew God but did not glorify Him as God or give thanks (Rom. 1:21). Even though God delivered the Israelites from Egypt through miracles and showed them signs and wonders in the wilderness, they chose to exchange the truth of God for a lie, worshipping the creature rather than the Creator (v. 25). Why did they do that? It was because the Israelites thought of themselves as wise (v. 22). Ultimately, their prideful hearts led the Israelites to commit the sin of idol worship.

We must be wary of pride. We must not think of ourselves as wise. Therefore, we should not steal God's glory to exalt ourselves. We must not make idols like the Israelites. We must not offer sacrifices before these idols and become like the Israelites, sitting down to eat and drink and rising up to play (Exod. 32:6). And we must not look at the idols we have made and rejoice as the Israelites did (Acts 7:41).

Third and last, we must not commit the sin of ingratitude towards God.

Look at Acts 7:42 - "But God turned away from them and gave them over to the worship of the sun, moon, and stars. This agrees with what is written in the book of the prophets: 'Did you bring me sacrifices and offerings forty years in the wilderness, people of Israel?'" Even though God met the Israelites from heaven, brought water from the rock, led them with a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night, the Israelites committed the sin of ingratitude towards God. Instead of giving glory to God with thanksgiving for His grace, they grumbled. In the end, while Moses was on Mount Sinai communing with God and receiving the Ten Commandments, the Israelites, along with Aaron, made a golden calf and worshipped it, committing the sin of idol worship. Ultimately, the Israelites did not offer sacrifices to God for forty years in the wilderness (Amos 5:25-27). Look at Acts 7:42b – "Did you bring me sacrifices and offerings forty years in the wilderness, people of Israel?" In the end, God turned away from them and gave them over to the worship of the heavenly bodies (v. 42). This cannot be anything other than a terrifying judgment from God. Leaving them to their futile thoughts and darkened foolish hearts is a frightening judgment. The reason is that, just like the Israelites, if God does not hold us, we will struggle in sin and ultimately die. The Israelites were abandoned by God in the midst of idol worship because of their previous sin. Look at Romans 1:26 - "Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts." In the end, even after entering and settling in the land of Canaan, the Israelites committed the sin of idol worship. They worshipped the idols of the Assyrians (worshipping the stars) (Jere. 8:2, 19:13). We must not commit the sin of ingratitude towards our Father God. When God blesses us in various ways, it pleases Him for us to use those blessings for His glory, not for idol worship

like the Israelites.

Our God is the God who does not abandon. When the Israelites sinned, God abandoned them. They sinned by disobeying God's word, making idols, and being ungrateful. Therefore, God abandoned them. However, the God who abandoned the Israelites is not the God who will abandon us. The reason is that God abandoned Jesus, His only begotten Son, on the cross in our place. Therefore, when we realize the grace and love of God revealed through the cross of Jesus, we will no longer commit the sins of disobedience, idol worship, and ingratitude.

Saved through the only begotten Son Jesus, who was abandoned by God the Father,

James Kim

(Seeking forgiveness for the sin of ingratitude towards God)

Church?

[Acts 7:44-50]

The article from the Korean-American Gospel Newspaper (June 11, 2006) titled 'Alternative Churches: Home Churches Without Pastors, Choosing Worship Freely, Trend of Increase' describes that in the 21st century, global churches can be divided into seven categories: (1) Mega-Churches: These are churches with over 2,000 attendees at Sunday worship services. Mega-churches are characterized by diverse auxiliary activities, including operating shops, hosting paid seminars, and running recreational facilities, which serve as significant sources of revenue. Hiring experts with MBA backgrounds to create various business opportunities is considered standard practice. (2) Meta-Churches: The term "meta" here signifies change. Meta-churches refer to churches in transition or turning, indicating that churches of the future are inevitably bound to change. Pastors of meta-churches need to possess a fundamental spirituality while understanding the structural renewal of churches that can adapt to future society. Meta-churches seek change while maintaining the quality of the church based on spiritual functions. (3) Television, Radio, and Internet Churches: These churches conduct worship services through TV, radio, or the internet rather than in physical church buildings. (4) Wal-Mart Churches, (5) Traditional Churches, (6) New Churches Pursuing Differentiation, (7) House Churches.

According to research conducted by Barna Research, which has been studying the attitudes and behaviors of American adults towards religion for the past 25 years, over 20 million Americans have opted for alternative ways of worship instead of attending traditional church services since the year 2000. These alternatives include house churches, workplace ministries, and worship through computers. The appeal of these alternatives lies in people's desire to deepen their relationship with God and others, as well as the freedom to schedule worship in a way that suits them, rather than being bound to attending church on Sundays. The author of the article evaluates this movement by stating: 'In the age where human-centered thinking, judgment, and convenience prevail, it is important to discern whether the worship conducted freely without a pastor on chosen days is 'God-centered' or 'human-centered'. The rapidly spreading house church movement appears to be a factor hindering the growth of traditional churches (Internet).

So, what kind of church should our church aim to be? Based on Acts 7:44-50, I would like to draw three lessons on what kind of church our church should strive to be. Therefore, I hope and pray that our church becomes even more rooted in the teachings of the Bible.

First, the church is the tabernacle of testimony.

Look at Acts 7:44 - "Our ancestors had the tabernacle of the covenant law with them in the wilderness. It had been made as God directed Moses, according to the pattern he had seen." Why does Stephen mention the tabernacle of testimony in his speech? He is addressing those who are persecuting him, emphasizing that the Israelites did not commit the sin of idolatry by worshiping the "Molten Calf" at the "Tabernacle of Moloch" because there was no tabernacle of God during the exodus (v. 43). So, what is the tabernacle of testimony? It is the altar where the Ark of the Covenant, the core of worship, was placed. The tabernacle of testimony is often known as the "tent of meeting." It was where God's presence was visible to the Israelites. Built by Moses according to God's instructions (v. 44), this tabernacle was carried with them until they entered the Promised Land of Canaan and even up to the time of King David (v. 45). Therefore, this tent, this tabernacle, bore witness to God dwelling with His people, the Israelites.

How can the fact that the church is the tabernacle of testimony be applied to our church?

- (1) The fact that the tabernacle of testimony is the central place of worship teaches us that our church should prioritize worshiping God with genuine and spiritual worship.

Look at John 4:23 - "Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks."

- (2) The fact that the tabernacle of testimony is the place of revelation teaches us that our church should become a church of blessing.

We can know this from Matthew 16:16-17. When Jesus asked His disciples, "Who do you say I am?" Simon Peter confessed, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." At that moment, Jesus responded, "...Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven" (v. 17). Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Blessed are you." He revealed that Jesus is the Lord, the Christ, the living Son of God. True blessedness is the confession of faith that acknowledges who Jesus truly is, revealed by God the Father.

- (3) The statement that our church becomes the tabernacle of testimony teaches us

that the church should testify to Jesus Christ.

In other words, our church should live a faith life of genuine confession, understanding who Jesus is through God's revelation. The church should bear witness to who Jesus is through our lives. When the church does this, it truly becomes a church.

Second, the church is the dwelling place of God.

Look at Acts 7:46 - "David found favor in God's sight and asked that he might provide a dwelling place for the God of Jacob." Stephen clearly states that the house David intended to build was not for God, but for the house of Jacob (v. 46). The emphasis that the temple was not for God but for the house of Jacob rejects the false notion that religious leaders sought to confine God to the Jerusalem temple and control Him according to their desires (Yoo). The Jewish religious leaders seemed to have worshiped the Jerusalem temple as if it were God. They committed the foolish sin of trying to confine God within the Jerusalem temple.

The dwelling place of God is what God established to dwell among the Israelites (Exod. 25:8). Look at Exodus 25:8 - "Then have them make a sanctuary for me, and I will dwell among them." Therefore, the Israelites were to worship God, serve Him faithfully, and express their dedication towards Him with humility in His dwelling place. However, they secularized the sanctuary, treating it as more important than God Himself. They seemed to value the temple building more than the presence of God, much like churches in today's age sometimes prioritize the church building over the congregants. A church cannot be considered a true church unless it can testify to the fact that God dwells with them. The church must manifest the evidence that God dwells with them. How can our church testify to the fact that God dwells with us?

(1) We can testify to the fact that God dwells with us through worship.

Look at 1 Corinthians 14:25 - "As they fall down and worship God, exclaiming, 'God is really among you!'" When the Corinthian church experienced the presence of God during worship, even unbelievers exclaimed, "God is really among you!" We must testify through worship that God dwells among our community.

(2) Through a life of obedience to the Word, each of us individually can testify to the fact that God is with us.

In other words, when we live by faith in Immanuel, we can testify to the fact that God dwells with us. Look at Matthew 1:23 - "The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel" (which means "God with us").

(3) Through prayer, we can testify to the fact that God dwells with us.

Look at Deuteronomy 4:7 - "What other nation is so great as to have their gods near them the way the Lord our God is near us whenever we pray to him?"

Third and last, the church is a place of rest.

Look at Acts 7:49 - "'Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. What kind of house will you build for me?' says the Lord. 'Or where will my resting place be?'" Stephen is attacking the false ideas and attitudes of the members of the Sanhedrin who are listening to his defense. He rebukes their attitude of idolizing the Jerusalem temple. Professor Sang Seop Yoo states: 'Stephen did not reject the temple itself, but rather he rejected the misuse and idolization of the temple by the people. The problem lies not in the temple itself, but in their attitude towards the temple (the idolization of the temple)' (Yoo). Can a temple made by human hands contain the God who created the entire universe? The answer to that question is "no," as Acts 17:24 states: "The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by human hands." Solomon already knew this truth (1 Kgs. 8:27), and Isaiah the prophet was even more explicit about it (Isa. 66:1-2).

How can the concept of the church as a place of rest be applied to our church? In other words, what must we do for the church of our Lord to become a resting place for God? The answer can be found in Psalms 132:7-9: "Let us go to his dwelling place; let us worship at his footstool— arise, Lord, and come to your resting place, you and the ark of your might. May your priests be clothed with your righteousness; may your faithful people sing for joy."

(1) We must offer right worship to God.

When we offer right worship in His temple, God comes to rest in His dwelling place.

(2) We must live a righteous life before God.

Those who offer right worship have the responsibility to live a life of right worship. We must live a righteous life in an unrighteous world. In doing so, God comes to rest in His place of rest.

In 1 Corinthians 4:16, when Apostle Paul speaks of the church, what is he referring to? He is directly referring to us, our church: "Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?" The Bible clearly states that you and I are God's temple. Furthermore, it emphatically states that the Holy Spirit dwells within us. So, the question arises: what kind of church should we be? Look at 1 Corinthians 4:17 - "If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple." Consider 1 Corinthians 6:19-20: "Or do you not know that your body

is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body."

Serving the church established by the Lord,

James Kim

(Dreaming of a church that reflects its true nature)

The Stiff-necked Christians

[Acts 7:51-54]

What is stubbornness? It is dogged determination not to change one's attitude or position on something (Internet). This word is used to actively present one's thoughts to other or is used to do what one thinks without listening to others. The Bible Exodus 32:9 says that the people of Israel are "a stiff-necked people." What does it mean? It is a metaphor for human stubbornness and foolish arrogance that does not obey God. The word "stiff-necked" means obstinacy. This reminds us a yoked cow. When we try to yoke the cow, the cow has to bow its head. But since the cow doesn't want to, the cow stiffens its neck.

In Acts 7:51 we can see the expression "stiff-necked". As we meditate on the four ways in which a straight-necked Christian is doing, I pray that if we are a straight-necked Christian, we will have the opportunity to repent our sins to God.

First, the stiff-necked Christians resist the Holy Spirit.

Look at Acts 7:51 – "You men who are stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears are always resisting the Holy Spirit; you are doing just as your fathers did." The Bible refers to the stiff-necked religious leaders who judged Stephen, 'You are always resisting the Holy Spirit.' These words point to the fact that the Israelites who were listening to Stephen's speech that they were like their ancestors who resist the Holy Spirit. When God's Holy Spirit counseled the Israelites through Moses and the other God's leaders after Moses, the stiff-necked Israelites resisted the Holy Spirit, and their descendants, the religious leaders, continued to sin against the work of the Holy Spirit. Here, "resisting" the Holy Spirit means rejecting, opposing, and showing hostility to the Spirit's message and the messengers who convey the message (MacArthur). How did the Israelites resist the Holy Spirit? They turned their ancestors' spiritual obedience into outward worship (Furneaux). This means that instead of obeying the Holy Spirit's message, they replaced it with outward worship. The Israelites devoted themselves to the outward worship only in order to enjoy their religious satisfaction, rejecting the message of the Holy Spirit. Why did the Israelites resist the Holy Spirit? Why did they reject the Holy Spirit's message? The reason is that they have not been circumcised in

their hearts and ears. This means that the Jews were physically circumcised, but not in their hearts. In fact, the Israelites lived the outward religious life that wasn't praise by God but praised by people by focusing on the law and the appearance of the temple without participating in the inheritance promised to Abraham. The Jews lived the lives of outward religionists rather than the spiritual obedience of listening to and obeying the voice of the Holy Spirit.

What should we do? We shouldn't go against the Holy Spirit. In order to do this, we must be saints who are circumcised in heart and ears and praised by God (Rom. 2:28-29). Also, we must oppose the Devil instead of the Holy Spirit (Jam. 4:7).

Second, the stiff-necked Christians persecute the righteous.

Look at Acts 7:52 – “Which one of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? They killed those who had previously announced the coming of the Righteous One, whose betrayers and murderers you have now become.” Stephen exposed not only the stiff-necked Israelites' sin but also their ancestors' sin. And his ancestors' sin was a sin that persecuted and eventually killed the prophets whom God sent to foretell the coming of the Messiah. Eventually, despite the fulfillment of the coming of the Messiah, who was sent by God and was prophesied through the prophets, the Israelites crucified Jesus. Stephen emphasized Jesus' innocence and righteousness to the Jews who were listening to him and exposed the sins of the Israelites who killed Jesus. Stephen pierced the essence of the fundamental sin of the Jewish people. It was the sin that killed the Messiah.

The stiff-necked Christians who are Christians outwardly persecute the Christians inwardly. They rejected the Holy Spirit's message of love each other and seek the form of godliness for self-religious satisfaction but denies the power of godliness. In the end, they are secularizing the church by trying to reveal their own righteousness rather than revealing the Lord's righteousness. These stiff-necked Christians disturb the church, persecuting the servants of the Lord who preached the word of God. They also murder their brothers and sisters in Christ in their hearts (1 Jn. 3:15). But we must hate unrighteousness and love righteousness. Since we are justified by the merits of Jesus Christ on the cross, we must love each other with our hearts with the love of Christ rather than committing murder by hating each other.

Third, the stiff-necked Christians receive the Word of God but don't keep it.

Look at Acts 7:53 – “you who received the law as ordained by angels, and yet did not keep it.” After Stephen pierced the fundamental sin of the stiff-necked Israelites, he pointed out to them that they who received the law as ordained by angels, they didn't keep it. This word was given through angels when God gave the law to Moses (Gal. 3:19; Heb. 2:2), and even though the Israelites received the law, they didn't believe in Jesus whom the prophets prophesized as Christ, but rather crucified Him. That's why the Israelites couldn't be said that they are law-keepers. Although they valued the law and studied and meditated on it, they didn't accept Jesus as Messiah, who is the heart of the law. Even now, the Jews don't believe Jesus as

Messiah (Isa. 30: 9).

How about us? Do we receive the Word of God and keep it? We are all builders of houses, either on the rock or on the sand. If we heard the Word of God and act on them, we are building our house on the rock (Mt. 7:24). “And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and yet it did not fall, for it had been founded on the rock” (v. 25). But if we hear the Word of God and don’t act on them, we are building our house on the sand (v. 26). “The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and it fell--and great was its fall” (v. 27). Are we building our house well?

As I met with a pastor this week, I really felt that Satan was attacking our families. There are so many marital conflicts in our families and our children who see us being in conflicts get hurts as well. How should we live our faith especially in our home? It’s very challenging. We must humbly received the Word of God and live a life of obeying it. How can we measure the maturity of our faith? Who are the mature Christians? The mature Christians are those who have good and soft hearts that are receptive to the Word of God, who are quick to listen to the Word and act on it. The problem is that we aren’t absorbing the Word of God well because of the lack of absorption. And the bigger problem is that we are not immediately putting that Word into practice. What should we do to solve these problems? First, we must train ourselves to receive the Word of God. And the important part of that training is meditation training. As we think and think about God’s Word repeatedly, we must experience the grace that Holy Spirit makes us to understand the Word and to engrave it on the tablets of our hearts. And then, we should train ourselves to put the Word of God into practice immediately for the purpose of cultivating the habit of putting the Word into action immediately. In order to do that, we must be alert to the habit of putting off. If we put it off, then we will forget it and won’t be able to put God’s Word into practice. Now, we must obey the Word of God with the determination of putting the Word into practice.

Fourth and last, the stiff-necked Christians are angry.

Look at Acts 7:54 – “Now when they heard this, they were cut to the quick, and they began gnashing their teeth at him.” Listening to the Stephen’s speech that exposed the sins of the religious leaders and their ancestors, the religious leaders were cut to the quick and they gnashed their teeth at him. And eventually they killed Stephen. There are two things we can do when we hear the Word of God and when the Word of God pierces our hearts. First, the positive response of the Word of God piercing our hearts is to repent our sins and be saved (Acts 2:37). Second, the negative response of the Word of God piercing our hearts is to be gnashing our teeth rather than repenting our sins (5:33, 7:54). Here, the first positive response teaches us how God’s Word can be blessing to us, while the second negative response shows us how God’s Word can be a curse to us.

Is God’s Word being blessing to us or curse to us? Are our hearts being pierced by this Word of God today, right now? Are we repent our sins or are we angry? As we listen to these words, we need to think

about whether we are stiff-necked Christians like the Israelites or not. Are we resisting the Holy Spirit? Are we persecuting the righteous? Are we receiving the Word of God and not keeping it? Are we angry? If we say “Yes” to these questions, we are stiff-necked Christians. Therefore, we must repent before God.

The Christ-follower who resists the Holy Spirit,

James Kim

(Yearning for true repentance)

The Holy Spirit-filled Christians

[Acts 7:55-60]

What is filled with the Holy Spirit? This is what Pastor Andrew Murray said about filled with the Holy Spirit: ‘Without filled with the Holy Spirit, it is absolutely impossible for a Christian or the church to live and work as God desires. Therefore, we must seek filled with the Holy Spirit with all our heart’ (Internet).

First, filled with the Holy Spirit means filled with Christ.

Look at John 16:13-14: “But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you.” Wherever the Holy Spirit works, Jesus Christ is exalted and His name is testified. When Peter and John faced persecution in witnessing Jesus Christ, they prayed to God “Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness” (Acts 4:29). And they were filled with the Holy Spirit and eagerly testified the gospel of Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit didn’t emphasize himself and since the glory of Jesus Christ came, the Holy Spirit was called “God who hides.”

Second, filled with the Holy Spirit means that not only Jesus Christ is exalted, but also His Word is manifested in power.

The Lord has also said that He is the Spirit of Truth and “He will guide you into all the truth” (Jn. 16:13). Ephesians 5:18 says, “And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit.” Colossians 3:16 says “Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God.” Here, Paul used the phrase “Let the word of Christ richly dwell” instead of the phrase ‘filled with the Holy Spirit’. Therefore, ‘the word of Christ richly dwell’ means same as ‘filled with the Holy Spirit’. The ‘filled with the Holy Spirit’ is not just our emotional change, but a state of full control of us with the eternal Truth Christ and His Word. Also, the ‘filled with the Holy Spirit’ is explained in comparison with

drunkenness. Just as alcohol enters us and dominates our central nerves, the Holy Spirit controls all our lives. He controls us by His Word and sanctifies us to make God's holy life within us.

The Jewish religious leaders, who were listening to the preaching of Stephen who was filled with the Holy Spirit, were stiff-necked men who persecuted and killed the righteous in resentment against the Holy Spirit. They didn't obey the word when they received it. In Acts 7:55-60, we find Stephen, who was filled with the Holy Spirit, unlike the Jewish religious leaders who were stiff-necked. I would like to think about who the Holy Spirit Christians are in three ways:

First, the Holy Spirit-filled Christians look and say.

Look at Acts 7:55-56: "But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. 'Look,' he said, 'I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.'" What did Stephen see and say? When Stephen, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven, he saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God (v. 55). Now the question is 'Why Jesus was standing?' The New Testament consistently testifies that Jesus is sitting at the right hand of God's throne (Yoo). But why did Jesus stand at the right hand of God in Acts 7:55? The scholars' interpretations vary. There is an interpretation that Jesus was standing up to receive the martyr Stephen's entry into the glorious kingdom after his death. And there is another interpretation that says the reason why Jesus was standing up was because Jesus, as a witness, wanted to testify the message and ministry of His servant Stephen like in the Jewish court (Wiersbe). This is what Professor Yoo Sang-seop says: 'The reason why Son of Man Jesus stood up at the right hand of God's throne was to acknowledge Stephen before God who was boldly testifying and acknowledging Him, and to intercede for him to Heavenly Father that he would be faithful to the end.' The reason why God allowed Stephen to see this heavenly vision was to encourage him on the one hand and on the other hand, to show that Jesus is still serving as a legal representative and mediator at the right hand of God for his faithful witness. (See Rom. 8:34; Heb. 7:24).

The Holy spirit-filled Christians are those who testify what they have seen and heard. Look at 1 John 1:3 – "We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ." Here, what does "we have seen" mean? In other words, what does it mean that we have seen Jesus? It means to believe in Jesus. Look at John 12:44-45: "Then Jesus cried out, "When a man believes in me, he does not believe in me only, but in the one who sent me. When he looks at me, he sees the one who sent me." Here, the phrase 'he who sees Jesus' and 'he who believes in Jesus' are used synonymously. Therefore, the Holy Spirit-filled Christians who believe in Jesus hear His voice through the Word of God by the work of the Holy Spirit and testify what they have heard. In other words, the Holy Spirit-filled Christians are those who believe in Jesus and His gospel and preach it. And the purpose of doing so is for the listeners to have fellowship with Jesus.

Second, the Holy Spirit-filled Christians depend on the Lord.

Look at Acts 7:59 – “While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” When the Holy Spirit-filled Stephen spoke what he saw, that is the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God, how did the leaders of the Sanhedrin and those leaders of the Synagogue of the Freemen who were furious and gnashed their teeth at Stephen respond? (v. 54) Look at Acts 7:57-58: “At this they covered their ears and, yelling at the top of their voices, they all rushed at him, dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. Meanwhile, the witnesses laid their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul.” These Sanhedrin leaders and the leaders of the synagogues of the Freemen, who were stiff-necked people, with uncircumcised hearts and ears (v. 51) didn’t believe in Jesus even though it was obvious that what Stephen saw and said, that is “the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God” (v. 56) proved the apostles’ preaching about Jesus resurrection and ascension was without any false because they were murderers who killed Jesus on the cross. Rather, they closed their ears completely with both hands when Stephen spoke (v. 57). They were against the Holy Spirit, and against the Holy Spirit-filled Stephen (Yoo). They yelled at the top of their voices and they all rushed at Stephen (v. 57). And they dragged him out of the city and began to stone him (v. 58). At that time, Stephen prayed to Jesus who stood at the right hand of God that he would entrust his soul to Jesus who advocated and defended him before God. Look at Acts 7:59 – “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” This prayer is also found in Psalms 31:5 – “Into your hands I commit my spirit.” This psalmist’s prayer eventually points to the prayer of Jesus on the cross: ““Father, into your hands I commit my spirit” (Lk. 23:46). In Acts 7:59, we see that the Holy Spirit-filled Stephen offered the prayer of Jesus on the cross. On the crossroad between life and death, Stephen entrusted his life to the Lord.

The Holy Spirit-filled Christians depend on God. Those who rebel against the Holy Spirit deny the Lord and trust in themselves. But the Holy Spirit Christians rely solely on the Lord even when they are stoned to death. Since the Holy Spirit-filled Stephen saw the glorious Lord, who died, was resurrected, and stood at the right hand of God entrust his spirit to Him. Like Stephen, we are Christians who have resurrection faith. Then, in the matter of life and death situation, we should entrust our spirits to the Lord. Whatever situation we are in, we must rely completely on the Lord.

Third and last, the Holy Spirit-filled Christians forgive.

Look at Acts 7:60 – “Then he fell on his knees and cried out, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them.” When he had said this, he fell asleep.” The Holy Spirit-filled Stephen fell on his knees and prayed for forgiveness even when he was stoning to death: “Lord, do not hold this sin against them” (v. 60). This prayer of forgiveness is similar to the prayer Jesus offered on the cross: “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing” (Lk. 23:34). The Stephan’s prayer of forgiveness also includes forgiveness for Saul, who was controlling behind this work of killing Stephan (Yoo). But was this Stephen's prayer answer immediately? Not at all. Rather than being immediately changed, Saul took the lead in persecuting the church even more (Yoo). However, in Acts 9, Saul was converted and faithfully carried out the ministry of the witnesses in suffering and persecutions from Acts 9-28. How amazing is this? Like this, the prayer of forgiveness is powerful.

Look at the American steel king Andrew Carnegie's writing about 'forgiving heart: 'He is famous for having a lot more talented people around him than other people. He was asked how he was able to put such outstanding people by his side, and, Carnegie said the one of the secrets is 'the heart of forgiveness.' There is a very special reason for Carnegie to have such a forgiving heart. When he was in his early twenties, he was in charge of delivering the funds from the company he worked for. On a train with a huge bag with a lot of money, he sat on the railing of the train and began to doze. But suddenly he woke up and the bag was gone. It was obvious that he slept and dropped his bag out of the train. Carnegie drifted over to the engineer, thinking about the situation, and asking him to back up the train. These days, there is no way any engineer would do that, but at that time people's minds were relatively simple. So the engineer, who was sorry to Carnegie, backed the train a few kilometers. Carnegie's eyes, which were staring out, came into the familiar bag that fell by the stream of water. Shouting close to screaming, Carnegie jumped out of the train and opened the bag. Fortunately, the cash was intact. So he continued to hug the bag like a treasure trove on his return train. It was said that Carnegie made an important decision to live up to his life with that daunting memory. From that time on, Carnegie decided to forgive young people even if they made a very decisive mistake, unless they had done it fraudulently. Since in human life, no matter how hard we try faithfully, sudden situation can happen. So Carnegie thought that the lifelong dreams shouldn't be penalized because of the sudden situation' (Internet).

In Acts 6, the Bible says that Stephen was "a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit" (v. 5), and was a man full of God's grace and power who did great wonders and miraculous signs among the people (v. 8). Also, members of the Synagogue of the Freedmen, who argued with Stephen (v. 9) couldn't stand up against Stephen's wisdom or the Spirit by whom he spoke (v. 10). So they stirred up the people and the elders and the teachers of the law to seize Stephen and brought him before the Sanhedrin (v. 12). Then they slandered Stephen in front of the religious leaders. "All who were sitting in the Sanhedrin looked intently at Stephen, and they saw that his face was like the face of an angel" (v. 16). Like Stephen, those who are filled with the Holy Spirit look to (focus on) the Lord Jesus and live their Christian life. As they do so, they resemble the image of Jesus (filled with His grace). Since they live their Christian life by solely relying on the merits of Jesus on the cross, they depend on Him completely (filled with faith). Not only they offer the Jesus' prayer of forgiveness on the cross but they also put it into practice (filled with power). I hope and pray that we all become such Holy Spirit-filled Christians.

Desiring to be established as a Spirit-filled Christian,

James Kim

(Hoping to always rely on the Lord and move forward in faith)

Saul vs. Philip

[Acts 8:1-8]

In Pastor Aidan Tozer's "Tozer speaks to students," Chapter 1, titled "Spiritual Power," the following words are written: 'A life lived in companionship with God can only clash with the world, because the ways of God and the ways of the world cannot walk together. They intersect and cut across each other. In this process, friction, hostility, conflict, and even persecution can arise. However, the blessed Holy Spirit vehemently opposes the comfortable ways of the world. We are living in a corrupt age. In my view, Christianity today is comfortably coexisting with the easy ways of the world without friction. The Holy Spirit says to the Christianity that is deeply asleep, Awaken now!. How can we, as deeply asleep Christians, awaken spiritually? We must live a life filled with the Holy Spirit and walk in a manner worthy of the Spirit's will. The Holy Spirit is a holy being. Therefore, whatever fills your mind should always be holy and pure. He desires a clean sanctuary. He wants to make His dwelling place glorious. Jesus does not abide in a place that is not filled with light and beauty. The Holy Spirit does not dwell in an impure and defiled temple (Tozer). We must keep our character clean. To do this, we must let go of anything that hinders our spiritual progress.

We meditated on the contrast between Stephen, a Spirit-filled Christian, and Saul, who persecuted Stephen, in Acts 7. In today's passage, Acts 8, we encounter Saul, who was involved in the stoning of Stephen, and Philip, a Spirit-filled deacon. One person lived in opposition to the Spirit and later experienced transformation on the road to Damascus, while the other person lived a life worthy of the Spirit and walked in the Spirit's will. Today, as I meditate on Saul and Philip, I seek to receive the teaching that God desires to give us about what kind of saints we should be.

Saul was a fierce persecutor.

Look at Acts 8:1 - " And Saul was there, giving approval to his death. On that day a great persecution broke out against the church at Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria." As we have already meditated in Acts 7, Stephen, a Spirit-filled deacon, was stoned to death by zealous Jews, and Saul made his first appearance. Instead of placing Stephen's clothes, which

were removed according to the legal customs of the time, at Saul's feet to show that his death was justified, the Jewish persecutors inexplicably placed their own clothes at Saul's feet. This symbolic act acknowledged that their act of stoning Stephen was done with Saul's approval or instruction (Yoo). However, in Acts 8:1, Luke records that Saul approved of Stephen's execution. Here, the noun "execution" is derived from the verb, meaning "to kill and remove." This noun form is unique to the New Testament and appears only in this passage. When Luke predominantly used this verb to describe an unjust death, it is clear that Stephen's death was unjust. Yet, Saul considered Stephen's death justified. Why did Saul consider Stephen's death justified? The reason is that, from Saul's perspective as a Pharisee among the Pharisees who strictly adhered to Jewish doctrine, Jesus could not possibly be the Christ, the Messiah. The gospel of Christ, which Stephen and the early church proclaimed, was incomprehensible to Saul. He could not understand how Jesus, whom he considered cursed and crucified on the cross, could be the Christ, let alone the Savior. Therefore, Saul considered Stephen's death justified, and he took the lead in persecuting the early church. He went from house to house, entering homes, and dragging off both men and women to put them in prison (v. 3). The fact that he seized women indicates the extreme cruelty of Saul (Park).

What happened as a result of this severe persecution led by Saul in the early Jerusalem church?

(1) Devout believers mourned greatly.

Look at Acts 8:2 - "Devout men buried Stephen and made great lamentation over him." Devout individuals, that is, Jewish believers who had accepted Jesus, had a customary practice of publicly mourning for someone who had been publicly executed. They went against this custom by burying Stephen and mourning for him openly. Thus, this severe persecution brought about great lamentation/sorrow.

(2) Christian believers were imprisoned.

Look at Acts 8:3 - "But Saul was ravaging the church, and entering house after house, he dragged off men and women and committed them to prison." Like a wild beast, Saul went out searching for Christians, entering houses (possibly house churches), forcibly dragging out both men and women, and throwing them into prison.

(3) All believers, apart from the apostles, were scattered from Jerusalem.

Look at Acts 8:1b - "... And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles." Due to Saul and the persecutors of Christianity, all the saints, apart from the apostles, were dispersed from Jerusalem. They were scattered not only throughout Judea and Samaria but even as far as the regions of Asia Minor (11:19).

Within modern churches, there are individuals similar to Saul. These individuals can be referred to as "legalistic believers." They hold a skewed belief system and exhibit a fervent conviction and passion for their distorted beliefs. Like Saul, they may possess knowledge of the Scriptures and a zealous spirit. But it is not a correct understanding of the Scriptures, and their zeal is based on misguided knowledge, making them truly dangerous believers. Those with a legalistic mindset may become prideful, thinking of themselves as righteous beings, especially if they believe they have fulfilled the rigorous demands of the law. Legalists tend to believe that they can earn God's approval through their own efforts. The most perilous aspect for legalists is that they miss the core of the gospel, which is that God unconditionally bestows salvation upon undeserving individuals. Pastor David A. Seamands stated, "The hardest thing to give up in the Christian life is the feeling that somehow I can do it" (Seamands). Many churchgoers, even after receiving justification through God's unconditional grace, become ensnared in the belief that ongoing enjoyment of God's love and grace depends on how well they think they are performing in their faith. They almost unconsciously transform God's love into a form of conditional love, basing it to some extent on human piety, and are driven by an obsession to contribute something to earn that love (Young-don Park). Living solely by God's grace can deeply wound the prideful human ego that exalts its own righteousness. The principle of relying solely on faith in God's grace seems too simple and easy, causing an inner resistance. A. B. Simpson said to believers, "The greatest danger is not that they cannot do it, but that they will do it" (Simpson).

Do we have such legalistic attitudes (or tendencies) within ourselves? Therefore, even if we may not bring great persecution to the church like Saul, we should reflect on whether we are causing significant difficulties. In the midst of this, we must repent before God, just as Paul confessed in 1 Corinthians 15:10, "But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me."

Philip was a man who brought great joy.

Look at Acts 8:8 - "So there was much joy in that city." Due to the persecution led by Saul and the persecutors of the early Jerusalem church, the saints, apart from the apostles, were scattered throughout all the regions of Judea and Samaria (v. 1). They traveled around, spreading the word of the Gospel (v. 4). How amazing is God's providence in this! On the very day that Stephen was martyred, the great persecution led to the scattering of the saints (v. 1), yet ultimately, the Lord used the dispersed early church to travel around and proclaim the gospel. From this perspective, I believe that a church must be willing to scatter. If we focus only on gathering and exerting our efforts for the growth of our local churches, it may not truly be considered genuine church growth. The term 'scattered church' is a contradiction. The church is a place to teach and to fellowship. The church is a gathering place. However, God expected the church to both gather and scatter. And, as seen in the Book of Acts, God desires the church to scatter. Spreading into the world is our mission. It was only after the Jerusalem church was scattered due to persecution that they were able to preach the gospel to Samaria and to the ends of the earth. Therefore, the scattering of the church is not a failure, but a progression (Internet). Among those who traveled around spreading the gospel, we encounter Philip starting from Acts 8:5. As we meditated on in Acts 6:5, Philip was one of the seven chosen to oversee the fair

distribution of provisions to the widows. He was a layman from Hellenistic background who engaged in enthusiastic evangelistic activities much like Stephen (Yoo). At that time, due to religious and cultural prejudices against Samaria, not only Jewish believers but even the disciples of Jesus hesitated to venture into the region. However, Philip went beyond the prevailing mindset of that era and went to the city of Samaria to preach the Gospel (Yoo). What were the results of Philip's evangelistic work at that time?

(1) The crowds listened eagerly to Philip's message and followed it wholeheartedly.

Look at Acts 8:6 - "And the crowds with one accord paid attention to what was being said by Philip, when they heard him and saw the signs that he did." The focus here is not on the signs performed by Philip, but rather on the message of God that Philip proclaimed – the gospel of Christ. The reason the people wholeheartedly followed Philip was because of the word of God he proclaimed, not just the signs.

(2) Many miracles occurred.

Look at Acts 8:7 - " With shrieks, evil spirits came out of many, and many paralytics and cripples were healed." Philip, like Jesus, cast out unclean spirits from people and also healed many who were paralyzed or lame. The repetition of the word "many" in this verse emphasizes that the Lord demonstrated great power through Philip (v. 13).

(3) There was great joy in the city of Samaria.

Look at Acts 8:8 – “So there was much joy in that city.” Despite the great persecution (v. 1) and the resulting great sorrow (v. 2) due to Saul and the persecutors of the early church, the Lord ultimately allowed the Samaritan believers to experience great joy through the great power demonstrated by Philip (v. 13).

As I reflect on the passages from Isaiah 61:10 and 62:5, I am reminded of the reasons why we should rejoice. Why should we obey the command to "rejoice always"? Why do we have great joy? It is because the Lord has clothed us with garments of salvation and has covered us with the robe of righteousness: "I will greatly rejoice in the LORD; my soul shall exult in my God, for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation; he has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself like a priest with a beautiful headdress, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels" (Isa. 61:10). However, even more astonishing is the fact that the Lord rejoices over us with great joy (62:5). Look at Zephaniah 3:17: "The LORD your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; he will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you by his love; he will exult over you with loud singing."

Our God is the one who turns sorrow into joy (Ps. 30:11). Although the early church saints experienced great sorrow due to the great persecution from individuals like Saul, ultimately, just as the Lord

turned their great sorrow into great joy, He also turns our great sorrow into great joy. Therefore, the confession that comes from those who taste this great joy given by the Lord is, "Then I will go to the altar of God, to God my exceeding joy, and I will praise you with the lyre, O God, my God" (43:4).

With gratitude to the God who turns my sorrow into joy, I continue to live today, my joy, my hope, my life,
my Lord and Savior,

James Kim

(With a heart filled with gratitude to God who turns my sorrow into joy)

What is It that Astonishes You?

[Acts 8:9-13]

Is it work of the Holy Spirit or the deception of Satan? How can we discern between the phenomenon of the Holy Spirit and the deceptive spirit? It lists five distinguishing points (Internet):

(1) Moral and ethical transformation versus immoral and unethical living.

Those who have experienced the work of the Holy Spirit consistently undergo a transformation away from immoral and unethical living. However, the work of the devil leads individuals not only to live immorally and unethically, but also to become further ensnared in such behavior.

(2) The work of the Holy Spirit leads captives to liberation, life, and dignity, while the work of the devil leads captives to oppression, curse, and destruction.

(3) The work of the Holy Spirit reveals the identity of the devil and breaks his power.

When the work of the Holy Spirit manifests, the power and abilities of the devil are exposed and shattered.

(4) It distinguishes between truth and purity, and falsehood and impurity.

(5) It is inferior to the power of God.

Due to the superficial resemblance, believers sometimes mistakenly confuse the deceptive spirit with the phenomenon of the Holy Spirit. To distinguish between the two and determine the authenticity of the signs, one must examine the fruit that manifests in the life of the one who has

experienced spiritual abilities (Internet):

- (1) The teachings of the one conducting the spiritual ministry must align with the Scriptures and traditional doctrines.

The Holy Spirit guides us into truth, while the devil deceives and confuses minds, claiming that there are other revelations outside of the 66 books of the Old and New Testaments, and teaches heretical doctrines divergent from the teachings of the traditional church.

- (2) The work of the Holy Spirit bears witness to the substitutionary sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross, whereas the work of the devil does not.

- (3) The work of the Holy Spirit builds up the Church, while the work of the devil seeks to destroy it.

- (4) The difference between the power of the Holy Spirit and magic is determined by their respective purposes.

The power of the Holy Spirit manifests for the glory of God, while magic uses the abilities given by God for selfish purposes.

- (5) The power of the Holy Spirit makes a person a new creation, while the power of the devil enslaves them to lawlessness.

- (6) By observing the moral and spiritual fruits, one can discern their spiritual source.

The Holy Spirit produces good fruit, while the spirit of deception produces evil fruit.

- (7) The work of the Holy Spirit brings about a new worldview and value system, whereas the work of the devil does not.

Look at 1 John 4:1 – “Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.” I would like to reflect today on Acts 8:9-13, focusing on the passage. As I contemplate the sorcery of Simon and the miracles performed by the deacon Philip, I want to consider what is truly astounding us.

First of all, are we not astonished by the self-proclaimed great one?

Look at Acts 8:9 – “Now for some time a man named Simon had practiced sorcery in the city

and amazed all the people of Samaria. He boasted that he was someone great.” On the day of the martyrdom of Stephen, filled with the Holy Spirit, there was a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, except for the apostles, and they were scattered, preaching the gospel everywhere (v. 1). Among them, the deacon Philip went down to the city of Samaria, where he proclaimed the gospel of Christ, a place where no one had ventured to go (v. 5). While preaching the gospel, God also performed signs and wonders through the hands of Philip. Many unclean spirits that had possessed people came out with loud shrieks, and many paralyzed and lame people were healed (v. 7). The author of the book of Acts, Luke, narrating Philip's ministry and miracles in Samaria, is speaking about Simon, who calls himself "someone great." This man Simon was already in the city of Samaria before the deacon Philip arrived, and he was a practitioner of magic. Therefore, he was a person who amazed others through magic and boasted of being a great person. In other words, the magician Simon demonstrated his claim of being 'I am a great one' through his magic. To the Samaritans, this person Simon was considered a divine being or a god who had appeared in this land (Yoo). In the end, those among the Samaritans who were deceived by Simon's magic said the following: " and all the people, both high and low, gave him their attention and exclaimed, 'This man is the divine power known as the Great Power'" (v. 10). Those who followed the magician Simon, who claimed to be the great one, spoke of him as the great power of God. From this, we can imagine how much influence he had on the Samaritans.

These days, it seems that false pastors performing "miracles" in churches or on TV are using many deceptive tactics to deceive the hearts of believers. This is a prophesied word in Matthew 24:24 - "For false christs and false prophets will arise and show great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect." What is astonishing is that so many people have been and still are being deceived. Why are so many people being deceived by the false christs and false prophets' false signs and wonders? What is the cause? It is because they do not love the truth and do not believe in the truth. Look at 2 Thessalonians 2:9-12: "The coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan with all power and false signs and wonders, and with all wicked deception for those who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. Therefore, God sends them a strong delusion, so that they may believe what is false, in order that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness." We need to be cautious of the famous pastors who claim to perform "miracles." We do not need to be astonished by the signs they claim to perform. We should not be deceived by their magical acts, similar to how Simon, who proclaimed himself as a great one, led people to follow him not for the glory of God, but for his own glory. We do not need to be astonished by the things they claim to be signs at all.

Second, are we not astonished by the manifest signs and great power?

Look at Acts 8:13 - " Simon himself believed and was baptized. And he followed Philip everywhere, astonished by the great signs and miracles he saw." The Bible tells us that many Samaritans who used to follow and obey the magician Simon now believed and were baptized, both men and women, when they heard the preaching about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ (v. 12). Among

them, even the magician Simon believed and was baptized. How amazing is the great power of God? Those who used to follow and obey the magician Simon, now turned around to believe in Jesus Christ and receive baptism. Truly, this is a sign among signs. Even Simon, who proclaimed himself as a great one, who had such popularity for amazing people with his magic, now, in contrast to Philip, was following him wholeheartedly, witnessing the true signs and great power demonstrated through Philip. Imagine the astonishment of Simon, who had previously deceived the Samaritans with his magic, now being amazed by the genuine signs and great power displayed through Philip. How wonderful is the work of our Lord? There is one thing we need to focus on. In verse 12 of today's passage, the Korean Bible states, "Philip..." but in the English Bible, we can see the conjunction "But." This conjunction provides us with a lesson. Namely, while the magician Simon may have gained genuine popularity by amazing people with his magic, Philip, in contrast to him, preached exclusively about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ. It is interesting to note that the author of the book of Acts, Luke, showed a contrast between Saul, who came with great persecution, and Philip, who brought great joy to the city of Samaria in last week's passage (Acts 8:1-8). Now, in Acts 8:9-13, he contrasts Simon, the practitioner of magic, with Philip the deacon who performed great miracles. This teaches us what kind of Christian we should be. In other words, we should not become false Christians who deceive people in front of them, proclaiming ourselves as great ones and seeking our own glory, like Simon. Instead, we should be in contrast to false Christians. We should strive to be true Christians. We should only love the truth of the Word. And we should become proclaimers of that truthful Word.

Here, we need to consider the relationship between the words and signs that testify to Christ. In other words, Deacon Philip not only proclaimed the words testifying to Christ, but the Lord also showed remarkable signs through him. This signifies that God manifested various signs to confirm the proclamation of His Word (Yoo). In other words, we should ask what the purpose of the signs is. For example, in the case of the magician Simon, he had the intention of receiving the title of having the power of God by showing his deceptive magic as a sign. On the other hand, for Deacon Philip, the true purpose of his signs was to confirm the proclamation of God's Word. In other words, the focus of the signs is not on the person performing them, but on Christ and His gospel.

In fact, we can see that many people were not primarily interested in the signs performed by Philip, but rather paid full attention to what Philip was saying (v. 6). The verse "And the multitudes with one accord heeded the things spoken by Philip" reminds us that the Jerusalem church paid concentrated attention to the teachings of the apostles (2:42) (Yoo). And the fact that the crowds were more focused on the teaching of the Word rather than the signs was not a temporary phenomenon, but continued throughout Philip's ministry (Yoo). May such a Word-filled ministry continue among us.

Only the Word!

James Kim's Sharing

(Desiring the work of the Holy Spirit)

Have You Received the Holy Spirit?

[Acts 8:14-25]

Here, we must consider the correct attitude towards the Holy Spirit. Pastor A. W. Tozer advises in his book "Speaks to Students" not to grieve the Holy Spirit with a single word. What causes one to grieve the Holy Spirit? It is when we resist the guidance of the Holy Spirit dwelling within us, even though we may sense it. Pastor Tozer says, 'Cease immediately from any act of resistance against God. Do not further resist what you believe to be right. If your conscience enlightens you from the Word of God, do not go against it. Follow the teachings of the Bible. If we continue to resist the will of the Holy Spirit as expressed in the Scripture He has authored, it grieves the Holy Spirit' (Tozer). May the indwelling Holy Spirit guide us and lead us with the truth of His word. May that word enable us to hear God's voice and, further, to obey it. Particularly, may the word that God places in our hearts convict us, pierce our hearts, and lead us to repentance, ultimately leading us to obedience to that word of God.

Indeed, those with ears to hear should listen to the voice that the Holy Spirit is desiring to share with us through Acts 8:14-25.

First, what does it mean to have received the Holy Spirit?

This statement does not mean that the Samaritans who believed in Jesus through Philip did not have a proper reverence for the Holy Spirit when they believed in Jesus. They had already received the grace of regeneration and had a proper reverence for the Holy Spirit. They had all been baptized and become members of the church. Look at Acts 8:16 - "For He had not yet fallen upon any of them; they had simply been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus." What then was the issue? They had received baptism but not yet received the Holy Spirit. So, when the Bible says that Peter and John laid their hands on the Samaritans, and they received the Holy Spirit, what does this mean? It refers to the special grace of the Holy Spirit received through the laying on of hands in prayer, which Peter and John, when they came from Jerusalem, administered to them. This laying on of hands is signified in three ways in 1 Timothy 4:14 (Park): (1) It indicates entrusting a task to the person, (2) It signifies the person being consecrated to God, (3) It indicates that God gives the grace to bear the responsibilities associated with

the task. Therefore, when Peter and John came to Samaria and prayed for the believers through Philip, this was a sign that they were receiving the special grace of the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:17). Now, the responsibility of the Samaritan believers is to use the grace they have received for God and His church. Since God has entrusted to them the task of being members of the church, which is the body of Christ, they must diligently use the gifts He has given them for the edification of the church. The reason Peter and John were sent from Jerusalem to Samaria to lay hands on the believers is because although the Samaritans received the gospel through Philip, they had not yet been recognized by the Jerusalem church as members of the community (Bruce). In other words, the laying on of hands by the apostles served as a confirmation and proof that the Samaritan believers were members of the community possessing the Holy Spirit. Before this, even though the believers in Samaria were a community of those who believed in Jesus, when viewed from a broader perspective of community, they had not yet been recognized by the Jerusalem church. Therefore, Peter and John coming from Jerusalem to lay hands on them resulted in the Samaritan believers becoming members of the church, a community recognized by the Jerusalem church. In other words, the laying on of hands by the apostles was a confirmation and proof that the Samaritan believers were members of the community that possessed the Holy Spirit, having received the special grace of the Holy Spirit through Philip. This is an interesting interpretation. By coming down from Jerusalem to Samaria and laying hands on the Samaritans, Peter and John conveyed that the Samaritans had now become members of the church recognized by the Jerusalem church. This means that the Samaritan believers were no longer just a local community of those who believed in Jesus, but they were now members of the larger community, recognized by the church in Jerusalem. In other words, the laying on of hands by the apostles confirmed and proved that the Samaritan believers were members of the community possessing the Holy Spirit, having received the special grace of the Holy Spirit through Philip.

Here, the important point is that the Samaritan believers who received Philip's preaching and believed in Jesus did indeed receive the Holy Spirit when they believed in Jesus (Calvin). When we accept Jesus as our Savior and Lord, the Holy Spirit comes into us. Look at Romans 5:5 - "And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out His love into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, whom He has given us." Therefore, the statement in the passage that they received the Holy Spirit through the laying on of hands by the apostles means that they received the special grace of the Holy Spirit. So, what lesson should we take from today's passage? The Lord has given each of us the gifts of the Holy Spirit (Eph. 4:7). We should not neglect these gifts but diligently use them for the edification of the body of Christ. Furthermore, those who have received the gifts of the Holy Spirit should use them within the boundaries of the truth of His word. In other words, we should use the gifts that God has given us in accordance with His word. Look at Acts 8:14 - "When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them." Here, "accepted the word of God" means that the Samaritans received Philip's preaching (v. 6) and believed in Jesus (v. 12). This statement teaches us that we should use the gifts God has given us for God and His church in accordance with the truth of His word and not in a way that goes against it. We must actively participate in the ministry of the Lord, who is building His church, using the gifts given to us by God.

Second, receiving the Holy Spirit is a gift from God.

The Holy Spirit cannot be bought with money. In today's passage, we see that Simon, who was previously a sorcerer, saw that the Samaritan believers who had believed in Jesus through Philip received the Holy Spirit through the laying on of hands by Peter and John (Acts 8:18) and he wanted to buy this power with money (v. 19). At that moment, Peter said to Simon, "May your money perish with you, because you thought you could buy the gift of God with money!" (v. 20). What sin is Simon being exposed for here? Dr. Yoon-sun Park mentioned three things:

- (1) It is the sin of evaluating the power of God as something equivalent to the value of money.

It is blasphemous to think that the almighty power of God, which is infinitely valuable, can be equated with money. We must remember that gifts are things that God has given us freely, and they are never conditional on our own merits or worthiness.

- (2) It is the pride of wanting to exalt oneself using God's grace.

Although Simon claimed to believe in the gospel (v. 13), his heart was still worldly. A worldly person seeks to exploit religion for personal gain.

- (3) The act of laying on of hands itself cannot be mistaken as the means by which the Holy Spirit comes.

That would be a delusion, treating even heavenly matters as something to be purchased. Dr. Park goes on to say, 'Often among believers, there is an excessive elevation of certain charismatic leaders, thinking that they must receive their laying on of hands to receive grace. This is an unwarranted thought. It hinders receiving the grace of the Holy Spirit' (Park). Ultimately, the consequence of Simon's sin is as Peter's words state, "May your money perish with you, because you thought you could buy the gift of God with money!" (v. 20). Simon wanted to buy the power to give the Holy Spirit to whomever he pleased in exchange for more money. Thus, in his greed for more profit, he would ultimately perish along with his money, as Peter admonished him in his anger (Yoo). Apostle Peter pointed out that Simon's heart was not right (v. 21). In other words, Simon did not truly repent. He had a heart desiring power. Therefore, Peter rebuked him for his greed, warning him that trying to buy more with money would lead to his destruction. In addition, Peter advised him: "Repent of this wickedness and pray to the Lord in the hope that he may forgive you for having such a thought in your heart" (v. 22). In other words, Peter urged him to repent of the wickedness in his heart, which was a major issue, and to seek forgiveness. However, instead of repenting to receive forgiveness, Simon was more concerned about avoiding the curse pronounced on him, and he pleaded with

Peter: "Pray to the Lord for me so that nothing you have said may happen to me" (v. 24).

Apostle Paul spoke about the gifts of the Holy Spirit given to us by God, saying, "But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it" (Eph. 4:7). This statement reminds us that each of us has received gifts, and these gifts are indeed grace as Christ apportioned. Furthermore, a "gift" is something received, not earned. Why has God given us the gifts of the Holy Spirit? What is the reason? Look at Ephesians 4:12 - "to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up." In other words, God has given us the gifts of the Holy Spirit as a grace to equip us for service, with the ultimate goal of building up the body of Christ, which is the church. And in the process of building up the church, a crucial element is love. Look at Ephesians 4:16 - "From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work."

In today's passage, Acts 8:14-25, we have witnessed how the Lord, who is the head of the church, used His disciples Peter and John to establish the church. These two apostles, after laying hands on the believers in Samaria who received the word of God, testified faithfully to the Lord's message (v. 25). The Holy Spirit dwelling within them continued to proclaim the Lord's word through these two apostles. As they returned from Samaria to Jerusalem, they preached the gospel in various villages of Samaria (v. 25). Why is the proclamation of the gospel by these two apostles in Samaria important? It is because it fulfills the prophecy of Jesus in Acts 1:8, where He said, "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." May you and I, like these two apostles, exert our efforts in proclaiming the gospel, and thereby participate in the fulfillment of Jesus' prophetic words.

Received as a gift through the grace of God,

James Kim

(Praying for us to live according to the guidance of the Holy Spirit)

The Disciples of Jesus?

[Acts 8:26-40]

The self-portrait of American pastors today, what is it? The Barna Group, an organization focused on church, ministry, and faith-related research, conducted a telephone survey of 627 pastors nationwide on their self-perception. The survey results summarized the pastors' self-perception on various aspects, including their ministry and interpersonal relationships, into seven categories. Among them, the second category is most relevant to today's passage: As educators, disciple trainers, and leaders, they showed high self-confidence. 98% of pastors responded 'I am a competent Bible teacher.' 9 out of 10 responded 'I am a competent leader,' saying they have a clear vision. 8 out of 10 responded 'I am a competent disciple trainer.' 7 out of 10 responded positively to 'I am closely involved in the local community.' Indeed, are our pastors as competent Bible teachers, leaders, and disciple trainers as American pastors stated in this survey? If that is the case... If the self-perception of our pastors or immigrant pastors in Korean churches aligns with what American pastors believe - that they are truly competent Bible teachers, leaders, and disciple trainers - then it raises the question: where are our disciples? It could be one of two things: (1) The pastors' self-perception is a misconception, or (2) The members, while refusing to receive proper biblical education and guidance from pastors, may not be living as disciples even though they receive disciple training. David Kinnaman, the director of this survey, said, 'While most pastors responded that they have a clear vision, very few pastors articulate the specific vision facing their own churches. Additionally, pastors who claim to be closely involved in local churches often focus on church-centered programs that do not extend beyond the church walls. Many pastors responded that their churches are theologically conservative and have competent disciple trainers, but only a few are developing a biblical worldview among the members' (Internet).

What about our church? What is the self-perception of our ministers? Do we truly consider ourselves as competent ministers? Do we perhaps think of ourselves as competent disciple trainers? What about the members? How many of them are striving and putting effort into living the life of a true disciple? Under the title "The disciples of Jesus?" based on today's passage Acts 8:26-40, I will reflect on whether we are all truly living as disciples of Jesus through the example of Philip the evangelist, who was a disciple of Jesus, and receive guidance.

First, a disciple of Jesus obeys the Holy Spirit.

What does it mean to obey the Holy Spirit? To obey the Holy Spirit means that, as we remain faithful to the teachings of the Bible, we make a decision to obey when the Holy Spirit helps us understand God's will within those teachings. The Holy Spirit governs and guides us through the teachings of the Bible. Therefore, we should meditate on the word of God (day and night) and receive the guidance of the Holy Spirit through it. Obedience to His guidance is the life of a disciple of Jesus. How then should we obey the Holy Spirit?

(1) We need to listen to the voice of the Holy Spirit.

We must receive His guidance. Look at Acts 8:26, 29, which we read today. We see Philip the evangelist, who listens to the voice of the Holy Spirit. In other words, we can see Philip, who receives the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Look at Acts 8:2, 29: "Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, 'Rise and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.' This is a desert place" (v. 26), "And the Spirit said to Philip, 'Go over and join this chariot'" (v. 29).

(2) We must have an attitude of willingness to obey the voice of the Holy Spirit, regardless of whether His guidance seems favorable or not.

Look at Jeremiah 42:6 - "Whether it is favorable or unfavorable, we will obey the voice of the LORD our God..." In Acts 8:26-27, we see that Philip obeyed the voice of the Lord, even though from a human perspective, there were probably one or two issues that made it seem unfavorable:

(a) The first issue is that the road the Holy Spirit commanded Philip to take, "the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza," was a desert road.

In other words, it was a dangerous path, yet Philip the evangelist obeyed the command of the Lord. The road he was instructed to take was through a desolate and perilous desert.

(b) The second issue was that the Ethiopian eunuch had dark skin and, from the perspective of the Jews, was considered a physically impure individual due to his emasculation (Park).

Such individuals were seen as unclean and impure by the Jews (Yoo). Nevertheless, Philip obeyed the voice of the Holy Spirit. In a way, Philip the evangelist had no preconceived notions. He went to the Samaritans, who were despised by the Jews, to preach the gospel, and in today's passage, he approached the Ethiopian eunuch, who was considered impure and unclean.

(3) We must believe that listening to the voice of the Holy Spirit brings blessings to us.

Look at Jeremiah 42:6b - "...if we obey the voice of the LORD our God, it will be well with us." The Bible clearly states that obeying God's word brings blessings, while disobedience brings curses. What did Philip do when he heard the voice of the Holy Spirit? When the Holy Spirit commanded, "Rise and go" (Acts 8:26), Philip the evangelist "rose and went" (v. 27). Interestingly, when the Holy Spirit commanded, "Go over and join this chariot" (v. 29), Philip the evangelist immediately 'ran' to the chariot that the Ethiopian eunuch was riding (v. 30) (Park). Philip the evangelist was agile and prompt in listening to the voice of the Holy Spirit and obeying it. How about us? Are we agile and prompt in obeying God's word?

We must abandon bad habits to succeed: It is said that there are three common bad habits that should always be avoided in sales, referred to as the "3 Ps": Perfection, Procrastination, and Paralysis (internet):

(1) Perfection:

Some people live in fear of failure in anything they do and expect everything to be 'perfect' in every aspect. They believe that they should never make a mistake, never show flaws to others, and never receive criticism. They think that they must do things perfectly without a single mistake. Such people can never become proactive. To succeed, one must not fear temporary mistakes, not be discouraged by failures, and strive steadily.

(2) Procrastination:

These are people who never do things right away, always saying, 'I'll do it later. I'll do it later.' They never have a sense of urgency to get things done promptly. There is a humorous story of a timid friend who, upon seeing a thief crossing the fence, said, 'This darn thief, just watch him come into the yard,' and as the thief entered the yard, said, 'This darn thief, just watch him come up to the porch,' then as the thief came up to the porch, said, 'This darn thief, just watch him come into the room,' and in the end, the thief stole everything and escaped, and the friend said, 'This darn thief, just wait until he tries to come back' (Internet). Those who keep postponing things end up becoming unproductive and stagnant.

(3) Paralysis:

These individuals lack enthusiasm in everything they do. They don't even attempt to try anything and just sit down, saying, 'It's not my thing, it's beyond my capabilities.'

Among these three bad habits, when we consider them in relation to today's passage, the bad habit we must be especially cautious of is "procrastination" - delaying, postponing, and hesitating. Even though we know that when the Holy Spirit gives us insight through God's word and speaks to us, we should immediately obey, like Philip the evangelist, we often hesitate and delay in our obedience. We can see an

example of the Israelites in Elijah's time who hesitated. Look at 1 Kings 18:21 - "And Elijah came near to all the people and said, 'How long will you go limping between two different opinions? If the LORD is God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him.' And the people did not answer him a word." Hesitation, silence, and being unable to be immediate and alert in obedience are factors that hinder prompt and obedient action.

Like Philip the evangelist in today's passage, we must be agile and immediately obedient to the guidance of the Holy Spirit. As disciples of Jesus, we should be prompt and obedient just like Philip.

Second and last, Jesus' disciples proclaim the gospel.

By observing Philip the evangelist's prompt and immediate obedience to the voice of the Holy Spirit and his dialogue with the Ethiopian eunuch, we can reflect on and find lessons about how to spread the gospel:

- (1) In order to proclaim the gospel, we must immediately obey the voice of the Holy Spirit when He says, "Rise and go."

We must not sit and delay when the voice of the Holy Spirit commands us to go. Especially, as this year's slogan states, we should strive to be winners of souls (Prov. 11:30). In order to win souls, when the Holy Spirit works in our hearts through His word and commands us to rise and go to the souls (people) whom God loves, we must say "yes" and obey.

- (2) When the Holy Spirit says, "Rise and go," we must obey His word and proceed with the heart of God.

For this, we must pray. Why did God suddenly send Philip the evangelist to an Ethiopian eunuch, a Gentile considered physically impure and unclean, after using him to perform miracles and preach the gospel to many in Samaria? In her commentary, Dr. Yoon-seon Park pointed out three things: (1) We can see God's zeal for the salvation of Gentiles, (2) We can understand how great God's faithfulness is even to preach to just one person, (3) When the eunuch happened to be reading from Isaiah, God led Philip to him, showing that God more earnestly commends believers to share the gospel when they seek His grace more diligently (Park).

- (3) We must keep in mind that the Holy Spirit commanded, "Go near."

When we see that the Holy Spirit commanded Philip the evangelist to go near the chariot that the Ethiopian eunuch was riding, we realize that we need caution and wisdom when approaching those we encounter in our lives. While there are times, like Philip in Samaria, when we boldly proclaim the gospel to a group of people in a public setting, when approaching an individual soul, it is also wise to come near and linger rather than just approaching them abruptly. Ultimately, when Philip the evangelist went near the chariot where the Ethiopian eunuch was riding, he saw the eunuch

inviting him onto the chariot, saying, "Please come up and sit with me" (v. 31).

(4) It is good to initiate a conversation from the perspective of the other person's situation.

Initiating a conversation from the other person's situation means that when Philip the evangelist went near the chariot where the Ethiopian eunuch was riding, he heard the eunuch reading from the prophet Isaiah and asked, "Do you understand what you are reading?" The fact that it is mentioned twice in verses 28 and 30 that the Ethiopian eunuch was reading from the book of Isaiah indicates that he was seriously pondering and trying to understand Isaiah's words, especially Isaiah 53:7-8 (Yoo). Therefore, the first question Philip the evangelist asked in their conversation was related to the book of Isaiah, which the Ethiopian eunuch was clearly contemplating. When we share the gospel, we need to be sensitive to the other person. We should promptly listen to their concerns. It's not just about speaking our own words. Proverbs 18:2 warns, "A fool takes no pleasure in understanding, but only in expressing his opinion." How does Proverbs 20:5 describe a wise person? "The purposes of a person's heart are deep waters, but one who has insight draws them out."

(5) We must teach about Jesus and proclaim the gospel.

Look at Acts 8:35 - "Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus." When the Ethiopian eunuch realized that Philip was referring to the passage he was reading (v. 30) and explained that he couldn't understand it without someone to guide him (v. 31), he invited Philip onto his chariot and asked him about the identity of the servant mentioned in Isaiah 53:7-8 (v. 34). In response, Philip opened his mouth, starting from Isaiah 53:7-8, and preached Jesus to the Ethiopian eunuch. Professor Sang-seop Yoo explains: 'At that time, scholars unanimously understood the content of Isaiah 53 as a prophecy about the suffering servant of the Lord, namely the suffering Messiah, just as Jesus taught his disciples. At that time, scholars either interpreted this passage as referring to the prophet Isaiah's own suffering or as the suffering of the entire nation of Israel. Furthermore, the concept of the suffering of the Messiah did not exist in their thinking at all. Therefore, at that time, people never dreamed that the suffering servant mentioned in the book of Isaiah would be the Messiah, a descendant of David' (Yoo). Therefore, when the Ethiopian eunuch asked Philip who the passage was referring to, saying, "Is the prophet speaking of himself or of someone else?" (Acts 8:34), Philip preached Jesus, starting from Isaiah 53:7-8, presenting Jesus as the Good News.

(6) We must administer baptism.

In Acts 8:38, when they came to a body of water, the eunuch asked, "Look, here is water. What can stand in the way of my being baptized?" (v. 36). Both of them went down into the water, and Philip baptized the Ethiopian eunuch. This aligns with the obedience of Philip the evangelist to the command in Matthew 28:19: "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the

name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." Applying this command to ourselves, we are to go and proclaim the gospel, make disciples, lead them into the church, and, through the pastor, administer baptism.

We are disciples of Jesus. As disciples of Jesus, we must be obedient to the Holy Spirit. In our obedience, we must heed the voice of the Holy Spirit, regardless of whether it seems favorable or unfavorable. The voice that the Holy Spirit imparts to us is to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ. We must listen to this voice and be obedient. We must go to the heart of Christ and share the gospel with souls dying in sin. I hope and pray that we may live as disciples of Jesus, empowered by His grace.

By the grace of God, ordained as a disciple of Jesus,

James Kim

(Praying for sensitivity to the voice of the Holy Spirit and obedience)

“Who are you, Lord?”

[Acts 9:1-9]

Are we truly changing? The life of a Christian is one of transformation. Faith is a willingness to change. The church is a community of people who have not only experienced change, but also seek it (Internet). However, there are times when we long for change, yet become disappointed and discouraged when we see our own habits persist. Regarding this spiritual condition, author Robert Boyd Munger, in his book "A Pauper of a Prince?," says, 'Many Christians today are despairing due to weakness, failure, and feebleness, unable to break free from the swamp of incompetence and helplessness. Therefore, the author's desire is to give this amazing gift of a transformed life to us all. The author's words, 'The amazing gift of a transformed life is more than forgiveness for the past or a promise for the future.' This gift pertains to our current lives. How can we all receive this amazing gift of a transformed life from God? The author describes the method to achieve this as "exchange of seats.' And such an exchange of seats always occurs in two directions. In fact, the main reason most people cannot live a transformed life is because they still dominate some aspect of their lives. Therefore, an exchange of seats can be seen as offering oneself to God, and receiving the Spirit of Christ from God to live within. The first step in this exchange of seats is surrendering, yielding, or consecration, and the second step is trust, or reliance on God' (Internet).

To undergo transformation, we must encounter Jesus. In other words, we must grow in knowledge of knowing Jesus. Look at Ephesians 4:13 - "Until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ." In today's passage, Acts 9:1-9, we see the scene of Saul encountering the risen and ascended Jesus on the road to Damascus. I hope and pray that meditating on Saul's transformation in today's passage will serve as a catalyst for our own pursuit of change.

First, look at Saul, who was a figure of threat and persecution (before he believed in Jesus).

Look at Acts 9:1-2: “Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's

disciples. He went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem.” Here, we can see that Saul's conversion was the peak of his hostility (Park). As we've already meditated, even after Stephen's martyrdom, Saul continued to enter every house, and dragging off men and women, he committed them to prison (8:3). However, he was "still" engaged in threats and murder (9:1). When it says he was still engaged in threats and murder, it means that Saul was still spewing threats and murder against the Lord's disciples as naturally as he breathed. The breath he exhaled was a breath of threats and murder against the Lord's disciples (Yoo). Therefore, Saul requested a letter to the synagogues in Damascus from the high priest (v. 2). At that time, the Roman government had entrusted jurisdiction over Jews outside of Palestine to the Sanhedrin, and the high priest whom Saul met was the chairman of that Sanhedrin. Because of this, Saul had the authority to demand the extradition of Jews who had fled to foreign lands back to their homeland. That's why Saul met with the high priest (Park). Why did Saul meet this high priest? The reason is that, while still exhaling threatening and murderous breath, he intended to go to Damascus and bind anyone, whether man or woman, who followed the Way, and bring them bound to Jerusalem. At that time, Damascus was a very important ancient city located at the crossroads of trade routes for camel caravans in Syria. It is said that tens of thousands of Jews lived in this city. It took about six days to travel from Jerusalem to Damascus on foot. Saul intended to go all the way to Damascus to bind the disciples of Jesus and bring them to Jerusalem. After his transformation, Saul confessed in Philippians 3:6, "as for zeal, persecuting the church..." (Phil 3:6). Why did Saul zealously persecute the church in this way? We can find the answer in 1 Timothy 1:13: "though formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent. But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief." The reason Saul persecuted the church with zeal was unbelief and ignorance. He did not hesitate to persecute and even kill the believers who confessed and believed in Jesus Christ, who was crucified, because of his strict adherence to the Jewish faith (Yoo). From his staunchly Jewish perspective, the crucifixion of the Nazarene Jesus was something that could never be accepted as a fact that the crucified Jesus was the Son of God, the Christ. This is because, for Jews, the Son of God, the Messiah, could never be subjected to crucifixion (Yoo). For Saul, opposing and persecuting Christianity was a matter of duty, and he believed it was what God demanded.

We cannot deny that, like Saul, we were once in a state of unbelief and ignorance before believing in Jesus. Even if we may have been born into a Christian family, if we did not truly believe in Jesus and instead held a distorted or misguided faith, failing to live a righteous Christian life or a biblical faith, there may have been times when we did not contribute to the body of the Lord and even obscured the glory of God. What's even more astonishing is the fact that, even after believing in Jesus, we can still sin against God due to unbelief and ignorance. Especially concerning our pastors, I am concerned that ultimately, the saints may also be abandoning the knowledge of God due to the abandonment of knowledge by our pastors (Hos. 4:6). The result of this ignorance is unbelief, and the result of unbelief is disobedience. What should we do? We must heed the words of Paul and also make the same confession: "Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing my Lord Christ Jesus..." (Phil. 3:8).

Second, look at Saul who fell to the ground (at the moment of encountering

Jesus).

Look at Acts 9:4 - "And falling to the ground, he heard a voice saying to him, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?'" As Saul was on his way with the letter from the high priest to go to Damascus, when he came close to Damascus, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him (v. 3). At that moment, Saul fell to the ground and heard the voice of the risen and ascended Jesus: 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?' The light that shone on Saul was reflected from the ascended Jesus (Yoo). How can we know this? We can see that Ananias said to Saul, "The Lord who appeared to you on the road by which you came" (v. 17). The light that suddenly surrounded Saul was from the ascended Jesus. The voice of the ascended Lord that he heard in this light was, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" This voice of Jesus contains the truth that persecuting Christians is equivalent to persecuting Christ himself (Park). We frequently encounter this truth in Paul's letters as well. That is, he metaphorically compares the church to the body of Jesus Christ and identifies Jesus as the head of the church. Therefore, the relationship between Jesus and the church is an inseparable union. So, the fact that Saul was persecuting the church means he was persecuting Jesus Christ, who is the head of the church. When Saul heard the voice, he asked, "Who are you, Lord?" (v. 5). Here, when Saul addressed Jesus as "Lord," it is evident that Saul knew that the one speaking to him in the light was a divine being. However, Saul did not yet think that this divine being was necessarily Jesus (Yoo). But when Jesus said to Saul in response to his question, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting" (verse 5), Saul was greatly shocked. At that moment, all of Saul's theology completely crumbled. This moment was the dramatic moment when the persecutor Saul became a proclaimer who risked his life to testify that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God. In addition to receiving salvation by the glorified Lord on the road to Damascus, Saul was also called to be the one who would take the gospel of Jesus Christ to the ends of the earth (Yoo). In other words, on the road to Damascus, there was Saul's conversion and his calling (commission) by the glorious Lord.

Did we, like Saul of Damascus, have a turning point in our life? Did we accept Jesus as our Savior and Lord, and receive His calling? Didn't we live, like Saul, in ignorance without believing in Jesus, but then accepted Him as our Savior and Lord, and now are living with a sense of calling from the Lord? The greatest encounter in life is with Jesus Christ. When we meet Jesus Christ, a turning point occurs in our lives. Every great person has a turning point in their life. No one is born living a great life. A great life always starts from a great turning point. There is a dividing line that separates before and after. There was a turning point in Paul's life too. Whenever Paul encountered a question about the change in his life, he must have remembered the road to Damascus. It was because the event of turning point in his life happened on the way to Damascus. Paul, who was living captivated by a purposeless life, or rather (much more dangerously) captured by a wrong purpose, met the turning point in his life on the road to Damascus (Internet).

Third and last, Saul being led by human hands (after he believed in Jesus).

Look at Acts 9:8 - "Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could see nothing.

So, they led him by the hand into Damascus." Saul, who met the risen Jesus on the road to Damascus and experienced the greatest turning point in his life, asked Jesus, "What shall I do, Lord?" (22:10). The Lord told him, "Get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do" (9:6). The reason was that when Saul entered the city, the Lord had revealed to Ananias, the Lord's disciple, that he would tell Saul what he must do. The companions with Saul at the time heard the sound but did not see anyone (v. 7). Here, the author of Acts, Luke, emphasizes that Saul not only heard the voice of the Lord but also saw the risen Jesus (Yoo). However, in Acts 22:9, those who were with Saul say, " My companions saw the light, but they did not understand the voice of him who was speaking to me." Instead of seeing this as a contradiction, it can be understood that they are explaining different facts. In other words, in Chapter 9, the emphasis is on the fact that the companions heard the voice but did not see anyone, while in Chapter 22, the emphasis is on the fact that Saul did not understand (comprehend) the voice of the one speaking to him (Yoo). Later, Saul got up from the ground, opened his eyes, but could not see anything, and was led by the hand of his companions into Damascus (9:8). And Saul spent three days without sight, and neither ate nor drank (v. 9).

After meeting Jesus on the road to Damascus, observe the weakened state of Saul. Until he encountered Jesus, Saul was still filled with threats and violence, even going to the synagogues in Damascus to bind both men and women and bring them to Jerusalem (9:1-2). However, after meeting Jesus on the road to Damascus, we see a different image of Saul being led by his companions into the city (9:8). How does it appear for a person, who was supposed to lead Christians from Damascus to Jerusalem, to be led by others into Damascus instead? We truly witness Saul's pitiful state of helplessness. Imagine Saul, unable to see, spending three days without eating or drinking. How thoroughly weakened Saul must have been. We, too, need to become thoroughly weakened.

As I reconsidered Ezekiel 29:15-16 during this week's morning prayer meeting, I reflected on God's promise to make the nation of Egypt a lowly nation. When thinking in relation to today's passage, Acts 9:1-9, there are three reasons why God makes us powerless:

(1) The first reason is to prevent us from exalting ourselves.

Look at Ezekiel 29:15: "It will be the lowliest of kingdoms and will never again exalt itself above the other nations" We, who are at risk of becoming too prideful, need to become powerless.

(2) The second reason is to prevent us from ruling again.

Look at Ezekiel 29:15: "... I will make it so weak that it will never again rule over the nations." This word signifies that, rather than relying on the Lord's rule, we are at risk of trying to rule ourselves, allowing our sinful nature to govern us. God makes us powerless to prevent this.

(3) The third and final reason is to prevent us from relying on anything other than God.

Here, God's intention is to make us stop looking to the things we used to rely on outside of God, so that we will no longer remember our sins. Look at Ezekiel 29:16: "Egypt will no longer be a source of confidence for the people of Israel but will be a reminder of their sin in turning to her." This is God's way of ensuring that we recognize Him as the Lord God and rely on Him alone.

Today's reflection on this passage can be described as the testimony of the Apostle Paul. In other words, it speaks of Paul's life before believing in Jesus, at the moment of belief, and after believing. Before believing in Jesus, Saul was filled with threats and violence. He even went to the synagogues in Damascus to obtain letters from the high priest, requesting permission to bind the followers of Christ and bring them to Jerusalem. The reason was that he intended to capture those who followed the way of Jesus and bring them to Jerusalem. The moment Saul encountered Jesus on the road to Damascus was when he met the risen Lord, which led to his transformation, and he received a calling from the Lord. After believing in Jesus, Saul's life took a different turn. He found himself unable to see and was led by the hand into Damascus. There, he encountered a disciple of Jesus named Ananias. The central theme of this entire process is the risen Lord. Saul encountered the Lord, experienced a rebirth, received salvation, and obtained a calling from the Lord. May the Lord grant this same grace of salvation to our fellow believers.

Understanding how a sinner is transformed and receives salvation through the grace of God is something beyond our comprehension.

James Kim

(Praying for a deepening knowledge of knowing Jesus, recognizing its highest nobility)

God's Chosen Instrument

[Acts 9:10-19a]

Do you know about the Great Awakening, a spiritual revival movement that greatly influenced 18th-century American society? It is also known as the First Great Awakening. This movement provided light and hope in a tumultuous era. Prominent universities, including Princeton, were established under the influence of this movement. At the forefront of this movement stood Jonathan Edwards, a pastor and theologian born as the son of a congregational minister. How was he able to shoulder the responsibilities of his time? He renewed himself daily by confessing five resolutions. Throughout his life, he exerted all his strength in living each moment to its fullest potential. He never missed an opportunity, no matter how small, to adopt the most beneficial course of action. He would never take something, no matter how profitable, if it would make him the object of contempt by others. He would never do anything out of resentment. Even if it seemed like a good opportunity that could be the last in his life, if it was not seen favorably by God, he would not choose it (Internet).

What mission has each of us been given? In order to fulfill that mission, are we confessing resolutions and renewing ourselves? In today's passage, Acts 9:10-19, we encounter Ananias, a disciple of the Lord who receives a calling. As I meditate on the Lord's words calling Ananias today, I hope and pray that it will serve as a moment for all of us to reaffirm the Lord's calling and resolve to obey His calling in order to fulfill our mission.

First, it is the Lord who calls us.

Look at Acts 9:10 – “In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision, ‘Ananias!’ ‘Yes, Lord,’ he answered.” We have already reflected on the testimony of Saul under the title "Who are you, Lord?" We meditated on Saul's appearance before believing in Jesus (Before Christ), the moment he met Jesus on the road to Damascus (On Christ), and Saul's appearance after encountering Jesus (After Christ). After meeting Jesus on the road to Damascus, Saul was unable to see anything, and he was led by others into Damascus. He spent three days without sight and neither ate nor drank (v. 9). During this time, the Lord was preparing His disciple Ananias to meet Saul in

Damascus (vv. 8-9). This provides a specific account of the words spoken by Jesus when He met Saul on the road to Damascus (v. 6). In the end, the Lord accomplished two purposes by transforming Saul (Paul), His chosen vessel, on the road to Damascus (Born Again) and giving him a commission (Yoo). Look at Acts 9:17: "...Brother Saul, the Lord—Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here—has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit." These two purposes were to restore Saul's sight and to fill him with the Holy Spirit. In addition, the Lord used Ananias, a devout man who received praise from all the Jewish people living in Damascus (22:12), to remove prejudices against Saul, who had persecuted and killed the church in a fanatical manner (Yoo). Even though no one would believe the news of Saul's conversion, the Lord used Ananias, who was praised as a devout man by all the Jewish people living in Damascus (22:12), to deliver the news of Saul's conversion to his disciples. His disciples then spread the news to many others, providing an opportunity for Saul to be accepted as a believing brother (Yoo). In a vision, the Lord specifically commanded His disciple Ananias to go to where Saul was (v. 11). From this passage, we can learn two lessons:

(1) We must learn the proper response to the Lord's calling.

When the Lord called His disciple Ananias in a vision, how did he respond? He said, "Here I am, Lord" (v. 10). This same response was given by the young Samuel and the prophet Isaiah. In the case of Samuel, when the Lord called him three times, he thought it was Eli the priest calling him and went to him, saying, "Here I am." But when Eli realized that it was the Lord who was calling Samuel, he instructed him to respond next time by saying, "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening" (1 Sam. 3:9). So, when the Lord called Samuel again, he responded in the way Eli had taught him, acknowledging the Lord's calling (v. 10). Isaiah had a similar response when the Lord called him, saying, "Here am I. Send me!" (Isa. 6:8).

(2) We must keep in mind who the Lord sends His disciples to.

From today's passage in Acts 9:11-12, we can draw a couple of lessons:

(a) The Lord sends His disciples to those who are praying.

Look at verse 11: "The Lord told him, 'Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying.'" The Lord sent His disciple Ananias to Saul, who was praying. In Acts 16:13, the Lord also arranged for Paul and his companions, who were going to pray, to meet Lydia and her companions who had gathered for prayer.

(b) The Lord sends His disciples to those who have seen a vision.

Look at Acts 9:12: "In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight." The Lord had already revealed to Saul through a vision that a man named Ananias would come and restore his sight.

There is no physical way for us to confirm whether we have received a specific calling or not. The only confirmation of a calling comes through faith in God. Only the Holy Spirit dwelling within your heart affirms the calling. The Bible tells us that God called "negative" individuals—foolish, weak, despised individuals. Moses received his calling at the age of 80 when he was an old shepherd. David was called while he was still a young shepherd, Joseph was a slave, and Daniel was in captivity. We find many examples in history that show God used individuals with negative aspects when calling important figures. Furthermore, faith in God's calling gives rise to a sense of purpose. Many notable figures in the history of faith were motivated by the belief that God had called them for a specific purpose. John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, recalled a moment on May 24, 1738, when he felt his heart strangely warmed as he remembered being rescued from a fire as a child. In that moment, he came to believe that God had saved him for the purpose of reforming the rapidly secularizing Church of England. The key point here is that when a person truly has a clear sense of calling, they begin to unleash their hidden potential. Only faith can ignite potential and maximize life (Internet).

Second and last, the Lord reaffirms His command to "Go."

Look at Acts 9:15 – “But the Lord said to Ananias, "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel.” When the Lord appeared to His disciple Ananias in a vision and commanded him to go to Saul, who was praying and had already seen a vision, Ananias responded to the Lord as follows: "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints in Jerusalem. And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on your name" (Acts 9:13-14). From Ananias' perspective, obeying the Lord's command would have been extremely difficult. The reason being, Saul had already received official authorization from the high priests in Jerusalem to go to Damascus and persecute Christians, and Ananias was one of the leaders in the church at Damascus. Additionally, Ananias was unaware of Saul's transformation on the road to Damascus, so from his point of view, it was only natural to find the Lord's command perplexing and even questionable. John Calvin suggested that Ananias' response at this moment appeared to be a manifestation of unbelief driven by fear, while scholar A. Schlatter argued that Ananias' words reflected a questioning of God's righteousness, indicating a concern about how he could share the message of grace with someone as fearsome and persecuting as Saul. Ultimately, when Ananias hesitated and questioned the Lord's command, the Lord reiterated His directive to Ananias, saying "Go" once again (Acts 9:15). In doing so, the Lord provided two reasons for this command:

(1) The first reason for the command "Go" was that Saul was chosen by the Lord.

Look at Acts 9:15: "But the Lord said to him, 'Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry

my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel." Here, the expression "chosen instrument of mine" refers to a vessel or container for holding something. In this case, Saul was chosen by the Lord to be an instrument for carrying the Lord's name. Despite his previous actions of persecuting those who called on the name of the Lord, Saul was now selected by the Lord to bear His name and go out into the world, proclaiming it to the nations (Yoo).

(2) The second reason for the command "Go" was so that Saul could see how much he must suffer for the sake of the Lord's name.

Look at Acts 9:16 - "For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name." In essence, this statement means that Saul, as the chosen instrument of the Lord, would have to endure hardships. The reason the Lord reiterated His command to Ananias was to make it clear that Saul's calling involved bearing witness to the gospel and enduring suffering. In response, Ananias immediately went to Straight Street in Damascus, found the house of Judas, and visited Saul there. Ananias then laid his hands on Saul and said to him: "... Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road by which you came has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 9:17). Isn't it astonishing? Ananias addressed Saul as "Brother Saul." This statement shows that Ananias, in obedience to the Lord's command, regarded Saul, the persecutor, and the transformed Saul on the road to Damascus as a fellow believer in the Lord (Yoo). Furthermore, Ananias informed Saul that the Lord had sent him because Jesus, whom Saul had met on the road to Damascus, had instructed Ananias to do so for two reasons: to restore his sight and to fill him with the Holy Spirit. At that moment, the scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he regained his sight. Saul then rose, was baptized, and ate, becoming strengthened (Acts 9:18).

The Lord is still commanding you and me to "Go." He instructs us to "Go and seek ..." (Acts 9:11). Yet, like Ananias, many of us hesitate when faced with this command, saying, "Lord, about this person..." (v. 13). At times, we hesitate to obey the Lord's command. In those moments, the Lord reiterates His command to us, saying once again, "Go." We are vessels chosen by the Lord. We are chariots carrying the name of the Lord. We who have received this calling have also been given a calling that involves enduring suffering for His sake. How will we respond to this divine calling (mission)?

'Living with a mission is beautiful' (Internet). There are four types of people depending on what they prioritize: (1) The first is a person who lives for profit. (2) The second is a person who lives for convenience. (3) The third is a person who lives for pleasure. (4) The fourth is a person who lives with a mission. We, as believers, are people who live with a mission. In the book 'Unique Management and Innovation' by Miyata Wahaki, it discusses how outstanding companies are created. It mentions three things. First, it advises to improve the quality of profit. It says that a company can make a profit

by cutting costs or expenses, but even better profit comes from making a profit through high productivity. It emphasizes that better profit comes from creating distinctive profit through products and services. Second, it encourages pursuing strategy and management concurrently. It advises to make a profit through strategy and prevent waste through management. Third, it advises not to deviate from the starting point. It means not deviating from the starting point. We, as believers, also live our whole lives without deviating from our mission. People who have succeeded in life as believers are those who have lived their lives without deviating from their mission until the end. We must hold onto our mission until the moment our breath stops (Internet).

Chosen by the Lord, and becoming a servant of the Lord,

James Kim

(Hoping to be even more led by the mission given by the Lord)

In Proclaiming Christ

[Acts 9:19b-31]

The person who repents, in other words, those who have encountered Jesus and been transformed, are called to live an even more transformed life. To be more specific, we have a responsibility to live a life of transformation. So, what leads us to further progress in a transformed life?

(1) Living in faith and hope advances transformation.

Faith leads us to abandon self-satisfaction, self-reliance, and self-absorption. It directs us towards Christ and fosters communion with Him. Hope maintains assurance and dispels coldness and despair.

(2) Living in repentance and obedience advances transformation.

Repentance is a humble sincerity that, with a sorrowful and ashamed heart, turns from wrongdoing to seek what is right. Obedience is striving conscientiously according to God's revealed will, without exceptions for our own convenience.

(3) Living in dependence and expectancy advances transformation.

(4) Living in submission and perseverance advances transformation.

(5) Living in praise and dedication advances transformation.

Living a life of fellowship and service also fosters progress in transformation (Internet).

Saul lived a transformed life after repentance. He received a calling to live an even more transformed life, a calling that can be summarized based on Acts 9:15-16 into two main aspects: (1)

The mission of proclaiming the gospel and (2) the mission of enduring hardship. Reflecting on Acts 9:19-31, I want to meditate on these two missions and pray that we may apply them in our lives.

First, in proclaiming Christ, we need to gain strength.

Look at Acts 9:22 - "But Saul grew more and more powerful and baffled the Jews living in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Messiah." After encountering Jesus on the road to Damascus, Saul obeyed the Lord's command, entered Damascus, met Ananias, received his blessing, regained his sight, was baptized, ate, and became strengthened (vv. 17-18). He then spent several days with the disciples in Damascus (v. 19). During this time, he immediately began proclaiming Jesus as the Son of God in the synagogues, astonishing all who heard him (vv. 20-21). Naturally, people were amazed because the one who had once persecuted those who believed in Jesus was now transformed and boldly proclaiming the gospel. However, instead of being weakened or discouraged by this astonishment, Saul gained even more strength to prove, based on the Old Testament Scriptures, that Jesus was indeed the Messiah, the Christ, which caused confusion among the Jews living in Damascus (v. 22). So, what was the strength that Saul gained? It was not physical strength from eating more food (v. 19). It referred to spiritual power (Park). In the end, Saul, in his spiritual strength, demonstrated with clarity, based on the Old Testament, that Jesus was the prophesied Messiah, causing perplexity among the Jews in Damascus (v. 22) (Yoo). What exactly was the spiritual power that Saul gained?

I hope and pray that spiritual power may be applied to all souls in our church in four ways. These are the 'Power of Prayer,' 'Power of the Holy Spirit,' 'Power of the Word,' and 'Power of Love.' Spiritual power is closely related to spirituality. So, what does spirituality mean? The spirituality mentioned in the Bible means becoming like the personality, life, and thoughts of Jesus Christ (Internet). In other words, spirituality refers to spiritual qualities or spiritual disposition. Therefore, to say that spirituality is excellent means that spiritual qualities are excellent. Spirituality does not refer to supernatural or miraculous abilities, but rather to moral and character-based attributes. Unfortunately, it seems that many people perceive spirituality as the ability to perform supernatural or extraordinary feats. The Lord has promised to call those who labor and carry heavy burdens to come to Him for rest. He also says that taking on His yoke and learning from Him is the way to find rest for our souls (Mt. 11:28-30). True spirituality can be said to reach the point where one can find rest even while bearing the yoke. The state of being crushed under the weight of the yoke, unable to gather one's thoughts, cannot be called spirituality. The Lord's yoke is easy, and His burden is light, He says. The weight of the cross is never light, but because of love for the Lord, and carrying it out of love for Him, it can feel light. This is the spirituality-based power that underlies spiritual power (Internet). We should yearn for this kind of power. Just as Jesus carried His cross, we should pursue spiritual power that allows us to feel light even while bearing our own crosses. To do this, we need to grow in our knowledge of Jesus Christ. We must strive to become more like Him. Therefore, our church specifically seeks and pursues four types of power: the power of prayer, the power of the Holy Spirit, the power of the Word, and the power of love.

Second, in proclaiming Christ, we can expect persecution.

Look at Acts 9:23 – “After many days had gone by, the Jews conspired to kill him.” D

"After many days," meaning 'after a long time has passed' (Yoo), the Jews in Damascus who had heard about Saul's testimony that Jesus is the Messiah, meaning the Christ, conspired to kill him (v. 23). So, they kept watch day and night at all the city gates of Damascus in order to kill Saul (v. 24). Saul, upon learning of this plot, was helped by his disciples to escape the city by being lowered down in a large basket through an opening in the wall, during the night (v. 25). One interesting point here is that the word "kill" in the phrase "conspired to kill Saul" in verse 28 is the same word that appeared in our previous reflection on Acts 8:1, where it mentioned Saul was there, giving approval to Stephen's death. In other words, before Saul encountered Jesus in Damascus, he had been actively involved in persecuting the early Christians, and now, after believing in Jesus as the Messiah (Christ), he narrowly escaped a plot to kill him by the Jews in Damascus. Isn't that intriguing? The same Saul who had taken a leading role in the stoning of Stephen was now facing the danger of being eliminated by the Jews for boldly testifying to Jesus Christ. Saul began to bear both the mission of testifying to the gospel and the mission of enduring persecution, just as the Lord had chosen him to do (9:15-16) (Yoo). Even Jesus Himself, during His earthly ministry, experienced opposition from worldly rulers like Herod and Pontius Pilate, as prophesied in Psalms 2:1-2. In a similar way, Paul, following the example of Jesus, faced persecution and threats from the Jews who conspired to kill him.

In proclaiming the gospel of Christ, we, like Paul, should be prepared to bear the mission of enduring persecution. In other words, we should be willing to bear both the mission of testifying to the gospel and the mission of enduring persecution, just as Paul did. Here, it is important to keep in mind a couple of key principles regarding the mission of enduring persecution:

- (1) We should remember that when we bear the mission of testifying to the gospel in the midst of the great power that God gives us, persecution may also come.

When we look at Acts 9:22, where Saul gained strength to testify that Jesus is the Christ after many days had passed, we learn the lesson that when we bear the testimony of the gospel in the great power of God, we should not forget that great opposition and persecution may also arise. Of course, the phrase "after many days," or "after a long time has passed," in verse 23 refers to the three-year period of Saul's life in Arabia (Park). We can therefore say that the lesson we learn about enduring persecution is that it may come after a period of spiritual training in the wilderness, just as in the case of Saul. Ultimately, we should expect temptations, persecution, and suffering to arise, just as Jesus faced them in the wilderness after His spiritual training, and just as Saul faced the danger of persecution and threat after gaining greater strength through the power of God.

- (2) We should accept, by faith, the truth that enduring suffering for the sake of Jesus' name (v. 16) is a gift of God's grace.

Philippians 1:29 states, "For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe in him, but also to suffer for him."

Third and last, in proclaiming Christ, we need significant encounters.

Look at Acts 9:27 - "But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. He told them how Saul on his journey had seen the Lord and that the Lord had spoken to him, and how in Damascus he had preached fearlessly in the name of Jesus." Because the Jews in Damascus conspired to kill Saul, he had to escape from the city through the help of his disciples and headed to Jerusalem (v. 26). He wanted to associate with (have fellowship with) the disciples of Jesus there, but they were all afraid of him and did not believe he was truly a disciple. At this moment, the Lord granted Saul a precious encounter. This encounter was none other than his meeting with Barnabas. Barnabas, whose name means "son of encouragement," had been isolated and lonely due to his opposition and persecution from the Jews on the outside and the unbelief of the disciples of Jesus on the inside (not believing Saul's conversion). He took Saul to the apostles and shared the account of Saul's conversion and how he boldly testified to the gospel in the name of Jesus in Damascus. As a result, Saul was able to boldly proclaim the gospel in Jerusalem, just as he had done in Damascus (. 29). However, when the Hellenistic Jews sought to kill Saul, he had to be sent off to Tarsus with the help of the brothers once again. Here, there are a few things we should consider:

- (1) We should reflect on the negative aspects of fear and mistrust.

In other words, the disciples in Jerusalem were so afraid and distrustful that they did not believe Saul had truly become a disciple, which ultimately led to Saul's isolation. The cause of this was the fear and mistrust of the disciples in Jerusalem. In the end, the fear within us generates mistrust towards others, making it impossible for us to truly have fellowship with them in the Lord. If Saul had not received the help of Barnabas and continued to be isolated from the disciples in Jerusalem, one might wonder what would have happened.

- (2) We need to consider positive encounters.

In other words, we should reflect on the invaluable encounter that Saul had with Barnabas. It seems that there were three crucial encounters in Saul's life leading up to this passage: (a) The first and most important encounter was undoubtedly with Jesus on the road to Damascus. (b) The second encounter was with Ananias, one of the disciples, after Saul entered Damascus. (c) Then, the third encounter in today's passage was with Barnabas. We also need such encounters. Of course, meeting Jesus should be the most fundamental encounter, and thereafter, in our

encounters, we should have someone like Barnabas, a senior or an encourager in the faith, someone beneficial to us in our service to the Lord.

(3) Like Barnabas, we need to actively pursue encounters.

Looking at Acts 9:27, it says that Barnabas “took” him to the apostles. Here, the Greek verb for "took" is used, which appears 18 times in the New Testament and carries the meaning of "grasping tightly" or "seizing." It is commonly used to convey the idea of "seizing forcibly" (Lk. 20:20, 23:26; Acts 16:19, 17:19, 18:17, 21:30, 33, 23:19). This shows that Barnabas did not act on Saul's request or insistence, but rather took the initiative to grasp Saul and lead him to the apostles. While others were afraid to even approach Saul, Barnabas, on the contrary, reached out to him, firmly held onto him, and guided him to the apostles.

What were the results of Saul, now transformed, coming to the early Jerusalem church? Look at Acts 9:31 - "Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace and was strengthened. Living in the fear of the Lord and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it increased in numbers." With the once fierce persecutor Saul converted, the church found external peace. Ultimately, at this time, the church advanced with two crucial elements: fearing the Lord and being encouraged by the Holy Spirit. As they grew in their reverence for the Lord, they also experienced spiritual peace. Moreover, the church saw an increase in the number of believers. This is a result of the enriched inner life of the church. A church lacking in spiritual power cannot secure an increase in the number of believers (Park).

In proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ,

James Kim

(Praying for bold proclamation empowered by the Lord)

The Growing Church

[Acts 9:31]

This is an article on ‘How to radically change the church’ in the “Church Growth Institute”: ‘The greatest church is a church that is not afraid of change. God is the leader of change. How can we effectively and fundamentally change the church? I suggest 10 things:

(1) Gain leadership for change.

People are looking at a leader and change begins with that leader. Build a leadership team for reform.

(2) Seek the sign of a healthy church.

The purpose of change is to become a healthy church. The changed church is the result of the sum of diagnosis, prescription, effort, and ability. Medical examination and prescription are essential. The signs of the healthy church are faith, leadership, excellence, dedication, creativity, and obedience.

(3) Have a creative crisis.

The biggest crisis is no sense of crisis. A sense of urgency is the driving force of new creation. Reformation is possible not by pleasant conversation but by desperate action.

(4) Settle the wrong past.

Anyone who sees the rearview mirror without looking ahead will fail. Neither the past form of ministry nor the present form of ministry is desirable. It has to be changed to the paradigm of future ministry. Seek meaning rather than form, and creation rather than preservation.

(5) Reevaluate your budget and finances.

In the future, economic problems will have the greatest impact on the church. If you don't manage your money properly, your spirituality can be destroyed. The budget and financial situation reveal the growth potential of the church.

(6) Focus on your vision.

The most important thing is purpose and vision. Those who have a vision are distinguished in their behavior, relationships, abilities, and spirituality. You must not work hard to achieve your vision. You have to risk your life. Vision is about delivering and accomplishing more than owning. Vision must be for the whole, not the part.

(7) Make the saints strong.

Strengthening the saints is a shortcut to growth. Let it be a church with a large number of believers who help pastors rather than one pastor who helps them. Training the lay people is the biggest pastoral mission.

(8) Celebrate a small success.

Success brings success. You need to be able to celebrate a little success so that you can plan for the bigger success. Organizations with adequate rewards and recognition are healthy.

(9) Pursue the reproduction of change.

Change is contagious. Changes in one person are communicated to others, and the success of one organization is extended to the success of another. A healthy church exists as a distribution model, not a model of ownership. Even if you realize the need for change and make sure you are motivated, you are already more than half successful.

(10) Settle the culture of change.

Change is not just two events, but a lifestyle that continues every day. It is most important that change become the culture of the church. When culture changes, everything changes' (Internet).

I want to think about four things about the growing church based on Acts 9:31, and apply them to our church.

First, there is peace in the growing church.

Look at Acts 9:31 – “Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace.” The environment in which the early church had peace was not peace without persecution and difficulty, but internal peace among these things (Yoo). This inner peace is the peace that the Lord gives in a world without peace. In John 20:19, 21, Jesus appeared to His disciples who were afraid and gathered on the first evening after the crucifixion and resurrection and said, "Peace be with you!" The peace of the Lord to His disciples in fear is peace that this world could not understand and that this world could not give. There must be this peace in the church. There must be peace from the Lord. But what about churches these days? Is there any peace that the Lord gives? What are the churches that we know? Aren't they many problems that are breaking the peace of the church? The Bible Acts 9:31 tells us that “the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace.” Not in one church, but in Judea, Galilee, and Samaria, all the churches were enjoying the peace of the Lord. How amazing is this? Doesn't it sound too unreal for us? Interestingly, in Acts chapters 8-9, the church spread to many places through the saints scattered throughout the region due to the persecution of Stephen's martyrdom. Therefore, the gospel of Christ was preached here and there through the scattered saints, and churches were established. Eventually, scattered disciples of Jesus spread the peace of God as well as the gospel of Jesus. But what about now? Rather than being scattered by persecution, the saints are experiencing the scattering of God through sin in the church, and the scattered saints are guilty of going to another church and breaking the peace rather than preaching the gospel. There are peace-makers in the church, but there are peace-breakers in the church as well.

We must be peacemakers as sons and daughters of God. Look at Matthew 5:9 - “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.” And in order to be peacemakers, we must let the peace of God to guard our hearts and our minds. In order to do this, we must not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, we must present our request to God (Phil. 4:6-7). Pastor Ken Sande, founder and representative of Peacemaker Ministry, has been instrumental in resolving hundreds of conflict cases involving biblical division, business, employment, and family disputes since 1982 using the Bible principles. There are many books on conflict resolution, including his representative book, “The Peacemaker: The Biblical Guide to Resolving Personal Conflict.” ‘To be a peacemaker, the Christians must first grasp the principle of conflict resolution through the Bible. ... We should meditate and study the life of Jesus Christ, the perfect example of a peacemaker. We also need systematic training to put these principles into practice in our lives. ... Learning to view conflict from a biblical perspective can solve many problems associated with avoiding and responding to conflicts. The Bible does not teach that all conflict is bad. Rather, some differences are taught to be natural and beneficial. The Christians should not avoid conflicts or require others to always agree with us, but should learn to rejoice in the diversity of God's creation and to work with people of different perspectives (Rom. 15:7, 14:1–13). The Christians should be able to remove the roots of conflict and open the way for true peace (Jam. 4:1-2, Mt. 18:15)’ (Internet).

Second, the growing church is being built up.

Look at Acts 9:31 – “So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria enjoyed peace, being built up” Here “being build up” means building up, not an external business aspect, but an internal godliness (Park). May local churches in early churches were largely built spiritually, united in saints in love internally rather than externally built up largely. In order for the church to be built spiritually, it must be edible with love. According to Dr. Yun-sun Park, “love edifies” in 1 Corinthians 8:1 is the same as saying that it builds up. If so, the lesson that the growing church is being built up means that the growing church is a church that edifies in love.

How is this in contrast with the churches these days? How do we explain the signs of division within in the churches that may have been built largely externally, but internally there are conflicts and divisions more than the element of love? There must be love in the church. There must be love that edifies. Then the church will grow. What must we do to be such a church?

(1) We must attain to the unity of faith and of the knowledge of Jesus.

Look at Ephesians 4:13 – “until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.” But the truth we must bear in mind here is that we must be careful with knowledge that puffs up. Look at 1 Corinthians 8:1 - ... Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up.”

(2) We must speak the truth in love.

Look at Ephesians 4:15 – “Instead, speaking the truth in love”

(3) We must serve the church according to our gifts with the help of the Lord who is the head of the church.

Look at Ephesians 4:16 – “from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.”

More specifically, how can we edify our faith?

(1) We should not give offense to everyone.

Look at 1 Corinthians 10:32-33: “Give no offense either to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God; just as I also please all men in all things, not seeking my own profit but the profit of the many, so that they may be saved.” We should seek the profit of others. It's a way to edify others when we think ‘Will this profit others?’ before we speak and act. If we see the newcomers are getting hurt and prevent them from attending the church, it is because the

believers' words and actions are not example to them. Especially we must be careful with our tongue. We must try not to commit sin with our tongue.

(2) We must strive to give glory to God.

Look at 1 Corinthians 10:31 – “Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.” The edifying faith is everything that leads a life to glorify God. On the contrary, if we live for the sake of our will, our faith is not edifying faith. In the church, if we keep on saying that self-assertion is right, it is not edifying even it is right. For the truth, we must risk our lives and keep the incision of faith, but other than the truth it is edifying to do everything to glorify God and not for ourselves. So if it is glorifying God when we lose, then we should lose. And if yielding is glorifying God, then we should yield (Internet).

Third, the growing church proceeds with the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit.

Look at Acts 9:31 – “So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria enjoyed peace, being built up; and going on in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it continued to increase.” Here, “the fear of the Lord” means ‘the believer is devoted in obeying His will, consciously and acting in the presence of God’ (Park). The growing church is conscious of God's holy presence in the fear of the Lord. Therefore, in reverence in God's holy presence, we try to accomplish only the will of the Lord. One of the Lord's wills is written in Amos 5:14 – “Seek good and not evil, that you may live;” This is the growing church. Those saints in the growing church leave evil and do good. This is the living saint and living church. In this church there is the comfort of the Holy Spirit. In other words, there is comfort in the Holy Spirit for those who obey His will in the Lord's ordinances by fearing God rather than fearing people in the midst of persecution of the wicked. This Holy Spirit is God comforting us when we are in trouble. In particular, the sufferings of Christ are ours in abundance, so also our comfort is abundant through Christ (2 Cor. 1:5). Therefore, the Holy Spirit comforts us in all our affliction (v. 4). In the church, a community of these people, there is inner peace during the time of trouble (Park).

The church must have the comfort of the Holy Spirit as the saints who fear the Lord live in obedience to God's will. No matter how difficult or adversary we are in obeying the will of the Lord, we do not need to worry because the Holy Spirit works in those who do the truth and gives them sufficient comfort. As the Romans 15:4 says, the Holy Spirit gives us hope through the encouragement of the Scriptures. The church that is gathered with those who fear the Lord and are comforted is growing.

Fourth and last, the growing church continues to increase.

Look at Acts 9:31 – “So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria enjoyed peace,

being built up; and going on in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it continued to increase.” This means that the number of church members is increased. If the church has a lot of numbers without internal grace, it will not enjoy spiritual peace. But the church with internal grace, such as “the fear of the Lord and the comfort of the Holy Spirit,” can grow both quantitatively and spiritually (Park). In Acts 2:47, the Bible says that the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved, in 4:4 the number of the men came to be about 5,000, and in 6:1, the Bible says “the disciples were increasing in number.” In Acts 6:7, the Bible says that “the number of the disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem.”

Pastor Kyung Ho Kim of Wildflower Hyangin Church writes: ‘I believe that the greatest disease that the church cannot follow Christ's path is growth ideology. The growth ideology disease is not only in the big church but also in the small church. The churches are doing multiplying movement and constantly presenting the growth of numbers. As far as the increase in numbers is concerned is the sign of the kingdom of God, the way of Christ, the reality is far from following Christ in that life and following the way of Christ in this field of history. The need to cure the church growth disease is what I felt with my skin during my ministry. In fact, the pastor is the most vulnerable to church growth disease. So I decided myself to draw a line from there, and when I reached the scale of independence, I thought that it would be a healthy way to grow a self-sustaining community church by setting up a branch church’ (Internet). What do you think of Pastor Kim’s comment? Should the church's numerical growth (quantitative growth) be criticized unconditionally? We must be very wary of criticizing quantitative growth while insisting only on the quality of the church. Of course, stealing sheep in pursuit of church quantitative growth is also a big problem for the church, but the fact that there is no quantitative growth is also a problem. Pastor William Chadwick confessed his conscience in his book, “Sheep Stealing,” calling himself the pastor who pursued church growth first by stealing the sheep. In this book he pointed out the problem of horizontal movement of the church members in the dark side of the church growth. He boldly pointed out that trying to bring other church members (sheep) to my church is stealing sheep. Listen to what he said: ‘As the growth of church numbers slowed down in the 1990s, there were increasing criticism about church growth in the past was not caused by 'conversion growth', but by 'transfer growth' (horizontal movement of members). The church has grown only statistically, with little growth in the kingdom of God.’ He honestly confessed that he was a pastor who pursued transfer growth, and he realized later that what the church really needs to pursue is not transfer growth, but conversion growth. In fact, he specifically confessed the history of the so-called stealing of sheep by attracting the other church members and fattened his church while hurting them (Internet).

I hope and pray that there is peace in our church. I also hope and pray that our church can be built up. I pray that our church will proceed with the fear of the Lord and comfort of the Holy Spirit. May the Lord continue to add the new believers in our church.

Desiring to love the church that the Lord is establishing even more,

James Kim (Praying that the Lord will continue to grow our church)

Is it Okay for Only the Church Numbers are Growing?

[Acts 9:31]

At 8:00 last night, something unexpected happened during the English Ministry Bible Study. The first thing I didn't expect was that I expected only two people to come. Nevertheless, I preached last Sunday's worship service and suggested that we stop the Friday Bible Study meeting by the end of the year as I spoke with two leaders of English Ministry. After that, we had not been gathering on Friday for a few weeks and I thought that I should not do this. So I told the English Ministry people that at 8 o'clock Friday evening, I should do the Bible Study and share what I learned with that person even only one person come. So I thought only one high school student would come on that Friday night Bible Study. Or maybe one of our leaders, a college student, might come. But there were seven people. Second, what I did not expect was to have a sincere conversation in the Lord after a Bible study with one of those seven members. I was grateful and happy to know him more through that heart-to-heart conversation. After the Bible study, as other members practiced praise, I talked more with him. What was so grateful in the conversation was that he said that he had peace in his heart, even in the most difficult circumstances he was experiencing. After studying the Bible with seven people, I dropped couple of them home and returned to my home with my beloved first daughter.

Before I went to sleep that day, I was reading in Acts 9, which I supposed to read in the next day Morning Prayer meeting, and my eyes stopped at verse 31. The reason is because even in that verse 31 the phrase "it grew in numbers" came out like Acts 6:1, "when the number of disciples was increasing," that I meditated in yesterday Morning Prayer meeting. So I decided to meditate on Acts 9:31 and I read Acts 9:1-30 again. The reason is because I wondered how the Lord made the Early Church grow in number. The reason I think the Lord increased the number of believers in the Early Church is because of Acts 2:47 – "praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved." As I was reading Acts 9:1-30, I found the answer in verses 19-20 and 28 how the Lord increased the number of believers in the Early Church: "... Saul spent several days with the disciples in Damascus. At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God. ... And he was with them, moving about freely in

Jerusalem, speaking out boldly in the name of the Lord.” In this passage, the way the Lord increased the number of believers in the Early Church was that the Lord converted and commissioned Saul on Damascus, who persecuted Jesus (vv. 4-5) and who was “a chosen instrument of Mine” (v. 15), and Saul (Paul) immediately began to proclaim Jesus “in the synagogues” (v. 20) and “in Jerusalem” (v. 28) that “He is the Son of God” (v. 20), “speaking out boldly in the name of the Lord” (v. 28). In other words, the Lord increased the number of believers by keep Saul increasing in strength (v. 22). The Jews who were confounded and who lived at Damascus (v. 22) conspired to kill Saul (v. 23), even the Grecian Jews tried to kill him (v. 29). In the midst of this persecution and tribulation, Saul fearlessly (v. 27) and boldly (v. 28) spoke (vv. 22, 28) “in the name of the Lord” (v. 28) that “Jesus is the Christ” (v. 22) so that the number of believers increased in the Early Church.

But was it all? Did the number of believers increase in the early church because Saul only spoke boldly in the name of Jesus? Is it worthy in the Lord’s eyes that only the church numbers are growing? I don’t think so. The basis of my thought is Acts 9:31 – “Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace. It was strengthened; and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it grew in numbers, living in the fear of the Lord.” When we look at this verse, there are at least three things that the Lord did to establish the Early Church as a church worthy of the Lord’s eyes:

First, the Early Church was at peace.

Look at Acts 9:31 – “Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace.” Isn’t it amazing? How did the early church find peace during tribulation and persecution? It was peace from the Lord. God the Holy Spirit united the Early Church saints through the bond of peace. And the Early Church saints made every effort keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace (Eph. 4:3).

Second, the Early Church was built up.

Look at Acts 9:31 – “So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria enjoyed peace, being built up;” How did the Early Church believers build up? It was through the word of God’s grace that built them up (20:32). Therefore, in the midst of trouble and persecution, the Early Church saints made level paths for their feet and took only ways that were firm (Prov. 4:26).

Third, the Early Church went on in the fear if the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit.

Look at Acts 9:31 – “So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria enjoyed peace, being built up; and going on in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit,” The Early Church saints were persecuted because they lived in obedience to the Word in fear of the Lord and hated evil. But in the midst of it, the Holy Spirit comforted them.

In the midst of that, the number of believers increased in the Early Church (v. 31). But the Early Church was not a church with only the number of believers increased. It was the church that enjoyed peace, was built up and went on in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit (v. 31). May our church be such church.

Praying for it to become a victorious community,

James Kim

(Dreaming of church members being true to their faith and the church being true to its purpose)

“Get up!”

[Acts 9:32-43]

The third element among the ten suggestions on ‘How to effectively and fundamentally change the church’ emphasizes having a creative sense of crisis. It states, ‘The greatest crisis is the absence of crisis. A healthy sense of urgency is the driving force behind new creation. Reform is not achieved through pleasant conversation, but through desperate action’ (Internet). In an article by Pastor Mark Burogap published in the Christian Today newspaper on October 11, 2006, he refers to extreme situations as opportunities for learning, suggesting that: (1) We should view crises as opportunities for humility. When we choose humility, we begin to see our crises differently. (2) We should view crises as opportunities to confess our own faults. (3) We should view crises as opportunities to seek God's will together. (4) We should view crises as opportunities to share joy in the midst of adventure (Christian Today).

In Acts 9:32-43, we encounter two individuals who were in a state of being laid down. These individuals serve as examples of laid-down spirits, and we seek to glean insights from the Lord's power and grace in raising them up.

First, laid-down spirits:

If we divide today's passage in Acts 9:32-43 into two parts, the first part encompasses verses 32-35, which recounts the healing of the paralytic Aeneas. The second part covers verses 36-43, detailing the healing of Dorcas. In both healing events, there is a common element: the word "lay down" is used to describe the condition of the individuals in verses 33 and 37 (verse 33: "...laid down for eight years," verse 37: "...was laid out").

- (1) In the first part (32-35), a man named Aeneas, who lived in Lydda, had been bedridden for eight years due to paralysis. His condition left him unable to get up.

(2) In the second part (36-43), a disciple of the Lord named Tabitha (or Dorcas), who lived in Joppa, fell ill and died. Her body was prepared for burial and laid in an upstairs room. When considering these two individuals, one was bedridden for eight years due to a debilitating illness, rendering him completely incapacitated. The other had passed away, and all hope of her rising again had vanished.

Reflecting on these two individuals, I couldn't help but think about the "spiritual stagnation" experienced by many believers. Pastor Joon-min Kang divided this condition into ten stages when he faced severe spiritual depression just four months after founding the Logos Church on February 5, 1989 (Internet):

(1) I lost faith.

I stopped believing in God. An ironic certainty settled in that no one could help me. Neither God, nor the doctor, nor even the caring touch of my dear mother could assist me. Spiritual faith was abandoned, and even natural faith began to fail.

(2) I lost enthusiasm.

All the enthusiasm within me began to fade away. The desire to accomplish something after studying abroad in the United States vanished. I wanted to throw all the beloved books into a dumpster. Appetite, desire, and ambition disappeared. The desires of the heart vanished. Along with them, hope disappeared as well.

(3) A desire to die emerged.

Although it was a reality that I had to die to truly live, I wanted to die. If suicide wasn't a sin, I wanted to do it. I wanted to step on the accelerator while driving. The thought stemmed from a belief that everything would end that way. Truly dangerous thoughts invaded me.

(4) I felt powerless.

A sense of helplessness settled in, the feeling that I couldn't do anything. I felt my strength wane. I had lost confidence. Confidence comes from capability. However, due to a sense of powerlessness, I lost confidence.

(5) Confusion about identity set in.

For the first time in my life, I seriously began to ask, "Who am I?" I started asking this question seriously after collapsing due to spiritual depression and considering leaving the pioneering

church. I had been supported by the title of pastor and the status of a student, but if I let go of all of that, I began to wonder who I was. Letting go of the pioneering church, relinquishing the title of pastor, and surrendering the big dream I held in my heart all led to questioning who I was. When Jesus was tempted by the devil in the wilderness, the most severe trial was the test of identity. The devil used the word "if" three times to inject doubt into Jesus. In two of those instances, he said, "If you are the Son of God," shaking Jesus' sense of identity.

(6) Everything in the world began to look dark.

I lost the positive perspective with which I used to view the world. I lost the positive outlook on ministry. Everything seemed dark, negative, and difficult. A sense of defeat, failure, despair, impossibility, and victimhood began to consume me. Worry and fear came knocking from time to time. I started hearing voices of ridicule and condemnation from people. I began to hear the mocking laughter of those who opposed the founding of the church. The truth was that it wasn't the world that was the problem, but rather the world within me. The window of my soul was clouded, making everything in the world appear dark. At that time, my inner world was dark, and the conversation within me was overly negative.

(7) The focus of my thoughts became blurred.

Stress arises when many thoughts come rushing in at once. Stress occurs when many thoughts come rushing in at once, making the burden feel heavy. If thoughts are clear and focused, stress can be easily overcome. Spiritual depression tends to blur the focus of thoughts. That's why the burden of my ministry felt even heavier.

(8) My body weakened, and rapid changes took place in my physical state.

It was due to the monster of worry that came with passing through spiritual depression. Fear arose along with worry. Faith weakened as worry came in. My heart started pounding, and my hands grew cold, causing cold sweat to break out. I began to feel the body undergo rapid changes according to my thoughts.

(9) I didn't want to meet people.

Passing through spiritual depression led to a sense of victimhood towards people. Specifically, during the process of pioneering a church, I developed a sense of victimhood towards those who opposed the pioneering. I wanted to blame people rather than take responsibility for the spiritual depression I experienced. In fact, at a time when I should have been with people, receiving help from them, I wanted to be alone. However, what was even more painful was that being alone was too agonizing. Before going through spiritual depression, I enjoyed being

alone. However, during spiritual depression, being alone was frightening in itself because dark thoughts came to me while I was alone.

(10) The most terrifying trial was losing my sense of calling.

A pastor lives and dies by their calling. When the sense of calling is strong, one can overcome anything. It makes us resolute. It enables us to transcend circumstances and even conquer death. For Paul, if accomplishing his calling required it, he didn't consider his own life dear (Acts 20:24). However, I, in the midst of spiritual depression, prayed to God to take my life in the same way Elijah fell beneath the broom tree, having lost my sense of calling."

Have you ever experienced one or two of these manifestations of spiritual depression? Or perhaps, are you currently in a state of spiritual depression? If so, there is hope in Jesus.

Second, the restoring power of Jesus

As we have already contemplated in Acts 3-4, Peter had experienced the healing of a beggar who had been lame from birth for 40 years, in the name of Jesus of Nazareth. Therefore, the healing of Aeneas, who had been paralyzed for 8 years due to a stroke, was not a particularly significant issue (Yoo). Look at Acts 9:34 - "Peter said to him, 'Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you. Get up and roll up your mat.' Immediately Aeneas got up." Peter had already healed a lame man from birth who used to beg at the temple gate, saying, 'Silver or gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk'" (3:6), and when he took him by the right hand and helped him up, the man's feet and ankles became strong (v. 7), and he jumped to his feet and began to walk (v. 8). In Acts 9:34, when Peter healed Aeneas, he commanded him to "Get up and roll up your mat, for Jesus Christ has healed you." As a result, Aeneas got up "immediately." As a result, "all those who lived in Lydda and Sharon saw him and turned to the Lord" (v. 35). The second miraculous event mentioned in today's passage is the resurrection of Tabitha, a female disciple, which the author Luke describes in more detail (vv. 36-43). First of all, the meaning of the Aramaic name "Tabitha" is said to be "gazelle, symbolizing grace and beauty" (Park). The beauty of Tabitha is described in the Bible as follows: "... she was always doing good and helping the poor" (v. 36). As an example, when Peter was sent for and arrived, the widows stood around him, crying and showing him the robes and other clothing that Dorcas had made while she was still with them (v. 39). These robes and clothes were the ones that Dorcas had made in order to do good and help others. From this word, we can see that the Lord's female disciple Tabitha was truly faithful in her faith. Because she was such a person, the believers were deeply grieved by her death (v. 38) and sent for Peter (Park). Peter sent everyone out, got down on his knees and prayed. Then he turned toward the dead woman and said, "Tabitha, get up" (v. 40). Peter's "Tabitha, get up" reminds us of when Jesus called out to Jairus' daughter, "Little girl, I say to you, get up!" (Mk. 5:41). Look at John 5:25 - "Truly I tell you, a time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live." As a result, Tabitha opened her eyes, and when she saw

Peter, she sat up (Acts 9:40). Peter reached out his hand and helped her up. Then he called for the believers, especially the widows, and presented her to them alive (v. 41). As a result, all the people in Joppa and Sharon saw Tabitha and believed in the Lord in great numbers (v. 42).

Here, the lesson we learn is that our Lord is a healing God. Look at Exodus 15:26 - "... I am the Lord, who heals you." Why did God heal the paralyzed man who had been lying in Lydda for eight years through Peter, and why did He also raise Dorcas, a female disciple from Joppa who was already dead? The reason is stated in Acts 4:29-30: "...enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. Stretch out your hand to heal and perform signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus." God healed the paralyzed man of eight years through Peter and raised Dorcas who had already died in order to (widely and effectively) proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ and lead people to believe in Jesus. As a result, when the paralyzed man of eight years was healed by the Lord through Peter, the result was that all those who lived in Lydda and Sharon saw him and turned to the Lord (v. 35). Also, what was the result when the dead Dorcas was raised? All the people in Joppa and Sharon saw Tabitha and believed in the Lord in great numbers (v. 42). As Professor Sang-seop Yoo says, 'These healings and the resulting widespread preaching were not only limited to the time of the apostles, but are still happening today in mission fields. When we earnestly seek Jesus, the Lord of the harvest, for effective gospel preaching, the Lord will perform such miracles whenever He deems it necessary. The problem is that people seek glory for themselves rather than giving glory to the Lord through healing. As long as we are careful about this point, it is truly desirable for ministers of the gospel to seek amazing healing miracles from God' (Yoo).

There is a memorable sermon title: 'Elijah Raised Again.' There are spiritual souls lying down around us who are exhausted and spiritually depressed. However, we have hope. Our Lord, the one with the power to do so, raises us again. Just as He healed Aeneas, who had been paralyzed for eight years due to a stroke, and raised Dorcas from Joppa, who was already dead and lying in an upstairs room, our Lord has the power to raise us sufficiently. Furthermore, our Lord, who has the power of resurrection, raised Dorcas (Tabitha), the female disciple, who had already died and was laid out in the attic, by giving her life back. Our Lord, with the power of resurrection, is fully capable of raising us. Therefore, let us, in the name of Jesus, rise again and exert our strength in proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ.

'I will rise in the name of Jesus, I will rise with the power given by the Lord
Even if the enemy comes against me, I will not fall, with the power given by the Lord,
with the power given by the Lord, with the power given by the Lord, I will rise.'

[Gospel song 'I Will Rise in the Name of Jesus']

Rising again in the name of Jesus,

James Kim (Living a life like a roly-poly in the Lord)

Cornelius

[Acts 10:1-8]

Renowned talk show host Oprah Winfrey confesses that the woman she admires and considers her mentor is Barbara Walters, surpassing notable broadcasters like Peter Jennings, Dan Rather, and Tom Brokaw, firmly holding the top spot in the salary rankings for television news hosts for decades. What makes her such a special presence? Anyone in front of her ends up revealing everything. Walters is the most 'comforting' news anchor in the United States. The essence of her excellence lies in trust, as Reverend John Maxwell puts it. People trust her when they interview with her, so they lay everything bare. I don't know why, but when you see the news anchor Barbara Walters, you're reminded of Goethe's words: 'Treat people as if they were what they ought to be, and you help them become what they are capable of being. Treat an individual as he is, and he will remain how he is' (Internet). Therefore, Reverend John Maxwell said in his book 'The Law of Trust': 'Remember the best moments: Mature people, when dealing with others, take their 'best moments' as the standard.' When we take the 'best moments' of others as our standard, we see the 'best moment' of Cornelius, an individual mentioned in today's Acts 10:1-8 passage. The author of Acts is talking about the 'best moment' of Cornelius, which became the cornerstone of Gentile evangelism in today's Acts 10. While meditating on Cornelius' 'best moment' today, I want to receive three lessons on what kind of Christian we should be.

First, Cornelius was a devout person.

Look at Acts 10:2 in today's passage: 'He and all his family were devout and God-fearing; he gave generously to those in need and prayed to God regularly.' I once meditated on how to create a 'devout household' rather than a happy one, and I would like to reapply that word to 'devout Cornelius' today:

(1) A devout person reveres God.

Look at Acts 10:2 - "He and all his family were devout and God-fearing; he gave generously to those in need and prayed to God regularly." The fact that Cornelius, the head of the

household, was devout and revered God with his whole family gives us a valuable lesson. That lesson is none other than that our male brothers, who are husbands and fathers in our homes, should take the lead in revering God. So, what does it mean to revere God? It means to hate evil. Look at Proverbs 8:13 - "To fear the Lord is to hate evil; I hate pride and arrogance, evil behavior and perverse speech." The Bible tells us that God hates pride, arrogance, evil behavior, and perverse speech. Therefore, those who revere God must hate these things. If revering God means hating evil, conversely, it can be said that revering God is also loving what is good. Look at Romans 12:9 - "Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good." And we should not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap a harvest if we do not give up (Gal. 6:9).

(2) A devout person gives generously to those in need.

Look at Acts 10:2 - "... he gave generously to those in need" Cornelius and his household demonstrated true piety, revering God above and loving people below. In other words, true piety means that two things should be together like the front and back of a coin. The front of the coin is revering God, and the back is loving your neighbor. And a concrete aspect of loving your neighbor is giving to those in need. Caring for orphans and widows in their distress is true piety (Jam. 1:27). Cornelius, while revering God, also generously helped his fellow neighbors, which earned him praise from the Jewish community (Acts 10:22).

(3) A devout person always prays to God.

Look at Acts 10:2 - "... and prayed to God regularly." Cornelius followed the Jewish custom of prayer and prayed regularly. The Jewish custom of prayer was to pray twice a day (9:00 AM and 3:00 PM) or even three times (9:00 AM, 12:00 PM, and 3:00 PM). In other words, Cornelius had a disciplined prayer life. And what's amazing is that Cornelius' prayers and acts of charity were remembered before God. Look at verse 4: "... Your prayers and gifts to the poor have come up as a memorial offering before God." Here we see a connection between prayer life and giving. The connection between prayer and giving shows that when prayer is based on precedents, it becomes right prayer (Yoo).

Second, Cornelius was a person who encountered an angel in a vision.

Devout Cornelius, following his regular prayer routine, was praying around the ninth hour, which is approximately 3:00 PM by today's time, when he had an encounter with an angel of God in a vision (v. 3). At that moment, Cornelius, filled with fear, asked, 'What is it, Lord?' (v. 4). The angel responded, 'Your prayers and gifts to the poor have come up as a memorial offering before God' (v. 4). Here, we must learn an important principle of piety. It is that a saint's prayer must be accompanied by his deeds of charity in order for it to be presented before God (Park). In the end, having observed

Cornelius' pious life, his life of prayer intertwined with acts of charity, God remembered and blessed Cornelius, commanding him in his vision to send men to the house of Simon the tanner and invite a man named Peter (vv. 5-6).

The lesson we learn here is that God is a God who draws near to the devout. Like devout Cornelius, who had a life of prayer combined with acts of charity, God draws near to such saints, desiring to bless them. Look at Deuteronomy 4:7 – “What other nation is so great as to have their gods near them the way the Lord our God is near us whenever we pray to him?” What is the problem then? The problem lies in offering prayers, yet not offering living prayers. In other words, the issue is that although prayers are being offered to God, the action of prayer is deficient. As a result, such prayers, being deficient in action, cannot manifest the power of prayer. Just as living faith is a faith with action, living prayer is a prayer with action, or a prayer that is put into practice. Think about the prayer and action of Jesus. In John 17, there is a prayer of Jesus for his disciples, and within that prayer, there is a plea for the protection of his disciples (vv. 11, 12). In this way, Jesus protected his disciples during his earthly ministry. For example, when his disciples encountered a storm at sea, Jesus calmed the storm, demonstrating his protection for them. Another lesson we should gain here is that when experiencing God's intervention, we should approach it with reverence. When devout Cornelius encountered an angel of God in his vision while praying, he 'stared at him in fear' (Acts 10:4). Likewise, when we experience God's intervention, we should approach it with fear, considering His holiness and majesty. Dr. Yoon-seon Park states: 'If the word of God, which is always present to us (the Bible), is received fittingly through the Holy Spirit, it will instill fear in us. However, for the most part, we are ignorant of this and do not fear it before the word of God due to our sinfulness' (Park). We should also experience God's intervention through His word. In other words, just as the Thessalonian saints received the word of God declared by Paul not as human words but as God's word, we too should receive the word of God through pastors, accepting it as the word of God (1 Thess. 2:13). When we do so, we can have a reverence for the word of God.

Third and last, Cornelius was an obedient person.

Look at Acts 10:7-8: “When the angel who spoke to him had gone, Cornelius called two of his servants and a devout soldier who was one of his attendants. He told them everything that had happened and sent them to Joppa.” Devout Cornelius, as soon as the angel departed, immediately obeyed the angel's command. He called two of his servants and a devout soldier from among his soldiers, and after explaining to them everything that had happened during his encounter with the angel, he sent them to Joppa, where Peter was staying. Would this obedience have been easy for Cornelius? Certainly not, when considering it from a human perspective, obeying the command of an angel was not an easy task. The reason being, there was a significant cultural barrier between Jews and Gentiles. Clearly, Cornelius knew how the Jews viewed people like him, Gentiles. The Jews did not regard Gentiles as equals, so Cornelius could have easily disobeyed, given that he had ample reason to fear the Jews. However, devout Cornelius transcended cultural biases and immediately obeyed the angel's command. Therefore,

he sent two servants and a devout soldier to Joppa, because he desired to hear the message that God would convey through Peter (v. 22).

The lesson we can draw here is that an obedient leader produces obedient followers. Cornelius, who was a centurion, demonstrated obedience to the angel's instructions, and we see his devout soldier obeying Cornelius' command in today's passage. Just as a child's obedience to their parents influences the child to obey them, an obedient person exerts the influence of piety on those around them. The insight gained from the Old Testament is the principle of thorough obedience. Nowhere is this more starkly demonstrated than when Abraham received the command to offer his son Isaac. God spoke, and Abraham obeyed. He did not devise emergency measures, nor did he offer conditions or excuses. Through a prolonged process of suffering, Abraham learned one profound truth about life, which was to obey the voice of the Lord. This 'holy obedience' is the conduit through which a simple life flows. Thorough obedience is only possible when we place our ultimate loyalty to God. The Ten Commandments begin with three concise warnings against idolatry, recognizing that anything higher than loyalty to God amounts to idolatry (Internet).

Today, we reflected on the finest moment of Cornelius. Indeed, what kind of Christians should we be? We should be devout Christians. We should be Christians who combine prayer with good deeds. We should be obedient Christians.

Imperfect, failing to balance prayer and good deeds, and committing sins of disobedience, I,

James Kim

(Praying with the hope that I may become true Christian)

A Devout Family

[Acts 10:2]

What should we do to build a devout family more than a happy family? Through Cornelius and his family, we want to be taught in three ways:

First, a devout family fears God.

Look at Acts 10:2a – “a devout man and one who feared God with all his household ...” The fact that Cornelius, the leader of the household, was a devout man who feared God with all his household gives us a valuable lesson. And that lesson is that the man, the husband and the father, should take the initiative in fearing God. Then what does it mean to fear God? It is to hate evil. Look at Proverbs 8:13 – “The fear of the LORD is to hate evil; Pride and arrogance and the evil way And the perverted mouth, I hate.” The Bible says that God hates pride, arrogance, the evil way and the perverted mouth. Therefore, those who fear God should hate them too. If fearing God is to hate evil, then if we think in opposite way, fearing God is to love good. Look at Romans 12:9 – “Let love be without hypocrisy Abhor what is evil; cling to what is good.” Look at Ephesians 2:10 – “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.” Look at Galatians 6:9 – “Let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we will reap if we do not grow weary.” The devout family is the Christ-centered family which the family fears God. The family who fears God hates evil and loves good. Therefore, we should not lose heart in doing good.

Second, a devout family gives many alms.

Look at Acts 10:2b – “... and gave many alms to the Jewish people ...” Cornelius and his family show two aspects of true godliness, that is fearing God above and loving people down. True devotion means two things must coexist together. The front of the coin is to fear God, and the back of the coin is to love the neighbor. And the specific aspect of neighboring love is giving alms or relief. True godliness is to take care of the orphans and the widows in distress. Look at James 1:27 – “Pure

and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.” Apostle James says that pure and undefiled religion (godliness) in the sight of our God is to visit orphans and widows in their distress. And those who fear God keep themselves unstained by the world. Cornelius was well spoken and respected by all the Jewish people because he who was a righteous and God-fearing man gave many alms to those in need (Acts 10:2). Look at Acts 10:22 – “The men replied, ‘We have come from Cornelius the centurion. He is a righteous and God-fearing man, who is respected by all the Jewish people. ...’” Our family and church also should work hard to give alms. In fearing God, we must serve our neighbors, especially those who are alienated from society. This is true religion and godliness in the sight of God.

Third and last, a devout family prays to God continually.

Look at Acts 10:2c – “... and prayed to God continually.” Cornelius always prayed according to the prayer customs of the Jews. The prayer customs of the Jews were prayed twice a day (9 am, 3 pm) or three times a day (9 am, 12 pm, 3 pm). In other words, Cornelius had a regular prayer life. And what is amazing is the fact that Cornelius's prayers and alms were ascended as a memorial before God. Look at verse 4: “... And he said to him, "Your prayers and alms have ascended as a memorial before God.” Here we can see that prayer life and giving alms are connected. The connection between prayer and giving alms shows that prayer is the right prayer when it is based on good deeds (Yoo Sang-Sup). Those who fear God are those who pray. We must strive for regular prayer life. And we must offer a living prayer to God. We should pray to God in fear of Him and strive for giving alms in love for our neighbors. We must live a life of prayer that goes with good works.

A devout family is a family that fears God. A devout family is a family that loves and helps (gives alms to) their neighbors. A devout family is a praying family.

Dedicated to building a devout family,

James Kim

(Praying that the Lord will establish our family as one that fears God, loves our neighbors, and prays to God)

“God has made clean”

[Acts 10:9-16]

A young pastor visiting a mining village passed by a dark and dirty tunnel and discovered beautiful white flowers growing inside. He asked one of the miners, ‘How is it that such clean and beautiful flowers are blooming in this remote mine?’ The miner replied, ‘Pour coal dust on those flowers.’ So, the pastor did as instructed, but to his amazement, as soon as the coal dust touched the petals, it fell to the ground, leaving the flower completely unaffected. The reason was that the petals were so smooth that the coal dust couldn't stick to them. Our hearts are the same. Though we live as humans in a world full of sin, God, who owns us, keeps us clean, protecting us from being ensnared by sin. Finding ourselves in the midst of sin is like a beautiful white flower blooming in a mine. The key to cleanliness lies in belonging to God. The secret of seeing God, the secret of knowing God, comes from a clean heart. A clean heart comes from God. We must have a clean heart. Only then can we find perfect happiness in any situation. However, there is a scheme from Satan to take away this happiness. Look at 2 Corinthians 11:3 - "But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent's cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ." Satan does everything in his power to lead us away from our sincere and pure devotion to Christ. One way Satan does this is by causing us to doubt God's Word. One of the verses that Satan uses to cause doubt is John 15:3 - "You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you." This verse refers to being already clean as a result of being bathed in the Word of God. Just as we become clean when we take a shower or bath, we have become clean as a result of being bathed in the Word of the Lord. Here, spiritual cleansing refers to the work of regeneration brought about by the Holy Spirit (Yoo). Those who have undergone this spiritual cleansing are already clean. Through the work of regeneration by the Holy Spirit, we have become a new creation in Jesus Christ, clean and ready to love our brothers and sisters sincerely from the heart without deceit. Look at 1 Peter 1:22 - "Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for each other, love one another deeply, from the heart." Are we, as a church, practicing such love? I would like to draw a few lessons today from Acts 10:9-16, focusing on the phrase "God has made clean" (v. 15).

First, we should not call what God has made clean impure.

Look at Acts 10:15 - "The voice spoke from heaven a second time, 'Do not call anything impure that God has made clean.'" Starting from Acts 9:32, we see that Peter traveled widely and in Lydda, he healed a paralyzed man named Aeneas, who had been bedridden for eight years, in the name of Jesus Christ. He also raised a woman named Dorcas (or Tabitha) in Joppa, who had already died. After these amazing events, Peter stayed at the house of Simon the tanner in Joppa, a person who worked with leather goods (v. 43). While he was staying in Simon's house, Cornelius was praying. While Cornelius was praying, he encountered an angel of God. At that moment, the angel instructed Cornelius to send for a man named Peter in Joppa. Upon hearing this command (v. 5), Cornelius summoned two of his household servants and a devout soldier from among those who waited on him and sent them to Joppa (vv. 7-8). The next day, when the men Cornelius sent approached Joppa, Peter was staying on the roof of Simon's house. Around noon, he had a vision (v. 9). In the vision, Peter saw a large sheet being lowered by its four corners from heaven, and it contained all sorts of four-footed animals, as well as reptiles and birds. A voice told Peter, "Get up, Peter. Kill and eat" (v. 13). Peter's response was, "Surely not, Lord! I have never eaten anything impure or unclean" (v. 14). Then the voice from heaven spoke to Peter a second time, saying, "Do not call anything impure that God has made clean" (v. 15). This happened three times, and then the sheet was immediately taken back up to heaven (v. 16). What does the vision that Peter saw mean? It can only mean one thing: a divine command from God that people from all regions, nations, races, without discrimination, can come and hear the gospel of Jesus Christ and be saved through faith (Park). This cannot be anything other than a meaning that contradicts the Jewish religious beliefs of the Old Testament era that Peter held. In other words, when we refer to Leviticus 11, the Israelites of the Old Testament era did not eat certain kinds of animals as they were considered unclean according to God's statutes. God's command to Peter in the vision was to eat those unclean animals. This meant that Peter no longer needed to strictly adhere to those statutes in the Old Testament era (Park). In other words, God's command to Peter in the New Testament era was to proclaim the gospel without discrimination between Jews and Gentiles.

In the body of the Lord's church, there should be no discrimination or prejudice. However, it seems that we Koreans engage in a lot of discrimination. We discriminate based on educational background, social status, family ties, and wealth to the point where it becomes suffocating. I believe that our nation, before God, should repent most deeply for judging and discriminating against one another. However, the problem is that even Korean churches have not yet abandoned the sin of judging and discriminating against people based on their appearance. Instead of looking at individuals within the church with spiritual maturity, dedication, and spiritual purity, we have not been able to break the habit of judging based on material wealth and worldly status. This is what Korean churches need to repent for. If a church shames and despises the poor and the weak, if the rich are exalted and the poor who come to the church have to bow their heads and be ignored, and if the saints form groups for fellowship based on social and economic status, it can by no means be considered the true form of a church. The Bible states that discrimination is a sin. In order for us to avoid discrimination, we need to

start with our speech. Among the words we use, there are often expressions that discriminate against others, even though we may not realize it. We should always be cautious about whether a certain word is discriminatory towards others or whether it might cause further harm to those who are already weak and wounded before using it. Second, we should examine whether there is a mindset of discrimination in our hearts, and if we have prejudice towards anyone, we should examine what our motives are. Last, it's not enough to just examine our hearts for any discriminatory thoughts; we need to actively make intentional efforts to care for the poor, the weak, and the wounded (Internet).

Second and last, what God has made clean is indeed clean.

When Peter refused to eat what he considered impure and unclean, he did not realize that the regulations in Leviticus 11 regarding unclean animals had been revoked because of Christ. In today's passage, Acts 10:15, the phrase "that God has made clean" refers to a simple past tense indicating an historical fact. In other words, it signifies that all deliberate religious regulations have been abolished due to the fact that Jesus Christ, through His crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension, has gained glory (Col. 2:14-15). Therefore, there is no longer a distinction made consciously about certain animals being clean or unclean (Park).

The doctrine of the dietary laws in the Sabbath-keeping faith is as follows. There are two main components: one is to refrain from eating unclean foods, and the other is to practice vegetarianism. The Sabbath-keeping faith teaches the prohibition of consuming foods deemed impure and abominable in Leviticus 11. This means that foods considered impure and abominable in the Old Testament are still considered as such and should not be consumed. However, is this doctrine of the Sabbath-keeping faith in line with the Scriptures? The regulations of impurity and abomination in Leviticus 11 do not apply to New Testament Christians, as all these regulations have been nullified by the redemption of the cross. The Bible provides clear evidence for this: "Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ" (Col. 2:16-17) (Internet). Look at Romans 14:14 - "I am convinced, being fully persuaded in the Lord Jesus, that nothing is unclean in itself. But if anyone regards something as unclean, then for that person it is unclean." On the contrary, Paul says, "Forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth. For every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving: For it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer" (1 Tim. 4:3-5).

However, the key point in today's passage, Acts 10:9-16, is not about food itself, but rather, God is using the metaphor of food to teach Peter a lesson. This lesson is nothing other than God instructing Peter, and by extension, the Jewish people, to no longer consider the Gentiles as impure and unclean. God had already cleansed the Gentiles, whom Peter considered impure, through the atonement of Jesus Christ on the cross, so He commands Peter to preach the gospel to them. When God told Peter

in the vision to kill and eat the unclean animals he saw, it was a symbolic representation of Peter welcoming and embracing the Gentile men sent by Cornelius, and sharing fellowship with them (Yoo). In a way, just as Jesus touched the leper, who was considered impure from a Jewish perspective, and dined with tax collectors and sinners who were viewed as defiled, God was telling Peter not to adhere to the Jewish purity laws anymore, but to accept and preach the Gospel to those whom God had already cleansed.

The thoughts and feelings that the Lord, who is currently the head of the church, gives me are to embrace and welcome souls in society who, like Jesus, are rejected and marginalized, in other words, those who experience exclusion and loneliness. We should fellowship together in the Lord and move forward. Just as Jesus said, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" (Lk. 5:31-32), our church should invite and embrace spiritually sick individuals, those burdened by sin, and lead them to repentance through the love of the Lord (v. 32). Look at Romans 2:4 - "Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, forbearance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness is intended to lead you to repentance?" The church should treat souls who are rejected and cast aside by the world, considering them as impure, with the love of the Lord, accepting them and enduring with patience, while leading them to repentance and turning them towards receiving Jesus as their Savior.

We should recognize that what God has deemed clean, we should not consider impure. Rather, we should understand that what God has cleansed is indeed clean. God has cleansed me and many others through the atonement of Jesus' cross. Therefore, we should not consider ourselves impure.

With a heart of gratitude for God's grace, who has cleansed us through the blood of Jesus,

James Kim

(As I seek for the glorious day to come)

If We Want to Listen to the Word of God

[Acts 10:17-33]

"If you want to listen to the word of God, you must turn off your cell phone during worship." There was a pastor who always scolded the congregation because of the sound of cell phones during worship. However, one day, while he was passionately delivering his sermon, again ... "Beep~~~" The sound of a cell phone rang out. But... it kept ringing, and no one answered, right? The congregation started murmuring. The pastor's temperature began to rise. However, he realized belatedly that the cell phone was ringing in his own pocket. With the pastor's next comment, everyone in the congregation burst into laughter... Opening his cell phone, the pastor said, "Oh, God? I'm in the middle of worship right now... I'll call you as soon as the service is over and talk to you in heaven ...' (Internet). What can we learn from this anecdote? Of course, it carries the message to turn off cell phones during worship, but in connection with today's passage, Acts 10:17-33, there is something else we can learn. It is none other than the fact that while we may hear the sound of someone else's cell phone well, we may not be listening well to the word of God that He speaks to us personally. For example, while listening to the sermon, thinking, 'Oh, this word is for my brother or sister so-and-so...', in other words, applying God's word spoken to oneself to someone else.

Indeed, how can we truly listen to the word of God? I would like to receive two main teachings based on today's passage, Acts 10:17-33.

First, if we want to listen to the word of God, we must exert effort in personally meditating on it.

What are the stages of Christian meditation training? If there is a path to deep meditation, it is by honestly presenting oneself to God, inviting Him into every aspect of daily life, avoiding the

rupture of repentance consciousness due to the state of sin, and confessing everything to God in daily life (prayer) while thinking in connection with God (meditation), gradually expanding the strong sense of repentance in faith practices to everyday life.

(1) The first step in meditation is to have constant self-reflection and confession of sins.

We must gather our thoughts around everything, from all matters and trivial things, that are related to God. Then, we should rely on God's compassion and love.

(2) The second step in meditation is based on actively seeking to know and find God.

We must make an effort to seek the image of God through the example of sanctified saints. We should also strive to know God through the words of the Bible (Internet).

When we apply this specific training of Christian meditation, we can call it QT (Quiet Time). So, what is QT? QT is a conversation where we both listen to God's word (listening) and speak our own words (prayer). There are four elements to QT: (1) Time - a quiet time, designated time, regular and scheduled time, (2) Place - a quiet place, a place without disturbance, designated place, regular and scheduled place, (3) Bible verses, (4) Prayer. There are a few preparations before starting QT, and the first preparation is the state of the heart. It requires an honest heart, an attitude of wanting to hear God's word, and a submissive attitude (Internet).

In Acts 10:17, 19, we see Peter, who strives to understand God's will: "Peter was greatly puzzled about the meaning of the vision" (v. 17), "While Peter was still thinking about the vision" (v. 19). After seeing the vision on the rooftop while staying at Simon the tanner's house, Peter pondered deeply about the meaning of the vision, as he couldn't grasp it at first (v. 18). The verb "puzzled" is used only four times in the Gospel of Luke and Acts, and in each context, it refers to a situation where there was no clear understanding of what had happened (Lk. 9:7; Acts 2:12, 5:24, 10:17) (Yoo). At that moment, the men sent by Cornelius were standing outside Simon's house, where Peter was staying, and asked loudly, "Is Simon who is called Peter staying here?" (v. 18). What's remarkable is that Peter, who had pondered so deeply about the meaning of the vision, didn't hear the loud voices of the men sent by Cornelius (v. 19). The verb "thinking" in verse 19 means to contemplate something thoroughly (Yoo). Then, the Holy Spirit spoke to Peter, saying, "Two men are looking for you. So, get up and go downstairs. Do not hesitate to go with them, for I have sent them" (v. 19). In the Korean translation, it says "two men," but this is a mistranslation. Cornelius sent three men. What's interesting is the phrase "for I have sent them." Who is the "I" here? It is the Holy Spirit. In other words, the Holy Spirit prompted Cornelius to send his two servants and a devout soldier to Peter. Eventually, Peter came to understand the meaning of the vision. He realized that God had cleansed the Gentiles, so he should welcome the Gentiles who came to call him and go with them to preach the gospel (Yoo). With the help of the Holy

Spirit, Peter quickly understood the meaning of the vision and obeyed the Holy Spirit's instruction to go with the men. Look at verse 21: "Peter went down and said to the men, 'I'm the one you're looking for. Why have you come?'" At this moment, the men sent by Cornelius explained to Peter about Cornelius, saying, "He is a righteous and God-fearing man, who is respected by all the Jewish people" (v. 22). They relayed the angel's instruction to Peter: "'Send to Joppa for Simon who is called Peter. He will bring you a message through which you and all your household will be saved'" (v. 22). Upon hearing this, Peter welcomed the Gentile Cornelius sent men into the house and lodged with them that night at Simon the tanner's house (v. 23) (Yoo). This is an astonishing fact. In the end, Peter, following the voice of God that instructed him to eat the unclean animals he saw in the vision, welcomed the Gentiles, who were considered unclean, sent by Cornelius, and stayed with them in the house. What's even more astonishing is that Peter allowed the Roman soldiers, whom the Jews disliked, to enter the house and stay with them. Professor Sang-seop Yoo remarks: 'Now Peter's paradigm has decisively changed, and he can no longer turn back. The old paradigm that Gentiles, being unclean, couldn't associate with Jews has now been buried in history for him. If the Apostle Peter hadn't promptly embraced the paradigm shown by the Holy Spirit, he wouldn't have become the protagonist who initiated the first mission to the Gentiles. The fact that only those sensitive to the leading mission of the Holy Spirit can become pioneers who transcend the thinking of the past continues to be emphasized in the Book of Acts' (Yoo).

We must wrestle with the word of God. How can we deeply meditate on the Bible?

(1) The first step is to read the Bible text as it is, fundamentally.

There are a few things to keep in mind in this first step. We must discard preconceptions and read the Bible as it is. Also, as we read the scripture, there are often explanations provided alongside the text. If we don't understand the word, it's natural for our eyes to be drawn to these explanations. However, we should refrain from reading them and grapple with the text ourselves. We should aim for our own understanding through our own wrestling, rather than letting someone else's interpretation fix our thoughts.

(2) The second step is interpreting the given scripture.

In this step, referring to explanations (e.g., footnotes/references) for unfamiliar verses can be very helpful. It's good to use resources like Bible dictionaries, Bible commentaries, and Bible maps.

(3) The third step is applying the given word to our lives concretely (Internet).

Second and last, if we want to hear the word of God, we must eagerly await and listen with a heart of reverence for the word of God proclaimed during worship.

Look at Acts 10:24 - "The following day he arrived in Caesarea. Cornelius was expecting them and had called together his relatives and close friends." After lodging at Simon's house, Peter and his companions, a group of about six brothers from Joppa (11:12), set off for Caesarea the next day (10:23). It took them about two days to reach Caesarea. When they arrived, Peter and his group found that Cornelius had gathered his relatives and close friends and was waiting for them at his house (v. 24). Look at verse 27. Peter said he saw a gathering of people. Peter then addressed the assembled crowd, saying, "'You are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with or visit a Gentile. But God has shown me that I should not call anyone impure or unclean'" (v. 28). What Peter said pertained to the customs of Jews at the time and God's commandment contrary to those customs. According to the customs of the time, it was unlawful for a Jew to associate with or visit a non-Jew. This was not only common knowledge among the Jews, but also well understood by the Gentiles gathered at Cornelius's house. 'Keep yourselves separate from the nations and do not eat with them or imitate their customs,' was a general principle for Jews (Yoo). Going beyond these Jewish customs, God showed Peter through a vision (within the vision) that he should not call anyone impure or unclean (v. 28). Peter, obediently, visited Cornelius's house and shared the vision he had seen. When he asked, "Why have you sent for me?" (v. 29), Cornelius also explained the vision he received during prayer in verses 30-32. Afterwards, Cornelius said to Peter, "Immediately, without hesitation, we have come. Now we are all here in the presence of God to listen to everything the Lord has commanded you to tell us" (v. 33). He made it clear that everything Peter was about to say to them was not Peter's own words, but the commandment of the Lord, so they were eager to listen (Yoo). Cornelius, his relatives, his friends, and everyone gathered at Cornelius's house were ready to hear the word of God through Peter and urged him to speak.

We must cultivate an attitude of wanting to hear God's word. This attitude involves eagerly waiting before God with a heart that reveres His word. Cornelius, whose heart burned with a desire for grace, not only wanted to receive it himself but also wished for his relatives and close friends to partake in it. He invited them, gathering them together with an eager heart to await the word before God. As Yoon-seon Park said: 'It is precious in the eyes of God when a person desires to personally receive His grace and hopes that others will do the same. It is a fervent eagerness that reveres grace' (Park).

In Jay E. Adams' book "Preaching with Purpose," in the chapter titled "Preparing to Listen Well," the author offers some practical advice, emphasizing that the preparation of the listener is just as important, if not more so, than the preparation of the preacher:

- (1) Make sure to get enough sleep.

In order to listen well to the Sunday sermon, it's important to go to bed early on Saturday night and get sufficient rest. This way, you can become an excellent audience.

- (2) Arrive at church on time.

If you rush and arrive at church hastily, you won't be in the right mindset to listen to the sermon. Arriving at church just before the service starts, out of breath and in a rush, will hinder you and your family from worshiping effectively.

(3) Have a proper breakfast.

If you skip breakfast on Sunday morning, you may become irritable and impatient. Planning to rush home quickly after the service to eat might lead to impatience.

(4) Prepare in advance.

It's a good idea to review the passage that will be preached before coming to hear the sermon. You need to invest in preparing to hear the sermon.

(5) Pray.

Prayer for the preacher, the congregation, and yourself is important.

(6) Be consistent.

Regular attendance at church is important. Approach God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having your hearts sprinkled to cleanse you from a guilty conscience (Heb. 10:22).

With a heart of gratitude to God, who allows us to taste the joy of meditating on His word,

James Kim

(Apart from Your voice, there is no greater joy)

People Welcomed by God

[Acts 10:34-48]

Whom do you welcome into your life? If priest Henry Nouwen were to talk about someone he welcomed into his life, he could say it was a severely disabled individual named Adam Arnett. Nouwen taught theological psychology at Yale in the 1970s, lectured part-time at Harvard in the 1980s, and also did missionary work in South America. In the 1990s, he spent the last ten years of his life caring for disabled individuals in the L'Arche community in Daybreak, Canada. Among the disabled individuals he cared for, Adam stood out to Nouwen, and they formed a special connection. After Adam passed away in February 1996 at the age of 34, Nouwen wrote a book titled "Adam: The Beloved," which was published in September of the same year. Many of Nouwen's friends, who held him in high regard, questioned his decision to leave a prestigious university to invest his time and energy in caring for Adam. They couldn't understand why he chose to be in a place where he could provide more help, structured guidance, and greater opportunities for service. However, through Adam's life, Nouwen saw Jesus, and in the book, he described the profound impact of encountering Adam's life and death: '... From the moment I saw Adam's body lying in the coffin, I was captivated by the mystery of his life and death. The fact that struck me like a flash of lightning in my heart was that this disabled person had received God's love for all eternity, and had been sent into this world with a unique mission, and now that mission had been fulfilled.' Henry Nouwen welcomed Adam, this disabled person, as someone sent by God, to be an instrument of God's blessings in the midst of profound vulnerability. When he did so, a fundamental change took place. Nouwen wrote in his book: 'From that moment on, Adam appeared as someone special, extraordinary, a person of promise with amazing and innate talents... His wondrous existence and the unbelievable worth he embodies will guide us to understand that we too are dearly cherished by God, blessed with grace, and loved as His children' (Internet).

The passage reflects on the awe-inspiring spirituality of recognizing the worth and love that God bestows upon us and those He sends into our lives. It encourages us to welcome them in the name of the Lord. Through such encounters, we come to realize how precious we all are as human beings. Understanding how God cherishes and loves us in our very existence can bring about fundamental

transformation in our lives. I would like to meditate today on Acts 10:34-48, focusing on the passage titled 'People welcomed by God.' I want to reflect on who the Apostle Peter realized God welcomes, and receive guidance on the kind of people we should strive to be.

First, people welcomed by God are individuals who fear God and practice righteousness.

Look at Acts 10:35 - "But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him." After hearing Cornelius' words, the Apostle Peter came to realize that God does not show partiality based on outward appearances (v. 34) and that God accepts those who fear Him and practice righteousness, regardless of whether they are Jews or Gentiles (v. 35). Indeed, Cornelius was one who feared God and practiced righteousness. As we have already reflected on in Acts 10:2, Cornelius was a man who was devout, and one who feared God with all his household, who gave alms generously to the people, and prayed to God always. His piety extended beyond his household, as evidenced by fearing God with all his household. It is not surprising that Cornelius, who lived a life that served as an example of fearing God, would also be described as one who gave alms generously to the people and prayed to God always. Cornelius' relationship with God was characterized by both fearing God and loving his neighbor through acts of charity, which is equivalent to practicing righteousness. This is indeed a righteous act.

In the Book of Psalms, we find seven blessings that God bestows upon those who fear Him:

(1) God looks upon those who fear Him.

Look at Psalms 33:18 - "Behold, the eye of the Lord is on those who fear Him, on those who hope in His mercy."

(2) God has compassion on those who fear Him.

Look at Psalms 103:13: "As a father pities his children, so the Lord pities those who fear Him."

(3) God loves those who fear Him.

Look at Psalms 103:17: "But the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear Him, and His righteousness to children's children."

(4) God provides food for those who fear Him.

Look at Psalms 111:5: "He has given food to those who fear Him; He will ever be mindful of His covenant."

(5) God blesses those who fear Him, regardless of their status.

Look at Psalms 115:13: "He will bless those who fear the Lord, both small and great."

(6) God fulfills the desires of those who fear Him.

Look at Psalms 145:19: "He will fulfill the desire of those who fear Him; He also will hear their cry and save them."

(7) God takes pleasure in those who fear Him.

Look at Psalms 147:11: "The Lord takes pleasure in those who fear Him, in those who hope in His mercy."

Let us, like Cornelius, be individuals who fear God and practice righteousness.

Second, people welcomed by God are individuals who bear witness to the gospel of peace.

Look at Acts 10:42 - "And He commanded us to preach to the people, and to testify that it is He who was ordained by God to be Judge of the living and the dead." After realizing that God accepts Gentiles like Cornelius who fear God and practice righteousness, Peter proclaimed the gospel of Jesus before all who were gathered in Cornelius' house (vv. 36-43). The gospel he preached was the good news of peace brought about by Jesus Christ. It was the "gospel of peace" (v. 36). This means it is the gospel that reconciles humanity, who were once enemies of God due to sin, with God (Park). Peter proclaimed this gospel of peace to Cornelius and all the Gentiles gathered in his house, starting from the ministry of John the Baptist (v. 37) and concluding with the crucifixion of Jesus (vv. 39-40). The miracles and healings performed by Jesus of Nazareth in Peter's preaching were acts of salvation that liberated people from the bondage of Satan. Such powerful acts of salvation were possible because God was with Jesus of Nazareth (v. 38) (Yoo). Jesus himself carried out this saving work in the regions of Judea (including the Galilee region) and Jerusalem, and Peter, along with the other apostles, bore witness to these events (v.39). Peter emphasized that the central message of his preaching was the death and resurrection of Jesus (vv. 39-41). The risen and ascended Lord commanded Peter and the other apostles to proclaim the gospel of peace to the people, and through faith in Jesus, people receive forgiveness of sins through His name (v. 43).

The gospel of Jesus Christ is the gospel of peace. God welcomes those who proclaim this gospel of peace. So, how can those who proclaim the gospel of peace testify to it?

(1) We must proclaim the gospel of peace, just like Peter.

In simple terms, we need to preach. We must open our mouths and proclaim the truth that through the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ, those who believe in Him are reconciled with God, who was once their enemy due to their sins. Only Jesus Christ can reconcile us with God, and we must proclaim this good news.

(2) We must live a life characterized by the gospel of peace.

Living a life characterized by the gospel of peace means taking on the ministry of reconciliation. Paul says that God has given us the ministry of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:18). We can think of this ministry in two ways: (a) It refers to the ministry of proclaiming the gospel of reconciliation between God and people, which we have already meditated on. (b) It refers to the ministry of reconciling neighbors with one another. To fulfill this second ministry of reconciliation, we must, as peacemakers, break down the barrier of the dividing wall that exists between people. Look at Ephesians 2:14: "For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation."

We must bear witness to the gospel of peace of Jesus Christ through our words and lives. By doing so, we can be called sons and daughters of God. Look at Matthew 5:9 - "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God."

Third and last, people welcomed by God are individuals who exalt God.

Look at Acts 10:46 - "For they heard them speak with tongues and magnify God." While Peter was proclaiming the gospel of peace to Cornelius and all those gathered in his house, the Holy Spirit came upon all who heard his words (v. 44). At that moment, both Peter and the Jewish believers who had come with him were astonished (v. 45). How did Peter and the Jewish believers know that the Gentiles, including Cornelius, and all those gathered with him, had received the Holy Spirit? They heard two things: Speaking with tongues and magnifying God (v. 46). Here, the statement that the Gentiles gathered with Cornelius magnified God means they praised Him. This event of speaking in tongues and magnifying God is similar to what happened when the 120 disciples received the Holy Spirit (2:11): "Cretans and Arabs—we hear them speaking in our own tongues the wonderful works of God." Witnessing the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, Peter instructed the Jewish believers who had come with him to baptize Cornelius and all those with him in the name of Jesus Christ. As a result, Cornelius and all the Gentiles who were with him received baptism and became part of the new covenant community of God. They were no longer just Jewish people belonging to God, but believing Gentiles now stood side by side with believing Jewish followers, confidently part of God's people (Yoo).

Cornelius and all the Gentiles gathered with him, who received the Holy Spirit, magnified God. In other words, they exalted Him by praising God through speaking in tongues. God delights in us praising Him, whether in Korean, English, Spanish, or any other language.

Those welcomed by God are individuals who fear God and practice righteousness. They also bear witness to the gospel of peace and exalt God. May we all desire to be individuals welcomed by God.

Desiring to be a person welcomed by God,

James Kim

(Praying to be able to welcome neighbors with the heart of Christ)

‘Who was I?’

[Acts 11:1-18]

How do you accept criticism? How do you react when others criticize you? In the essay ‘Turning Criticism into Pearls’ by Pastor Young-min Pi (Gangnam Central Baptist Church), he says: ‘When a clam takes a breath on the sandy ocean floor, there are times when a grain of sand is mistakenly lodged inside its fragile flesh. When a rough and hard grain of sand is embedded, the clam releases its body fluid to alleviate the pain, constantly wrapping and rewrapping the grain of sand, enduring years of hardship. After overcoming many years of hardship, the sand inside the clam becomes a beautiful pearl, emitting a radiant spectrum of colors. However, not all the sand that enters the clam's body becomes a pearl. Many clams, unable to overcome the severe pain caused by the grain of sand, end up perishing. While living in this world, we cannot completely escape from being criticized. Winston Churchill, the former Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, said, ‘The only way to avoid criticism is to say nothing, do nothing, and be nothing.’ Through criticism, we mature, and through criticism, we must enter into the history of God's righteous judgment and transform sand into pearls’ (Internet).

When I look at Acts 11:17, I see that when the apostle Peter went up to Jerusalem, he spoke to the circumcised believers (v. 2) who criticized him, saying, "So if God gave them the same gift he gave us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to think that I could stand in God's way?" In today's passage, I want to reflect on the circumcised believers and Peter under the title "who was I," and receive the lessons provided.

First, they were the circumcised believers who criticized.

Look at Acts 11:2-3: "So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcised believers criticized him and said, 'You went into the house of uncircumcised men and ate with them.'" Assembled in the house of Cornelius, whom God welcomed, along with all the people present, Peter was testifying to them about the gospel of peace. After the incident where the Holy Spirit came upon all who heard the message, Peter went up to Jerusalem and met with church leaders and the general congregation. They had already heard the news that the Gentiles have also received the word of God. In their meeting, the

circumcised believers criticized Peter. Their criticism centered around why Peter had eaten with uncircumcised men. Here, "circumcised believers" refers to Jewish believers in Jesus. These Jewish believers, who had faith in Jesus, believed mistakenly that one must first honor the Law of Moses and become an esteemed Jew before receiving the blessing of Christ (Park). Because of this, it was incomprehensible to them that Cornelius and all those gathered in his house had received the word of God without adhering to Moses' Law. They couldn't fathom how these Gentiles could receive the blessing of Christ without first becoming esteemed Jews. Therefore, they confronted Peter. In reality, the religious leaders, the Pharisees and scribes, had no legitimate grounds to criticize Peter. This was because Peter entering the house of an uncircumcised man and dining with him was not prohibited by the Law, but was based on Rabbinic tradition (Park). However, though it may have appeared that the circumcised believers were criticizing Peter for dining with Gentiles, in actuality, they were criticizing the shocking event of Gentiles receiving the word of God through the ministry of the Jewish apostle Peter.

Such criticism was also directed at Jesus. In Luke 15:1-2, when Jesus dined with tax collectors and sinners and the Pharisees and scribes, who were religious leaders, opposed him, it seemed outwardly like they were resenting Jesus for dining with tax collectors and sinners. However, in reality, they resented Jesus because of the salvific event for tax collectors and sinners that his fellowship represented. "Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, 'This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.'" In Luke 5:30, the Pharisees and teachers of the law saw Jesus dining with Levi, a tax collector, and many others at Levi's house, and they mocked Jesus' disciples, asking, "Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?" From the perspective of the religious leaders, the Pharisees and scribes, they had no choice but to resent and criticize Jesus and his disciples. To them, it was inconceivable nonsense that Jesus would welcome "all tax collectors and sinners." The reason for this was that the Jewish religious leaders firmly believed that God's salvific work was limited to their chosen people, the Jews. However, there was a fact that they were completely unaware of. That fact was that God's work of salvation was not limited to Jerusalem (the Jews), but extended to Jerusalem, all of Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8).

The lesson we should take from this is that we should not limit the work of God's salvation. We must heed the words of Jesus: "Jesus answered them, 'It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance'" (Lk. 5:31-32).

Second, there is the explanatory Peter.

Look at Acts 11:4 - "Peter began and explained everything to them." When Peter visited Cornelius to convey the message of salvation (v. 14) and shared how the Holy Spirit came upon them (v. 15), he subsequently explained the events in sequence to the circumcised Jewish Christians who criticized him. This explanation began with Peter praying and receiving a vision while staying at the

tanner Simon's house in Joppa (vv. 5-10). Then, messengers sent by Cornelius arrived and sought Peter (v. 11). At that moment, the Holy Spirit instructed Peter not to hesitate, but to go with them (v. 12). Peter recounted how he went to Cornelius' house, where he was invited in accordance with the angel's instructions, as reported by Cornelius (vv. 13-14). Finally, Peter shared the incident where the Holy Spirit came upon the Gentiles while he was proclaiming the gospel of peace in Cornelius' house (vv. 15-16). Afterward, Peter stated: "So if God gave them the same gift he gave us who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to think that I could stand in God's way?" (v. 17). He had simply obeyed God's command, and all that had transpired with the Gentile Cornelius—receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit through faith in Jesus for salvation—was a work of God. Therefore, how could Peter stand in the way of God's salvific work?

We should not be obstacles but rather conduits in the salvific work that takes place under the sovereignty of God. In the Gospel hymn "Channel of Blessing," there are these lyrics: "Break Thou the bread of life, dear Lord, to me,/ As Thou didst break the loaves beside the sea;/ Beyond the sacred page I seek Thee, Lord;/ My spirit pants for Thee, O Living Word." These words reflect the longing for spiritual nourishment from the living Word of God, akin to the breaking of bread beside the sea. The hymn conveys the yearning to go beyond the literal words of Scripture and to seek a living encounter with God. It recognizes that the Word of God is not confined to the pages of the Bible but is alive and active in our lives. The hymn goes on to express the desire for God to reveal Himself through the Scriptures: "Bless Thou the truth, dear Lord, to me, to me,/ As Thou didst bless the bread by Galilee;/ Then shall all bondage cease, all fetters fall;/ And I shall find my peace, my All in all." This reflects the hope that through the illumination of the Holy Spirit, the truths of Scripture will come alive and bring freedom and peace. The hymn ultimately acknowledges that Jesus is the ultimate source of spiritual sustenance: "Thou art the bread of life, O Lord, to me,/ Thy holy Word the truth that saveth me;/ Give me to eat and live with Thee above;/ Teach me to love Thy truth, for Thou art love." It recognizes Jesus as the source of spiritual nourishment, with His Word being the truth that brings salvation. The hymn concludes with a prayer to abide in Jesus and to be taught to love His truth, recognizing that He is love itself.

The third and the last group is the circumcision believers who give glory to God.

Look at Acts 11:18 – "When they heard this, they had no further objections and praised God, saying, 'So then, even to Gentiles God has granted repentance that leads to life.'" The circumcision believers, who believed in Jesus after hearing Peter's explanation, could no longer criticize. The reason is that they had conviction in their hearts after hearing Peter's explanation. That conviction was the assurance that God had granted repentance leading to life even to the Gentiles. Therefore, the circumcision believers gave glory to God.

How amazing is this? The circumcised believers who once criticized and opposed Peter, upon

hearing his explanation, now glorify God. How astonishing is this work of God? Not only did God make Peter realize that the salvation work of God was not only for the Jews but also for the Gentiles, but He also made the Jewish Christian believers in the Jerusalem church, who could be considered the mother church, understand through Peter's explanation that God had granted repentance leading to life even to the Gentiles. I believe this is truly significant in God's strategy for the salvation of the Gentiles. The reason being, even though Peter preached the gospel to Cornelius and all those gathered in his house in Caesarea, and they received the same Holy Spirit as Peter and other Jewish Christian believers, if the Jerusalem church, which can be called the mother church in terms of missionary strategy, did not acknowledge it, there would have been a delay in the Gentile mission strategy. However, God, through the apostle Peter, made it known to Cornelius and all those gathered in his house that the gospel was for them as well. This revelation not only silenced the opposition of the Jewish Christian believers in the Jerusalem church but also led them to acknowledge God's salvation work towards the Gentiles. Therefore, they gave glory to God.

Who are we to speak of the salvation work that God plans and carries out? We have nothing to say. No, we should have nothing to say. It is the sovereign work of God's salvation, and who are we to hinder God? We can never block God, and we should not even attempt to. We are merely instruments in the hands of God. If God chooses to use us in advancing His sovereign plan of salvation, then we must simply humbly obey. If God says He will use you and me to fulfill His sovereign plan of salvation, what can we say? We must humbly acknowledge God's work of salvation even if it is through us. And we must witness the glory of God and give glory to Him.

In our lives, we cannot fathom why such immense grace of salvation is bestowed upon us,

James Kim

(Praying that we all, as soldiers of the Lord who silently participate in the work of God's salvation even amidst criticism and opposition, may be established)

The Antioch Church (1)

[Acts 11:19-30]

William Barclay, a well-known Bible teacher and commentator, said the meaning of service like this: ‘When the world evaluates, the standard is how many people are you dominating, and how many people are going to come when you use your finger to give a sign to come? Also the worldly standard is intellectual standard, academic excellence or a number of executive meetings. Many also judge the greatness of a person based on his/her bank balance and how much of his/her assets and material possessions. But Jesus' evaluation has nothing to do with them. The Lord's evaluation standard is only one. And that one is how many people are you serving. There is greatness in it. If you really want to be like Jesus, there is nothing more than surrendering yourself to serve someone. This is a Christian challenge and an inevitable responsibility when the world is watching the church with suspicion. And this is a way to actively defend faith’ (Internet). What kind of church should our church be when the world is watching our church with suspicion? What are the challenges and the inevitable responsibility that our church has? It is to imitate Jesus. In particular, it is living a life of serving others like Jesus. Therefore, our church must be a “serving church.” I hope and pray that we serve our churches, serve our families and serve our neighbors. Let’s serve humbly, joyfully and voluntarily.

I would like to think and learn about what kind church was Antioch church based on Acts 11:19-30, under the heading “The Antioch church” and apply what we learn to our church so that our church can be like Antioch Church.

First, The Antioch church was a well-known church.

Look at Acts 11:22 – “The news about them reached the ears of the church at Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas off to Antioch.” Here, what was the “The news about them” that the Jerusalem church saints heard? It was the news about a large number who believed in the Lord and turned to the Lord (v. 21) when some of the scattered people, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who came to Antioch due to the persecution that occurred in connection with Stephen and preached the Lord Jesus to the Greeks also (vv. 19-20). This news

reached the ears of the church at Jerusalem (v. 22). So the Jerusalem church sent Barnabas off to Antioch (v. 22).

The words of Acts 11:19-21 are the words of God that initiated the Hispanic Ministry at our church after studying that passage during the leader bible study. Those who were scattered because of the persecution that occurred in connection with Stephen went to Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch and spoke the word to no one except to Jews alone (v. 19). But there were some of them who went to Antioch and preached the Lord Jesus even to the Greeks (v. 20). When I was meditating on this, I began to wonder why God was still not moving our church from the Hispanic region. And the thought that came into my mind was that maybe the Lord's will is for us to reach out and preach the gospel to the dying Hispanic souls in this area. So our church leaders began to pray to God for a Hispanic pastor who can serve our church and our church neighbors. Then, about ten months later, God sent Pastor Victor Gomez to us and he began to serve our Hispanic Ministry (HM). I asked myself these questions: 'What is the rumor of our church? Or what rumor do we want to be spread?'

One day, I once learned about our church in the Korean newspaper Religion section. Our church didn't publish an article, but a reporter who wanted to cover our church wrote about our church and published it. Perhaps it was because our church has three ministries in one church: Korean Ministry (KM), English Ministry (EM) and Hispanic Ministry (HM). I personally hope that the news about our church can be spread like this: 'Wow, that church is united by God's love,' 'It's amazing how three ministries of different cultures and languages are united together in love,' 'That church is truly a church that keeps the unity of the Spirit in diversity,' etc.. In this age when churches are divided due to problems in the churches and as a result the churches aren't a good example to the world, I hope and pray that our church may be able to show the world the unity of the church within the three ministries. One thing that is unfortunate for us to see is that our church isn't like Antioch church in which "a large number who believed turned to the Lord" (v. 21). But I am thankful that about three of our church neighborhood families come to our Hispanic Ministry worship and prayer meeting. Another thing that I am thankful is that God has been working wonderfully in Tijuana, Mexico, where our Hispanic Ministry Pastors Gomez and his wife, Mrs. Elma Gomez and others who go down to Tijuana, Mexico every month. It shows the work of God and His gospel there, that so many Mexican souls have accepted Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. When I hear these news through Pastor Gomez, I cannot help but to think about the Lord's will as to what God is doing through our church in Tijuana, Mexico (Now also in Ensenada, Mexico too). When I hear the Lord's hand is with Pastor Gomez and his mission team, and a large number who has believed are turning to the Lord (v. 21), I wonder why the power of God is manifested more in Tijuana, Mexico than in our church. In the midst of this, I talked to Pastor Gomez about if it's the Lord, we should think about establishing a district church there.

As the Jerusalem Church sent Barnabas off to Antioch after hearing the news about the God's work of salvation in Antioch church, I thought about likewise our church is sending Pastor Gomez and his mission team to Tijuana, Mexico every month. I hope and pray that through our church members' prayers and service in love, we can hear more about the God's saving work in Tijuana, Mexico. I also pray and hope to hear the

same thing from other countries where our church is supporting with prayers and small amount of financial support. And I hope and pray that as our church serve humbly, joyfully and voluntarily our neighbors through community outreach, the power of the gospel may be manifested so that the good news about our church may spread to our neighborhood.

Second, Antioch church was Christian church.

Look at Acts 11:26 – “and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch And for an entire year they met with the church and taught considerable numbers; and the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch.” When the Jerusalem church heard the news about God's work of salvation in Antioch, they recognized the Gentile mission and sent Barnabas, who was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith, to Antioch (v. 24). And when Barnabas arrived at Antioch, he witnessed the grace of God (v. 23). In other words, Barnabas was delighted to see God's gracious work of saving the Gentiles. He actually witnessed with his own eyes that the larger number believed and turned to the Lord (v. 21). So he rejoiced and encouraged them all with resolute heart to remain true to the Lord (v. 23). The word of this encouragement was to keep remaining with the Lord with a purpose in mind’ (Park). The result of sending Barnabas to Antioch was that considerable numbers were brought to the Lord (v. 24). Eventually, after the large number believed and turned to the Lord through some of the Jews who had come to Antioch and preached the Lord Jesus, the Antioch church grew even more through Barnabas. Therefore, since Barnabas couldn’t work alone in the ministry of the Antioch church due to the larger number of believers, he went to Tarsus to find Saul (Paul) and brought him to Antioch (vv. 25-26). And for a entire year Barnabas and Paul systematically taught and trained the considerable numbers (v. 26, Yoo). As a result, the disciples of the Antioch church reached a qualitatively amazing maturity, so that for the first time they earned the nickname “Christians” from non-Christians. It means ‘followers of Christ.’ How well were they trained and followed Jesus Christ that they were called “Christians” who were followers of Christ in the eyes of the surrounding non-Christians?

Are we following Jesus Christ as His disciples? Or are we not half Christians? Someone said, ‘The condition to be unhappy is to be a half Christian.’ It means that when we live with dual life in the church and in the world, we will be unhappy. What does a ‘Christian businessman’ mean? If you think that everyone who goes to church and does business is a Christian businessman, that's a misunderstanding. If you do business and do not apply biblical principles of the business, but do your business only in worldly ways, then you aren’t a Christian businessman but a Christian who goes to church and do business. A true meaning of ‘Christian businessman’ is a person who does business by applying the teachings of Jesus Christ within the principles of business. The same is true for Christian workers. ‘A Christian worker’ refers to a person who does work with the word of Christ. However, even though there are many Christians who attend church and do their works in worldly ways, but only few people do business or work like Christians who apply the biblical principles to their business or work. In order for us to be influential in changing the world, we must apply the principles of the Bible to the principles of our lives. We must abandon our double life of faith and be born again as true Christians who change the world by revealing Christ in us (Internet).

Third and last, the Antioch church was a church doing the relief.

Look at Acts 11:29 – “And in the proportion that any of the disciples had means, each of them determined to send a contribution for the relief of the brethren living in Judea.” As the Antioch church grew up, through the ministry of Barnabas and Saul, they lived a life of following Jesus Christ so that many people earned the nickname “Christians” at the Antioch church. At that time, among some prophets who came down from Jerusalem to Antioch, Prophet Agabus prophesied through the Holy Spirit. He said that there would certainly be a great famine all over the world (vv. 27-28). And that prophecy was fulfilled during the reign of Claudius (v. 28). During the reign of Claudius, there was a series of crop failures and food shortages in Rome, Greece, Egypt, and Judea (Yoo). Because of this great famine, the people who lived in Judea suffered so much that they eventually suffered a great blow to the church in Judea and the church needed help. At that time, the Gentile church of Antioch determined to send a contribution for the relief of the brethren living in Judea (v. 29) and sent it in charge of Barnabas and Saul to the elders of the Jerusalem church (v. 30).

Here we can find the principle used by the Antioch church in helping the Jerusalem Church. And the principle is none other than "each according to his ability" (v. 29). This means that each of them supported their own savings according to their own economic capabilities (Yoo). This relief from the Antioch church makes me to think of the relief of Gentile Cornelius (Acts 10). Luke, the writer of the book of Acts who recorded the life of one person Cornelius in giving many alms in Acts 10, said in Acts 11 that not one Gentile person but the Gentile church of Antioch sent the contribution for the relief of the brethren in the Jerusalem church. How amazing is God's work? Interestingly, because the Antioch Church (which had a spiritual debt to Jerusalem church), which grew under the Jerusalem church support, helped the Jerusalem church economically, the relationship and fellowship between two churches was more strengthened. How beautiful work of the Lord it is to see that there was a fellowship between the individual Jews Peter and Gentile Cornelius in Acts 10 and there was fellowship between the Gentile Antioch church and the Jewish Jerusalem church in Acts 11? In the Lord, the church is one. Both the Jewish and Gentile churches are one in the Lord.

The church that generously gives relief will be prosperous. Look at Proverbs 11:25 – “The generous man will be prosperous, And he who waters will himself be watered.” Then how should we give relief? Here are some suggestions (Internet):

(1) Give relief regularly so that you may live a life of giving relief.

If you often send relief donations, even a small amount, to those who need them, then you may be able to live a life of giving relief. Although your relief may be small for you, but it can be a great help to anyone who needs it.

(2) Look for the object of relief in prayer.

If you send relief vaguely, then you may not feel rewarding. Therefore, if you are determined to

do relief, you need to pray for the Lord to reveal the object of relief.

(3) Practice relief secretly with volunteer heart.

Relief should not be forced, but should be done voluntarily. Also relief should be done in secret, not in pride. In doing so, God is honored and will reward you in secret.

(4) Praise God for the fruit of relief.

Do not rejoice alone when your relief offering bear some fruits, but praise God who guided you to the relief. In doing so, God will bless you for more so that you can do more relief.

The Antioch church was a well-known church. The Antioch church was the well-known church for the larger number of people who believed in Jesus Christ and turned to the Lord. Also, the Antioch church was Christian church. The Antioch church believers earned the nicknamed “Christians”. The Antioch church was a church that did relief. I hope and pray that the Lord will establish our church like the Antioch church.

May our church, like the church in Antioch, pray for the establishment that the Lord may grant,

James Kim

(Looking to the Lord who is the head of the church)

The Comforter who Rejoices in the Grace of God.

[Acts 11:23]

I have pondered questions such as, 'What am I looking at in my life, and what do I desire to see? What do I see within my family, and what do I desire to see in the community of the church I serve?' There are times in the church where there is a desire for quantitative growth, a temptation, and there are also many times when there is a fervent desire to see qualitative growth in the progress of faith. Especially in the church context, based on Acts 4, I earnestly desire to see (1) the power of prayer --> (2) being filled with the Holy Spirit --> (3) boldly proclaiming the Gospel --> (4) the Lord adding more believers --> (5) the community of love. Personally, there are many times when I see our sins within our family. However, on a family level, I fervently hope that the family members, through God's love, will love one another and also be able to see Jesus in each other's lives. Personally, I fervently desire to see the fulfillment of the promise given to me by the Lord, the passage in John 6:1-15, and also to see the fulfillment of the promise given to the church, where I serve as a servant of the Lord, in Matthew 16:18. However, as I meditate on today's passage, Acts 11:23, the challenge that God gives is for me to desire to see the grace of God, just as Barnabas did. Through God's grace, I fervently desire to see a spiritual revival that God manifests in my own life, in my family, and especially in the church community.

In Acts 11:21, we encounter Barnabas, a comforter who rejoiced in the grace of God. He witnessed the work of grace where many people, including Gentiles, believed and turned to the Lord. I would like to consider what kind of comforter he was through three points.

First, a comforter who rejoices in the grace of God is an exhorter with a steadfast heart.

Look at Acts 11:23 - "When he arrived and saw the evidence of the grace of God, he was glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts." The term "with purpose of heart" can

be understood as having set one's heart on a goal. In the historical context, due to a large-scale persecution related to the martyrdom of Stephen, many scattered to regions in Asia Minor, including Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, but they only proclaimed the gospel to the Jews, limitedly (v. 19). They did not realize that God's purpose in scattering them was to proclaim the gospel to the Gentiles. However, a small number among them went to Antioch and preached the good news about Jesus to the Greeks as well (v. 20). As a result, the remarkable conversion story occurred more among the Greeks than the Jews. This was because the hand of the Lord was with the few from Cyrene and Cyrene who proclaimed the gospel to the Gentiles, doing the work that pleased and was acknowledged by the Lord (v. 21). There was remarkable fruit in the proclamation of the gospel to the Gentiles by those who took on the challenge, pleasing and acknowledging the work of God. Barnabas, rejoicing in this grace of God, earnestly exhorted the new believers to remain true to the Lord with purpose of heart. In other words, Barnabas urged them to remain faithful to the Lord. The reason was that these newly converted Gentiles were at great risk of reverting back to the idolatrous practices of the Antiochian lifestyle, due to their old instincts. Therefore, Barnabas encouraged them to remain loyal to the Lord, even amidst the temptation of idol worship.

I believe the city of Antioch was similar to the Los Angeles where I currently reside. Antioch, the third largest city in the Roman Empire (after Rome and Alexandria), was characterized by magnificent buildings, well-developed roads, a bustling port, and a center of wealth. The city was home to the worship of Greek, Roman, and Syrian gods. Barnabas, who rejoiced in the grace of God for these newly converted Gentiles amidst such an environment, exhorted them to remain steadfastly attached to the Lord. I think John 15:4 applies here: "Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me." To abide in the Lord means to keep His commandments and obediently follow Him. Likewise, a comforter who rejoices in the grace of God is one who exhorts with a set purpose in their heart to remain attached to the Lord.

Second, a comforter who rejoices in the grace of God is described as a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith.

Look at Acts 11:24 - "For he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a great many people were added to the Lord." The conjunction "for" at the beginning of this verse (found in the English Bible NASB but not in the Korean Bible) explains verse 23. In other words, verse 24 is an explanatory verse for verse 23. The reason why Barnabas could exhort the newly converted Gentiles with a steadfast heart was because of his character and faith. This teaches us that existence (being) should lead to action (doing). To be a possessor of good and spiritually abundant grace allows one to rejoice in God's grace while comforting and exhorting brothers and sisters. Through this, as with Barnabas, a work will occur where a great many people were added to the Lord (v. 24).

Third and last, a comforter who rejoices in the grace of God is a teacher.

Look at Acts 11:26 - "and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. So for a whole year

Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of people. The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch." As the church in Antioch experienced significant growth due to the large number of people being added to the Lord, Barnabas found it overwhelming to handle the pastoral responsibilities alone. So, he went to Tarsus to find Saul, also known as Paul, and brought him to Antioch. Together, they met with the church and taught great numbers of people for a whole year (v. 26). A comforter who rejoices in the grace of God, like Barnabas, can lead a team ministry with fellow pastors without a spirit of competition. The outcome of Barnabas and Paul's year of teaching was astonishing: "The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch" (v. 26). Through the abundant grace of God, manifested in the diligent teaching with joy and personal integrity, the new believers in the church in Antioch were established as followers of Christ, resembling Him greatly.

I once again pose the question, 'What am I looking at in my life, in my family, and in my church, and what do I desire to see?' The answer is a confession that I desire to see God's grace. With a purpose set in my heart for myself, my family, and the saints in the church, I earnestly desire to exhort them, aspiring to be like Barnabas, a person of spiritual abundance. Through God's grace, teaching the truth with joy and personal integrity, I fervently pray for an outcome where those called Christians are added to the Lord.

With a heart that earnestly confesses that what I have become is solely by the grace of God,

James Kim

(With a heart once again meditating on God's grace)

The Lord who Leads Us Out

[Acts 12:1-19]

We have hope as long as we are alive. We can only live when there is hope. Without hope, we cannot live. Especially as believers, we cannot live without the hope of salvation.

Our God is the God of salvation. He is the One who delivers us. Look at Jonah 2:9 – “Salvation is from the Lord.” No matter how deep we may go down into the swamp of life, as long as there is no hope, we are people of hope. Biblically, this is expressed as 'against all hope, he hoped,' as with Abraham (Rom. 4:18).

What are you hoping for? What are you placing your hope in? Even if we face unexpected events and difficulties in our lives this year, let's remember that our God is the God of salvation.

I want to meditate on the passage in Acts 12:1-19 today, under the title 'The Lord Who Leads Us Out,' reflecting on how the Lord led Peter, who was imprisoned, out of prison. I hope and pray that we may also experience the work of the Lord's salvation in our lives.

First, look at Peter in prison.

look at Acts 12:4 – “When he had seized him, he put him in prison, delivering him to four squads of soldiers to guard him, intending after Passover to bring him out before the people.” The background of this passage is that King Herod Agrippa I, who reigned over Judea and Samaria, ruled during the years AD 41 to 44. He persecuted the church. He had reached out to harm the church and had James, the brother of John, put to death with a sword (vv. 1-2). When Herod saw that this made the unbelieving Jews pleased, he arrested Peter and placed him in prison, handing him over to four squads of soldiers to guard him (vv. 3-4). The intention was to keep him firmly guarded, with one squad guarding at a time (Park). Why did Herod the king guard Peter so rigorously? The reason was that King Herod knew about Peter being imprisoned and later miraculously released by God's power during the high priesthood of Annas and

Caiaphas (5:19) (Park). One interesting fact is that the author of the Book of Acts, Luke, referred to the time when Herod imprisoned Peter as 'the Feast of Unleavened Bread' (Park). This choice of words was intended to avoid the criticism of the people, who accused Herod of polluting the feast when he executed James. He wanted to avoid the people's reproach for having done something wrong during the feast (Park).

Like Herod, there is work of Satan imprisoning us. This imprisonment is the prison of the heart. When we ask how Satan confines us in our hearts, it is by making us 'unable to love,' 'unable to forgive,' 'trapped in guilt,' and so on, preventing us from experiencing freedom in truth. In the book 'The Path to Experiencing Freedom of Thought,' it is written: 'Many people today live in prisons of the mind. Prisons of fear, worry, anger, inferiority, despondency. ... They are trapped there, unable to see the light, living in misery and powerlessness. But we must remember, this prison is not a real prison, but a fantasy prison we create for ourselves' (Internet). We need to break free from such prisons. To do this, we must earnestly pray to God.

Second, look at the church that prays earnestly.

Look at Acts 12:5 – “So Peter was kept in prison, but the church was earnestly praying to God for him.” Ultimately, King Herod's persecution of the church led them to pray even more fervently to God. This illustrates a spiritual battle. On one hand, there was the violent act of imprisoning Peter, while on the other hand, the church was praying fervently for him. This contrast shows the struggle between violence and prayer (Park). At this time, two forces were fighting against each other. On one side, Peter was imprisoned, and on the other side, the church was earnestly praying for him (Morgan). So why did the church pray so fervently? The reason is that they prayed not only for Peter's release, but also for the event to be resolved in a way that would benefit the church (Park). Because God answered the church's fervent prayer, they wanted Peter to be delivered from prison, hoping that through his salvation, the power and glory of God would be manifested, bringing benefit to the church. However, it is doubtful whether this earnest prayer of the church was truly prayed in faith. How can we know? After the Lord miraculously rescued Peter from the prison, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John Mark. At that time, many people had gathered there to pray (v. 12). When Peter knocked at the door, a servant girl named Rhoda came to answer (v. 13). She recognized Peter's voice and was so overjoyed that she didn't open the door, but ran back to tell the others, 'Peter is standing at the door!' (v. 15). Isn't it interesting? Rhoda, the servant girl, believed that God had answered the church's earnest prayer and rescued Peter. However, the early church saints gathered at Mary's house, including John Mark's mother, did not believe in God's saving work.

Here, we must learn some lessons from the church's prayer for Peter:

(1) The church's prayer should follow the example of Jesus' prayer.

His prayer was fervent. Here, the noun 'prayer' and the adverb 'fervently' directly reflect Jesus' prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane (Yoo).

(2) The church's prayer should continue until it receives a response.

The church's fervent prayer, which started when Peter was arrested and imprisoned, continued until Peter came to their place (v. 12) (Yoo).

(3) Like the church's prayer, we should pray together.

The number of saints who gathered to pray when Peter was first arrested did not diminish, even though there was no visible answer to their prayers. The phrase 'many people' in verse 12 should be corrected to 'a great many people' (Yoo).

(4) Our prayers should be prayed in faith.

Ultimately, although the church's prayer resulted in Peter being rescued and coming to the house of Mary, John's mother, and knocking on the door, the saints who were praying did not believe that it was Peter.

Third and last, look at the work of the Lord's salvation that led Peter out of prison.

Look at Acts 12:17 – “Peter motioned with his hand for them to be quiet and described how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. ‘Tell James and the other brothers and sisters about this,’ he said, and then he left for another place.” If we look at Acts 12:6-10, it explains how the Lord rescued Peter from prison.

(1) The Lord's salvation occurred on the night before Herod planned to kill Peter.

Look at Acts 12:6 – “The night before Herod was to bring him to trial, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, while sentries stood guard at the entrance.” Dr. Yoon-sun Park says: ‘... it teaches the truth that when human difficulties reach their peak and it seems like no matter how much we pray, there will be no response, God's intervening power will manifest itself’ (Park).

(2) When the Lord's salvation was about to take place, Peter was sleeping peacefully between two soldiers.

How could he sleep so peacefully in such a situation? After all, by the next morning, he would likely become a martyr like the apostle James. It is truly remarkable. How bold his faith must have been. It was because Peter entrusted everything absolutely to the hands of the Lord, he

could sleep without any worry (Yoo).

(3) What we need to consider is the power of the Lord.

The reason is that even though Peter was being closely watched like a fortress, when the Lord rescued Peter, human surveillance was completely powerless. There was no room for error in the surveillance of Peter. His hands were filled with chains, two soldiers watched over Peter from both sides, and the rest of the soldiers guarded him steadfastly outside the prison door (Yoo). In the dark prison, an angel appeared, bringing light, and the angel struck Peter on the side to wake him up, saying, 'Hurry, get up' (v. 7). At that moment, the chains fell off Peter's hands on their own, and the angel urged Peter to 'put on your clothes and sandals,' and 'wrap your cloak around you and follow me' (v. 8). When Peter obediently followed the angel's instructions, he came out of the prison, passed through the first and second gates without any problems, and when he reached the iron gate leading to the city, it opened for him by itself (v. 10). Peter thought he was seeing a vision of some kind (v. 9). In the end, after Peter was rescued and the day had dawned, there was quite a commotion among the soldiers who did not know what had happened to Peter (v. 18). Herod sought Peter, and when he could not find him, he interrogated the guards and ordered them to be put to death (v. 19).

The Lord who led Peter out of prison answered the fervent prayers of the early church saints who prayed earnestly for Peter. God bestowed His grace of salvation upon Peter. Our God is a God of salvation. Our God is the God who answers our fervent prayers. I hope and pray that we all may experience the salvation of God.

Living today by the God of salvation who answers our prayers,

James Kim

(God who fulfills His plan of salvation!)

Give Glory to God!

[Acts 12:20-25]

We are like spinning tops as Christians. A wooden spinning top must be struck with a whip to come to life. The more it is struck, the better it spins, and the more life and vitality it exudes. The characteristic of a wooden spinning top is that the more it experiences pain, the better and stronger it becomes. This is the same for the life of a Christian. When people of faith face hardships, the more they endure, the more mature and strong they become. Those who fall and crumble in the face of adversity, those who give up on life, cannot truly be called Christians. The life of God's people Israel, who lived like slaves in the land of Egypt, was just like this spinning top. They became a nation that grew stronger the more they suffered. They became a prosperous and magnificent nation through trials and pain (Internet). We, too, are Christians who become stronger like spinning tops the more we face hardships. Peter and the early church saints, who experienced the saving power of God in the midst of King Herod's persecution, were also like spinning tops. For us, spinning top-like Christians, crises are opportunities. At the time of the Exodus, the Israelites, who were brave when Pharaoh's army approached the Red Sea (Exod. 14:8), eventually returned to their old slave mentality in fear and resentment (vv. 10-12). However, Moses, in the midst of this crisis, challenged them to stand still and see the salvation of the Lord, the God of hosts, who fights for the Israelites. Moses saw the crisis as an opportunity. What kind of opportunity? An opportunity to see the glory of God.

We are God's people who live for the glory of God. The sole purpose of our existence as Christians is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever (Westminster Shorter Catechism, Question 1). How can we give more glory to God? Today, we want to learn three ways centered around Acts 12:20-25. In the midst of these, I hope and pray that you and I can give glory to God.

First, to give glory to God, we must be humble and give glory to Him.

Look at Acts 12:23 - "Immediately, because Herod did not give praise to God, an angel of the Lord struck him down, and he was eaten by worms and died." After the miraculous rescue of Peter, King Herod

went down to Caesarea (v. 19). While he was ruling there, an event occurred that greatly angered him. It was an incident involving the people of Tyre and Sidon regions who were receiving food supplies from the king. The specific details of what caused this anger are not mentioned in the Bible. Recognizing the urgency of the situation, the residents of Tyre and Sidon, who were in charge of the king's security, earnestly expressed their desire to reconcile with the king (v. 20). Therefore, King Herod accepted their fervent desire for reconciliation and set a special day to meet with them (v. 21). At that time, he wore a robe that was made entirely of silver and sat on his throne to address the people from Tyre and Sidon who had come to him (v. 21). The people who listened to his speech were the same ones who had greatly angered King Herod, but now they shouted flattery to reconcile with him: 'This is the voice of a god, not of a man' (Yoo). The robe worn by the king was made entirely of silver. When the sun's rays shone on the robe as the king entered the theater at sunrise, the robe gleamed brilliantly and marvelously. The flatterers sitting in various directions in the theater shouted out to the king, 'Show us favor. Until now, we have worshipped you as a mere mortal, but now we confess that you are beyond being anything other than a mortal destined to die.' Having heard such praises, the king neither rebuked those who shouted nor rejected their flattery (Josephus).

For a person, praise is more dangerous than insults (Park). The one receiving praise accepts it without any issue and enjoys it. However, receiving excessive praise is a sin that robs God of His glory. How dangerous is it? That's why Proverbs 27:2 says: "Let someone else praise you, and not your own mouth; an outsider, and not your own lips." Receiving praise is not always a good thing. We must remember that we are tried by praise. Therefore, when receiving praise, we must be even more humble before God and people. We must lower ourselves. In the midst of this, we must give glory to God.

Second, to give glory to God, we must make His word flourish and give glory to God.

Look at Acts 12:24 - "But the word of God continued to spread and flourish." Here, we see the author of Acts, Luke, recording the growth of God's word after serious challenges and persecution faced by the church for the third time. The first record was the wise resolution of the problem arising from the issue of distribution, which resulted in the word of God spreading and more converts being added to the Jerusalem church (6:7). The second record was the transformation of the once-persecutor Saul, who met Jesus on the road to Damascus, and became a bold proclaimer of the Lord's word, leading to the church flourishing throughout Judea, Samaria, and Galilee (9:31).

Internal problems or external persecution faced by the church do not weaken it, but rather strengthen it (Yoo). How do we become even stronger? Through the power of God's word. This is the ability of the word. What kind of faith should the church have? The church must believe in the power of God's word. The Bible says, "For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart" (Heb. 4:12). The foremost priority in our hearts is to believe that God's word has the power to transform a person's soul. A person who believes in the power of the word, that is, the power to pierce the soul of sinners,

to bring repentance, and to transform their souls, boldly proclaims and spreads the word (Internet).

Third and last, to give glory to God, we must fulfill our mission.

Look at Acts 12:25 - "When Barnabas and Saul had finished their mission, they returned from Jerusalem, taking with them John, also called Mark." This passage tells us that, as we have meditated on in Acts 11:27-30, in fulfillment of the prophecy by Agabus, during the time of Governor Claudius, there was a severe famine in Judea. In response, the Antioch church sent Barnabas and Saul (Paul) to deliver relief funds to the elders of the Jerusalem church. After completing this mission, Barnabas and Saul returned to the Antioch church, accompanied by John, also known as Mark.

Fulfilling our mission is giving glory to God. The end of a life lived in mission is beautiful. There are four types of people depending on what they center their lives on. First, there are those who live for profit. Second, there are those who live for convenience. Third, there are those who live for pleasure. Fourth, there are those who live for mission. We as believers live for mission. And mission invokes passion (Internet). Malcolm Muggeridge said, 'There are many paths. But life is too short to try them all' (Internet). We have not been called to do everything. We do not have the time or ability to do everything. God does not want us to do everything. He wants us to focus on what is important, on what He wants to do through us (Internet).

We must rightly give glory to God. To do this, we must be humble. A prideful person can never give glory to God because they give glory to themselves. We give glory to God by believing that His word has the power to transform a person's soul. And by fulfilling the mission given to us, we give glory to God. Sola de Gloria!

Praying that we humbly carry out our mission to the end,

James Kim

(Yearning for the flourishing of the Word)

The Antioch Church (2)

[Acts 13:1-3]

What is the cause of the decline of the Korean church? Pastor Young Min Pi said: ‘The Korean churches are concerned that the number of Christians has decreased more than many years ago. But the decrease in the number of Christians is probably a natural result. It is because the Christians live well, they have land, they have good education for their children, and they are satisfied, so they treat others indifferently. Because the Christians are at the forefront of this, it's only natural that the numbers of Christians decrease. The Christians should not be indifferent to community. Also they can't be satisfied with their own self-satisfaction that ‘I'm fine now.’ Indifference and self-satisfaction cause the community of the church to cause to fall by evil. Awake, and look around. There are so many people who need our love’ (Internet).

We have already meditated on the three things based on Acts 11:19-30 under the heading “Antioch Church (1)”: (1) The Antioch church was the well-known church (v. 22). Since the Lord’s hand was with them, the church was known as the great number of people believed and turned to the Lord (v. 21). (2) The Antioch church was “Christians” church (v. 26). The Christians who follow Jesus ... If we are true Christians, it will be okay. (3) The Antioch church was the church doing the relief (v. 29).

I saw a pastor column in the Christian Herald (February 8, 2007). I read the article, ‘The Church of Growing Spirituality,’ written by our presbytery pastor. Introducing the recently published book, “Revolutionary Wealth,” by Alvin Toffler, Alvin Toffler said a future society is bigger and more valuable than invisible wealth. What do you think? So Toffler emphasizes ‘the intangible wealth.’ That means that in the future, money, securities, and land will not only be wealth, but invisible knowledge will form wealth as well. The pastor's question was then, ‘What is the invisible wealth to the church and Christians?’ That pastor says ‘spirituality.’ And he said that spirituality is accomplished by word of God and prayer. As I read this article, I thought about what spirituality our church should pursue. I was challenged to pursue ‘the desert spirituality.’ The basis for this challenge is “the congregation in the wilderness” in Acts 7:38.

What is desert spirituality? In Henry Nowen's book, “The Way of Heart”, he summarized in three

ways: “solitude,” “silence,” and “prayer.” It means to leave the world and go to the place of solitude. Its purpose is to meet with our Lord and to be with Him. In the meantime, we must find and fight our false ego (such as anger and greed). Solitude is a furnace of transformation. We must learn to be silent in the place of solitude. In fact, silence is the solitude of action. Why are we silent? It is to hear the voice of the Lord. Therefore, silence is not to speak the words, but to listen to God's voice. Nowen says solitude and silence are for prayer. Solitude is not being alone, but with God and silence is not speaking but listening to God. I think this is an invisible secret prayer of heart. In pursuit of this spirituality, our church will be able to become a true Christian church like Antioch (Acts 11:26). And the Christian church will earnestly praise, "Lord, I want to be a Christian In a my heart, in a my heart, Lord, I want to be a Christian In a my heart, In a my heart" (Hymn, “Lord, I Want to be a Christian”, v. 1). The church of such true Christians cannot but will be well known (v. 22). The reason is because the hand of the Lord is with them, and a large number who believe turn to the Lord (v. 21). In the meantime, true Christians give alms according to the Lord’s will to any races, cultures, and prejudices in love (v. 29). In other words, our church should be like the church of Antioch - the church that does relief, the “Christians” church, the well-known church. In particular, I pray that our church will be well-known as the churches with various workers like Antioch church (13:1). I earnestly pray that the Lord raise up the various Christ-centered workers who have dreams among the three ministries of our church. I would like to meditate on the Antioch church in three ways under the heading “Antioch Church (2)” focusing on Acts 13:1-3. May the Lord establish our church as the Antioch church.

First, there were various workers in Antioch church.

Look at Acts 13:1 – “Now there were at Antioch, in the church that was there, prophets and teachers: Barnabas, and Simeon who was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul.” There were “prophets and teachers” in the Antioch church: “Barnabas,” Simeon who was called Niger,” “Lucius of Cyrene,” “Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch” and “Saul.” It is interesting to see that in the Antioch church, people from different origins and educational backgrounds were doing the ministry together. Barnabas was a Levite from Cyrene, Saul was a rabbi educated from Tarsus, Simeon was a black man from North Africa, Lucius was from Cyrene, and Manaen was a political and aristocratic background with a high social status. This fact shows that although the Antioch church was a Gentile-oriented church, its core Word ministers were an international character (Yoo).

How amazing is this? The Antioch church, which didn’t discriminate against race (serve with Simeon who was called Niger) and the church that didn’t discriminate against the rich and poor (serve with Manaen, a high social status who was the younger brother of Herod), was a beautiful church in the eyes of the Lord. How beautiful is it that people of diverse backgrounds come together to serve the church, one body of the Lord? Isn't this what our church should pursue? The church that keeps unity in diversity is a beautiful church. Each member of Christ's body must be able to serve according to each other's ability in equality. The ideal of the church is to seek unity as a member of Jesus Christ among such diversity (Internet).

However, today's church seems to be a "noble church" and discrimination seems to be commonplace. Today, the church is becoming the noble church where only successful people survive and tends to discriminate from one another and this is becoming common. This shows that the body of Christ, the church, is sick now (Internet). In the church, we are ignoring and discriminating each other. Environment, personality, difference between rich and poor, educational difference, job, etc. are still problems in the church. This is still guilty in violating the Lord's will by focusing on these external things rather than the fact that the church is a family of God in Jesus. The church needs various servants. Just as there are many members in the body, there must be various workers in the church with different gifts. And the church is beautiful when these diverse gifts of workers are united in Jesus Christ, faithfully keeping the unity of the church. I hope and pray that the work of serving the church together will continue to be established by various servants in our church as the Lord continues to rise His humble servants.

Second, the Antioch church was a church led by the Holy Spirit.

Look at Acts 13:2 – "While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." What are the characteristics of the church led by the Holy Spirit? There are two ways to think based on verse 2:

(1) The church led by the Holy Spirit serves the Lord.

Acts 13:2 says, "While they were worshiping the Lord." Here, the word "worshiping" can be interpreted in two ways (Park):

(a) This refers to personal spiritual fellowship with God.

More specifically, it is talking about fasting, which is to reject physical pleasures and to receive the spiritual touch of God (Park). The fasting of the five leaders of the Antioch church was more like a fasting prayer to find the Lord's wonderful will for the Antioch church rather than because of any special problems and persecution.

(b) The word "worshiping" can also mean corporate worship.

In the Bible, the word "serving" is often interpreted to mean "worship." For example, in 1 Thessalonians 1: 9, the Thessalonian church saints said that they abandoned idols and returned to God to live and serve the true God, where the word "serve" means 'to worship'. The word serve also indicates that the five diverse workers of the Antioch church served in the church as prophets and teachers (Acts 13:1). When we see that Barnabas and Saul's ministry was evangelism, nurturing through word teaching, and doing the relief of the saints in Jerusalem (11:23-26, 29-30), serving in the Antioch church seems to include these things as well (Yoo).

(2) The church led by the Holy Spirit does what the Holy Spirit tells to do.

Eventually, the five leaders of the Antioch church learned the will of the Lord in fasting prayers. The will of the Lord was to set apart Barnabas and Saul. The Bible does not say clearly how they came to know the will of the Lord, whether they heard the voice of the Holy Spirit or not. According to Dr. Yoon-sun Park, 'At this time some of the prophets of the Antioch church would have heard the voice of the Holy Spirit.' What the Holy Spirit had commanded was "'Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them" (v. 2). Professor Yoo Sang-sup points out two things to note here (Yoo):

(a) **The Holy Spirit raised two workers for Himself.**

For Himself means the Holy Spirit established Barnabas and Paul to testify the God's Word, the Word of Salvation, to make the people to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and be saved.

(b) **The two men appointed by the Holy Spirit were Barnabas, the first of the five, and Saul, the last.**

This means that both Barnabas and Saul were called to serve the mission of the Holy Spirit, but the other three were indirectly involved in missionary work. In other words, the other three were the missionaries who send Barnabas and Saul to the mission fields and supported their mission with prayer and materially behind the scenes.

I hope and pray that our church will be led by the Holy Spirit. I pray that our church will become a church that serves the Lord and faithfully takes on the mission of preaching the gospel according to the will of the Lord.

Third and last, the Antioch church was a sending (mission) church.

Look at Acts 13:3 – "Then, when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away." The Antioch church leaders ordained Barnabas and Saul, who seemed indispensable in the Antioch church in obedience to the Spirit's command. In some ways, these are the leaders who revived the Antioch church. Nevertheless, the Antioch church leaders sent them after they laid their hands on Barnabas and Saul. What's interesting here is that the word "send" means "released" rather than sent (Park). If so, the Antioch church released Barnabas and Saul who were indispensable, in obeying the will of the Holy Spirit and have appointed them as missionaries. This fact gives us two important lessons:

(1) This teaches us that missionary work is very important when we see the Antioch church released very important leaders of the Antioch church, Barnabas and Paul, as missionaries.

How difficult was this for the Antioch church to send the very important leaders of the church as missionaries. I am sure it wasn't easy for the Antioch church to decide to send both Barnabas and Saul as missionaries. However, the Antioch church knew the importance of mission and was willing to obey the mission of the Lord.

(2) This teaches us that we should send the missionaries who are prepared.

When the Holy Spirit's will was to send Barnabas and Saul as missionaries, both Barnabas and Saul were neither the beginnings of the faith or the beginners of the ministry sent to the mission field. The lesson this fact teaches us is that we must build up well-prepared mature workers and send them to missions. Professor Yoo Sang-sup says: 'It is no coincidence that those who have been prepared to go to the mission field under the direction of the Holy Spirit are successful. This shows that it is not advisable to send unverified people to the mission field. ... From now on, the churches should think more carefully about sending their mission to the mission field, not just as soon as they graduate from seminary and receive ordination. And the churches should refrain from sending people to missions who have not been tested for character, faith, or theology. Rather, only those who are best prepared under the sovereign guidance of the Holy Spirit should be sent' (Yoo).

There were various workers in Antioch church. Also, the Antioch church was led by the Holy Spirit. The Antioch Church served the Lord by doing what the Holy Spirit told them to do. And the Antioch church was a sending church. In other words, the Antioch church was a missionary church. The Antioch church sent the prepared workers Barnabas and Paul as missionaries. I hope and pray that our church be like the Antioch church: the various workers of the church keep the unity of the church in the Lord, the church that serves the Lord under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and the mission church.

Praying for a church with diverse workers, a church led by the Holy Spirit, and a church engaged in missions,

James Kim

[Holding on to the promise of the Lord establishing His church (Matthew 16:18)]

The Mission of the One who is Sent

[Acts 13:4-12]

We must have a clear awareness of being sent. Look at John 17:18 - "As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world." Jesus had a clear awareness of being sent by God, and His disciples also had a clear awareness of being sent. Therefore, we too must have a clear awareness of being sent. In Rabbinic literature, the one who is sent is considered to be like the sender. The mission of the one who is sent is to accurately represent the one who sent them. To fulfill this mission, the sender invests the one who is sent with their power and authority. Our authority as the sent ones is not separate from the one who sends us. It is through truly representing God and Jesus Christ (Jn. 8:42) that our identity and authority are established.

As chosen people, we have an important mission. We can think of it in four ways: (1) We have a ministerial mission. Ministry implies service, and all Christians are ministers, meaning they are servants. (2) We have a vocational mission. God calls the chosen people and when He calls, He definitely gives a mission. God's calling has a purpose. (3) We have an apostolic mission. We are sent into this world. And the one who is sent has a mission. It is a testimony to the Lord. The apostles were sent as special witnesses to the life of Jesus Christ, His sacrificial death, His victorious resurrection, His glorious return, and the eternal kingdom of God. (4) Another mission is to be a "peacemaker."

I would like to receive the teachings that God wants to give us today under the title of "The mission of the one who is sent," focusing on Acts 13:4-12.

The mission of the one who is sent is to proclaim the word of God.

Look at Acts 13:5 - "When they arrived at Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God in the Jewish synagogues. John was with them as their helper." After the five prophets and teachers of the Antioch church separately ordained Barnabas and Saul (Paul) according to the command of the Holy Spirit (v. 2),

they fasted, prayed, and laid hands on the two and sent them off (v. 3). Eventually, Barnabas and Saul, who received the sending of the Holy Spirit, went down to the port of Seleucia on the Antioch coast, took a ship from there, and went to Barnabas's hometown, Cyprus (v. 4). From there, they came to Salamis on the eastern coast of Cyprus (v. 5). There, as ones sent by the Holy Spirit, Barnabas and Saul fulfilled their mission and proclaimed the word of God in various synagogues of the Jews (v. 5). Here, as we see Barnabas and Saul, who were sent by the Holy Spirit, being given the mission of proclaiming the word of God, we can learn and have confidence in how the Lord works.

(1) The Lord appoints a helper to assist in fulfilling the mission.

Look at Acts 13:5b - "... John was with them as their helper." The word "helper," in Greek "hupēretēs," originally referred to a slave who rowed in the lower deck of a ship. On both sides of the lower deck of a Roman warship, there were rows of slaves rowing vigorously. They couldn't see the outside at all. They didn't need to. They couldn't even determine whether the ship was heading east or west. They simply rowed with all their might to match the rhythm set by the oarsman. John was precisely this kind of "helper." Whether the next destination would be Pisidia Antioch or Jerusalem was not under his jurisdiction. He simply followed along as Barnabas and Saul decided, and as long as he took care of them and supported them, that was the best he could do (Internet). The Lord appointed John, who was Mark, the cousin of Barnabas (Col. 4:10), to assist Barnabas and Saul in fulfilling their mission. Mark likely also served in practical ways necessary for the physical well-being of the two missionaries. However, Mark's role as a helper also signifies that he assisted the Jerusalem church by supporting Barnabas and Saul, thus signifying the cooperation between the Jerusalem church and the Antioch church in the mission to the Gentiles (Park). Cooperating with one another and sharing the ministry load is truly beautiful. Utilizing each other's different gifts and talents to effectively carry out the mission entrusted to us by the Lord is a truly beautiful teamwork. In a way, within a family, the husband is the one entrusted with a mission, and the wife is the helper. And this helper is appointed by God.

The greatest Helper that the Lord has sent to both you and me is none other than the Holy Spirit. Look at Luke 24:49 - "I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high." The author of Hebrews confesses in Hebrews 13:6 - "... So we say with confidence, 'The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can mere mortals do to me?'"

(2) The Lord prepares those who are willing to hear His word.

Look at Acts 13:7 - "The proconsul, an intelligent man, sent for Barnabas and Saul because he wanted to hear the word of God." One story that comes to mind when we think of God preparing is the story of Abraham, who, in obedience to God's word, was willing to offer Isaac. God had

already prepared a ram for sacrifice, and as a result, Isaac was spared (Gen. 22). At that time, Abraham named that place "Jehovah Jireh," which means "The Lord will provide" (v. 14). God, in the midst of entrusting us with the mission of preaching the gospel, prepares those who are willing to hear His word. Look at Proverbs 18:15 – "The heart of the discerning acquires knowledge, for the ears of the wise seek it out." The Bible describes the proconsul Sergius Paulus as an intelligent man. He wanted to hear the word of God. Surely, the Lord prepares those who are willing to hear His word.

The Lord manifests His power even in the midst of Satan's work. What is Satan's work? Satan's work is to make us disbelieve God's word. The Lord had prepared Proconsul Sergius Paulus to hear His word (v. 7), but alongside him, Satan had also prepared a man named Bar-Jesus, a false prophet, who opposed the servants of God, Barnabas and Saul, and worked to prevent the proconsul from believing (v. 6). This Bar-Jesus (also called Elymas), opposed Barnabas and Saul, who were servants of God, and exerted efforts to lead Proconsul Sergius Paulus astray from believing. As mentioned in verse 8, "But Elymas the sorcerer (for that is what his name means) opposed them and tried to turn the proconsul from the faith." In the book "The Spiritual Warfare Every Christian Must Know" by Rev. Sung-jong Shin, ten tactics of Satan are mentioned: (1) Pride, (2) Despair, (3) Comparison, (4) Doubt and Unbelief, (5) Lies, (6) Hatred, (7) Complaint and Resentment, (8) Delay, (9) Unfaithfulness, (10) Hypocrisy. Satan's aim is to make us doubt and disbelieve in God.

Proconsul Sergius Paulus was quite receptive and open to believing after hearing the word of God from Barnabas and Saul (v. 8) (Yoo). However, the false prophet Elymas, realizing this, opposed Barnabas and Saul and attempted to lead Proconsul Sergius Paulus away from belief. He sought to lead the upright path of the Lord astray and deceive Proconsul Sergius Paulus who was walking in the right way (v. 10). This is Satan's work. How much are we hearing and seeing this work of Satan? How many people in the world today are walking on crooked paths, led astray by twisted thoughts due to the distorted teachings influenced by Satan's work? However, even in the midst of Satan's work, the Lord manifests His great power. How did God's power manifest? Look at verse 9: "Then Saul, who was also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked straight at Elymas and said..." God's power first manifested in Paul. The Lord, in the midst of Satan's opposition, filled His servant Paul with the Holy Spirit. Therefore, God rebuked the false prophet Bar-Jesus (Elymas) who opposed the gospel work of God's servants (v. 10) and pronounced judgment upon him. Look at the first part of verse 11: "Now the hand of the Lord is against you. You are going to be blind for a time, not even able to see the light of the sun." And as prophesied, the false prophet Bar-Jesus (Elymas) immediately became blind, seeking someone to lead him around: "... immediately mist and darkness came over him, and he groped about, seeking someone to lead him by the hand" (v. 11b). In the end, even in the midst of Satan's work, God's great power was revealed. As a result, Proconsul Sergius Paulus, whom God had prepared, believed even more in Jesus. Look at verse 12: "When the proconsul saw what had happened, he believed, for he was amazed at the teaching about the Lord."

The mission of the one sent is to proclaim the word of God. The Lord appoints a helper to bear this

mission. Additionally, the Lord prepares those who are willing to listen to His word. However, Satan also works. Nevertheless, even in the midst of Satan's work, the Lord manifests His great power. We are the ones sent by the Lord into this world. Our mission is to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ. In fulfilling this mission, we should earnestly pray for the Lord to appoint a helper for us. In the midst of this, the Lord will send us the helper He has prepared for us. We must believe that the Lord has also prepared those who will hear the gospel in the course of our mission. In this faith, as we take on the task of spreading the gospel, we should expect the work of Satan. However, we must pray, anticipate, and wait in faith, knowing that even in the midst of Satan's work, the power of God will prevail.

As one sent according to the will of the sending Lord, desiring to live in accordance with His purpose,

James Kim shares

(Experiencing the work of God that He has prepared)

‘This Message of Salvation’

[Acts 13:13-41]

I meditated on Joshua 23:11 this Thursday during the early morning prayer meeting: "So be very careful to love the Lord your God." Contemplating on this word, I reflected on the importance of being cautious not to "turn aside" (v. 12) from loving God. In order to do this, we must cling closely to our God. See verse 8: "But you are to hold fast to the Lord your God, as you have until now." Holding fast to God means adhering firmly to Him (Park). To achieve this, we must diligently observe and follow God's commandments. Look at verse 6: "So be very careful to love the Lord your God." Are we truly putting great effort into keeping God's commandments? It seems that often we desire a smooth path and prosperity, but struggle to obey or even understand the key to achieving it. What does the Bible say is the key? It is meditating on God's word day and night and diligently obeying what is written. Look at Joshua 1:8: "Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful."

We must exert great effort in meditating on God's word. In the midst of this, we must listen for God's voice. In particular, we must hear the "this message of this salvation" mentioned in Acts 13:26. In today's passage, we see Paul and his companions arriving in Pisidian Antioch from Paphos by ship, and on the Sabbath they entered the synagogue and sat down after the reading of the Law and the Prophets. They were invited to speak if they had a word of encouragement for the people. Then Paul stood up, motioned with his hand, and began his address. In verse 16, he addresses the Israelites and God-fearing Gentiles and preaches the word of salvation. I summarized this word of salvation into three points for reflection:

First, God has brought us out with great power.

Look at Acts 13:17: "The God of the people of Israel chose our ancestors; he made the people

prosper during their stay in Egypt, with mighty power." Just as God brought the Israelites out of Egypt with His mighty power, He has brought us out of Satan's kingdom with great power. When we talk about God's great power here, it refers not only to the ten plagues that He sent upon Egypt through Moses, but also to how He has delivered you and me from Satan's kingdom with His exalted arm ("great power"). What is this "great power" that Acts 13:17 is speaking of? If we consider the original Greek expression, it literally translates to "with His uplifted arm." In other words, God delivered the Israelites from Egypt with His uplifted arm, which symbolizes His "great power" (Yoo). While God delivered the people of Israel from Egypt with His uplifted arm, He has saved us from Satan's kingdom through the exalted cross of Jesus Christ (v. 23). This is through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (vv. 30, 34). Jesus fulfilled all that was written about Him in the Scriptures (v. 29) and yet, despite there being no fault found in Him, the Jews requested for Him to be put to death (v. 28). Ultimately, He was crucified on the cursed tree, the cross (v. 29). People took Him down from the cross and laid Him in a tomb (v. 29). But God raised Jesus from the dead (v. 30). In other words, God raised Jesus from among the dead, preventing Him from experiencing decay (vv. 34, 37). Therefore, through Jesus, we have received forgiveness of sins (v. 38) and have been declared righteous (v. 39).

Therefore, we must proclaim a baptism of repentance to everyone, just as John did. Look at verse 24: "Before the coming of Jesus, John preached repentance and baptism to all the people of Israel." The "baptism of repentance" here was a ministry to lead people to receive forgiveness of sins through accepting Jesus Christ (Park). Similar to how John the Baptist preached this baptism of repentance to all the people before the arrival of Jesus, we too must proclaim His gospel, calling people to repent and receive Jesus as their Savior (v. 23) before His second coming.

Second, God bears with our actions.

Look at Acts 13:18 - "For about forty years he endured their conduct in the wilderness." During the forty years in the wilderness after the exodus from Egypt, the Israelites repeatedly tested and grumbled against God, even resorting to idolatry by making a golden calf. Nevertheless, God endured patiently. This same enduring God continues to bear with our conduct as we live in this wilderness. What is our conduct? Of course, like the Israelites, we sometimes doubt and resent God, even betraying Him. However, apart from that, it seems we are also committing similar sins to those of the Jews mentioned in verse 27. Look at verse 27: "The people of Jerusalem and their rulers did not recognize Jesus, yet in condemning him they fulfilled the words of the prophets that are read every Sabbath." Just like the Jews at the time of Jesus who "did not recognize the words of the prophets that are read every Sabbath," we also seem to be unaware of the sermons we hear every Sunday. Therefore, we are committing the sin of not believing in God's word (v. 41, Park). Dr. Yoon-sun Park says, 'Even though human beings may be great leaders, they tend to despise those who are close to them, and not only that, they also tend not to deeply contemplate the true meaning of God's word, even if it comes directly from heaven' (Park). In the end, the Jews committed the sin of condemning Jesus (v. 27). Despite Jesus being completely without sin and no guilt found in Him, they still asked Pilate to put Jesus to death (v.

28).

We must remember that God's patience is unlimited (1 Tim. 1:16). Also, we should pay attention to the words in 2 Peter 3:15a: "Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation"

Third and last, God will give us the promised land as our inheritance.

Look at Acts 13:19 - "He overthrew seven nations in Canaan, giving their land to his people as their inheritance. All this took about four hundred and fifty years." In the end, God fulfilled His promise to the Israelites by destroying the seven nations in the land of Canaan and giving it to them as their inheritance. God is faithful. The same God who promised the land of Canaan to the Israelites during the exodus also gave the promise to their ancestors. What was this promise? Look at Acts 13:23 - "From this man's descendants God has brought to Israel the Savior Jesus, as he promised." Ultimately, God, in accordance with the promise made to the faithful David, establishes the Savior Jesus (v. 23) from his descendants, fulfilling His will (v. 22). More specific words of promise are found in verse 33: "he has fulfilled for us, their children, by raising up Jesus. As it is written in Psalms - "You are my son; today I have become your father." The quoted words from the second Psalm are from Psalms 2:7, which says, "You are my son; today I have become your father." Originally, this passage refers to God adopting a new king who succeeds David's throne as His son according to the covenant made with David, but Paul uses these words in relation to the resurrection of Jesus. Paul's argument is that the resurrection of Jesus is the event in which God declared Jesus as His Son (Yoo). Through the accomplishment of Jesus' resurrection, God has given us, who believe in His death and resurrection, the "holy and sure blessings promised to David" (v. 34; Isa. 55:3). These "holy and sure blessings" mean that God has adopted us as His children (v. 33) and has granted us the gift of eternal life through the resurrection of Christ, which has been realized for all the chosen people like us.

God is leading us to the true promised land, the heavenly kingdom. Just as Jesus was raised from the dead without seeing decay (v. 35), we too will be raised in glorious bodies that will not decay when Jesus comes again, and we will live with God in the eternal rest in the kingdom of heaven.

Today we have heard the word of God's salvation. God led us out of the kingdom of Satan, where we could do nothing but die, by causing Jesus to be lifted up on the cross. And our God is leading us through this transient world, as sojourners, to the true promised land, the kingdom of heaven. However, what is the problem? Like the Israelites in the wilderness of the exodus, we doubt and resent God, and we commit the sin of betraying Him. Furthermore, like the Jews living in Jerusalem at the time of Jesus, we often commit the sin of blaspheming Jesus in front of unbelievers because we do not understand God's word even though we hear it. But the amazing thing is that our God bears with these actions of ours. Why? It is because He desires to lead us to repentance. Look at Romans 2:4 - "Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, forbearance, and patience, not realizing that God's kindness is intended to lead you to repentance?" Therefore, we know one thing for sure. It is to receive forgiveness

of sins through Jesus.

With hope gained through the word of God's salvation,

James Kim

(Pressing forward towards the true promised land)

‘Completing His Course’

[Acts 13:25]

Once in Korea, there was a stir caused by rotten radish dumplings. Many citizens were angered by the fact that some dumpling companies were making dumplings with spoiled radishes imported from China. In the midst of this, I came across a news article about a restaurant owner who made a declaration of conscience. The reason they used spoiled radishes to make dumplings was to reduce the cost of ingredients and make more money. The news reporter pointed out that this was a misguided thinking of dumpling companies and some snack shops trying to easily make money at the expense of the nation's health. Similarly, many Christians seem to be running a race of faith with a misguided mindset, just like dumpling companies and some snack shops trying to easily make money. They want rapid growth in their faith without enduring hardships or dedicating themselves. Whether they will be able to finish the race of faith to the end is a question that seems unnecessary to ask.

I want to reflect on the race of faith of John the Baptist, focusing on Acts 13:25. More specifically, I want to meditate on his life as he persevered in his race of faith to the end, and receive the lessons that God provides.

First, John the Baptist proclaimed a message urging for change.

Look at Acts 13:24 - "Before the coming of Jesus, John preached repentance and baptism to all the people of Israel." Here, "repentance" refers to a change in life and heart. External change is meaningless without internal change. Therefore, as we prepare for our church's word conference, the entire church is praying for "change." I am holding onto Romans 12:2 - "Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will." What I want to consider here is what are the things I should not conform to in this generation. I want to reflect on things like whether I am following the patterns of the world, compromising with the world, etc. In short, I need to identify what needs to change in my life and in my heart. Therefore, as I prepare for this word conference, I desire to live a life that seeks change both during

and after the conference.

Second and last, John the Baptist possessed an unchanging truth.

The unchanging truth was 'I am not the Christ' (v. 25). Knowing who I am not means knowing who I truly am. In other words, John the Baptist knew his subject and faithfully fulfilled his role. In the Gospel of Mark, chapter 1, and the Gospel of John, chapter 1, John the Baptist is described as (1) a voice in the wilderness, (2) one preparing the way of the Lord, (3) one making the paths straight for Him, and (4) one revealing Jesus. He clearly understood his calling or mission and faithfully carried it out to the end. When people asked him, he could say, 'I am not the Christ,' which is the confession of one who faithfully acknowledges his calling. How many famous Christians are there who, while outwardly giving glory and honor to Christ, have roots of pride deep within, seeking to enjoy His glory and honor for themselves? Reflecting on whether there is any prideful ambition within, even as we outwardly give glory and honor to Christ, the confession of John the Baptist, 'I am not the Christ,' cannot be anything but the truth and principle of a life that led him to finish the race of faith. The confession 'I am not the Christ' not only tells us that I know who I am, but also that I know with certainty who Christ truly is. John the Baptist knew with certainty that Jesus was the Messiah, the Christ. Referring to Him as the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world (Jn. 1:29), John the Baptist focused solely on Jesus. That's why when his disciples told him that many people were going to Jesus to be baptized, he said, "He must become greater; I must become less" (3:30). The attitude of 'I must become less' is the faith posture of one who acknowledges the solid fact that 'I am not the Christ.'

I once watched the funeral of the 40th President of the United States, Ronald Reagan, through the news, and tried to apply the two principles of John the Baptist's life. First, like John the Baptist, who proclaimed a message urging for change, President Reagan was a president who pursued change in America. Leaving the White House, in his final speech, he evaluated the changed America, saying, "Not bad, not bad," and concluded his speech with, "Good bye! God bless America!" I was deeply moved by President Reagan, who endured pain and suffering to make a better America for the American people. Second, like John the Baptist, who possessed an unchanging truth, President Reagan is being evaluated as a president who held onto unchanging principles to the end. Through the news, I heard that he was being remembered as a man of principle, who governed the country according to his convictions without being swayed by the environment. I also heard the evaluation of Rev. Billy Graham, who said that President Reagan was a man with deep faith. Watching how President Reagan's death was evaluated through his funeral after he completed his race, I was challenged to become someone who finishes the race well.

Praying earnestly to be able to pursue change continuously in the race of faith, to distinguish between what

needs to change and what should not change, and to always possess the unchanging word of truth in my heart,
I remain,

James Kim

(Dreaming of Change Through This Revival Conference)

‘Continue in the Grace of God’

[Acts 13:42-52]

During the reign of Louis XIV, there is a fable that La Fontaine satirized. It's called 'The Wolf and the Lamb.' The story goes like this: One thirsty lamb was trying to drink from a stream in a valley when a wolf appeared and scolded loudly, 'How dare you muddle the water that I am going to drink!' The lamb, knowing there was nothing he could do, offered to drink farther downstream, about twenty steps away. Still, the wolf persisted, and suddenly he said, 'You, there! Last year, you insulted me, didn't you?' The lamb replied, 'Last year, I hadn't even been born yet.' The wolf insisted, 'Well, then, it was your brother or father, but it must have been someone from your family for sure.' With that, the wolf dragged the lamb into the woods and devoured him. This work conveys the thought that in the dominion of the mighty, justice always prevails.

Throughout history, the powerful have dominated. The strong, the influential, the knowledgeable, the wealthy have ruled over those who were not. Regardless of East or West, people have lived in subjugation, either through social hierarchies or by wealth and power. The church is not a community ruled by the principle of power. Churches that resemble the world unconsciously fall prey to the principles of power, becoming ensnared in self-satisfaction, arrogance, and pride. The church should never become a place ruled by the principle of power. It should be a place ruled by the principle of grace. It should be a place where people saved by the grace of God and living by His grace serve. Jesus, who came in the form of a human, completed salvation by dying on the cross. This is the method of redemption by the principle of grace, not by the principle of power. The church is not a place to boast in power, but a place to serve in grace. We should serve in grace (Internet).

The Bible Acts 13:43 says, "... continue in the grace of God." This expression illustrates the way of life for those who believe in the risen Jesus. A similar expression appears in Acts 11:23, "Remain true to the Lord." A life of faith is a life that continues to abide in the grace of God. A life of faith is never one that starts with God's grace and then proceeds with human effort or strength in the middle (Yoo). We must live a life of genuine faith. From the beginning, through God's grace, in the middle,

and in the end, we must finish with God's grace. We must never be like the Galatians, who began in faith but sought to finish by human works. We must guard against such foolish and misguided pitfalls of faith.

Today, I want to receive guidance on how to always remain in the grace of God, focusing on Acts 13:43. In doing so, I also pray that we may always abide in the grace of God.

First, in order to always remain in the grace of God, we need to gather to hear God's word.

Look at Acts 13:44 - "On the next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord." When Paul and Barnabas arrived in Antioch, they entered the synagogue on the Sabbath day and preached "the message of salvation" (v. 26) to the Jews and God-fearing people. They requested that the new people they met at the synagogue go out and tell others about this message on the following Sabbath (v. 42). So, on the next Sabbath, almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of God (v. 44). It seems that they received much grace from the message of salvation they heard through Paul and Barnabas the previous Sabbath. Therefore, they eagerly gathered again to hear God's word, even more so than the previous week. The author Luke states that almost the whole city gathered.

In the age we live in, there is a drought of not hearing God's word. Look at Amos 8:11 - "The days are coming," declares the Sovereign Lord, "when I will send a famine through the land—not a famine of food or a thirst for water, but a famine of hearing the words of the Lord." It's an era that denies the existence of absolute truth, an era where emotional manipulation through psychological tactics gains attention over the true word of God, an era where there is more talking than doing the word. It's an era where ears are present, but they do not hear the word of God (the voice). In Acts 13:45, we see a crowd opposing and not welcoming the word of God. They were Jews who, seeing many people gathering to hear the word of God through Paul and Barnabas, became jealous. They contradicted and reviled what Paul said (v. 45). Why did these Jews contradict and revile what Paul said? Of course, when hearts are filled with jealousy, it is unlikely that they will be receptive to the word of God. They must have been offended by what Paul said because it pricked their ears. Why would what Paul said have offended these Jews? Perhaps it was because Paul's message proclaimed that one could be justified by faith in the resurrected Jesus (vv. 38-39), while these Jews believed in being justified by observing the law of Moses, not by faith in Jesus (Yoo). That's likely the reason they opposed what Paul said.

In order to always remain in the grace of God, we must make an effort to gather to hear God's word. However, in the age we live in, there is a habit of forsaking gathering. Therefore, the writer of Hebrews advises us in this way: "Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching" (Heb. 10:25). We need to break free from this habit and make an effort to gather and hear God's word. However, there are factors that hinder us from hearing God's word. Look at Luke 8:14 - "The seed that fell among

thorns stands for those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by life's worries, riches and pleasures, and they do not mature." The passage identifies three things that hinder us from hearing God's word: life's worries, riches, and pleasures. When we worry, become preoccupied with wealth to the point of idolizing it, and seek to satisfy ourselves with worldly pleasures, even if we hear God's word, we cannot achieve maturity in faith. This kind of faith life can be described as a "thorn-infested" faith life. So, I would like to ask myself which of the three is hindering my spiritual maturity. To always remain in the grace of God, we must have a longing for God's word. In Nehemiah 8:1-5, we see the Israelite people who longed for God's word. They requested Ezra the scholar to bring out the Book of the Law of Moses to read it to them. They listened as Ezra read the Law from daybreak till noon, for about six hours (Lee). And not just for one day, but for seven days, standing for six hours each day, they listened to God's word (8:18).

Second, in order to always remain in the grace of God, we must praise God's word.

Look at Acts 13:48 - "When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honored the word of the Lord; and all who were appointed for eternal life believed." Praising God's word means exalting it. How did they exalt God's word? John Calvin interprets it in two ways:

- (1) By confessing the prophecy of the prophet Isaiah (quoted from Isaiah 49:6) in Acts 13:47 as true, which Paul mentioned, they glorified the word of God.

Look at Acts 13:47 - "For this is what the Lord has commanded us: 'I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.'" Paul explains that it is reasonable for the Gentiles to be the first to hear the gospel because the Jews rejected it (v. 46) and also because it is consistent with the prophetic words of Isaiah in the Scriptures (v. 47) (Park).

- (2) The Gentiles who heard the word of God through Paul accepted the doctrine (teaching) of the word in faith, thus exalting the word of God.

We should respect the word of God. To respect the word of God means to receive it with "Amen" and to obey it in faith (Calvin). When we accept the word of God in faith and live a life that embodies the word, we can say that we exalt the word of God. A good example is the saints of the Thessalonian church. The Thessalonian saints received the proclaimed word through Paul not as human words, but as the word of God (1 Thess. 2:13). They received the word even in the midst of tribulations with "the joy of the Holy Spirit" (1:6-7) and eventually, the word worked in the believers (2:13), making them imitators of the Lord (1:6). Furthermore, they became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia (v. 7). We should not stop at merely hearing the word of God. We must exalt the word of God. To

do this, we need to confess the truth of God's word and, by accepting it in faith, exalt it before God. Especially in the midst of persecution and tribulation (Acts 13:50), we must receive the word of God with the joy of the Holy Spirit, allowing it to work in us, so that we may become more like Jesus and give glory to God.

Third and last, to always remain in the grace of God, we must believe in Jesus.

Look at Acts 13:48 - "When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honored the word of the Lord; and all who were appointed for eternal life believed." The salvation story of God speaks of the fact that God's salvation is entirely by His grace. Those appointed by God to receive eternal life believed in the Lord. The reason is that God gave them faith. This is a concept familiar to us as "predestination." Those chosen by God through His sovereign grace receive faith as a gift and accept Jesus as their Savior. Furthermore, as a result of hearing the words of Paul and Barnabas and receiving the Lord, a remarkable thing happened: the word of the Lord spread throughout the whole region of Pisidia Antioch (v. 49).

We must believe in Jesus wholeheartedly. Jesus said, "The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent" (Jn. 6:29). The most important work we should be diligent in is believing in Jesus. And believing in Jesus pleases God. Look at Hebrews 11:6 - "And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him."

When we always abide in the grace of God, we are filled with joy and the Holy Spirit (v. 52). The believers in Pisidia Antioch, who were appointed for eternal life and believed in Jesus after hearing the message of salvation through Paul and Barnabas (v. 14), were filled with joy and the Holy Spirit even in the midst of persecution. What was the reason for this? The reason is that they were satisfied only with faith in Jesus Christ (Park).

Desiring to always abide in the grace of God,

James Kim
(Faith, Word, and Praise)

The Word of His Grace

[Acts 14:1-7]

The term "logismoi" is a word used by the desert fathers in the Greek language. This word refers to false thoughts and desires that lead to sin and despair. Logismoi are deceitful thoughts of the devil that go against the teachings of the Bible. They compel us to engage in sinful actions and corrupt speech. D.T. Bonhoeffer confessed, 'We often spend a long time trying to get rid of thoughts and worries that oppress us when we should be praying and musing on God's word' (Internet). How about our own faith life? Could it be that we are unable to accept God's word due to false thoughts and desires (logismoi) that lead to sin and despair?

In today's passage, Acts 14:3, the author Luke refers to God's word as "the word of His grace." The context behind this word of grace is when Paul and Barnabas preached the gospel in Iconium, faced persecution, and were driven out (13:50). Following the principle of Paul to first preach to the Jews, they boldly proclaimed the gospel in the synagogue of the Jews (Park). The people in Iconium who heard the word of grace through Paul and Barnabas were divided into two groups (v. 4). I would like to meditate on these two groups and receive a lesson on which group we belong to.

The first group opposes the word of grace.

Who were the ones opposing the word of grace?

(1) They were the ones who did not accept the gospel of Jesus Christ.

In other words, those who opposed the word of grace were unbelievers. These unbelievers did not believe in Jesus, even after hearing the word of grace through Paul and Barnabas. These unbelievers were not among those whom God had predestined to receive eternal life (13:48). In other words, those who opposed the word of grace were not chosen by God.

(2) Those who opposed the word of grace were disobedient.

In Acts 14:4, when Paul and Barnabas preached the word of grace and were divided, the Scripture refers to the first group as those who followed the Jews. The term "disobedient" in Greek means 'reluctant to be persuaded' or 'resisting obedience due to inhibitions of faith.' Unbelief and disobedience are linked. To not believe in God's word is to be disobedient. The term "disobedient" can be understood as one who not only does not believe the gospel but also resists and opposes it (Park). Their rebellious actions led to causing offense to the saints (believers) who believed in Jesus (v. 2).

(3) Those who opposed the word of grace persecuted the servants of the Lord.

Look at Acts 13:5 - "There was an attempt by both the Gentiles and Jews, with their rulers, to mistreat them and to stone them." Some of the citizens, along with the Jewish leaders and officials who sided with the unbelieving Jews, conspired to openly mistreat Paul and Barnabas and even plotted to stone them (Park). They actively cooperated and persecuted the servants of the Lord, Paul and Barnabas. They went as far as attempting to stone them to death, similar to how unbelieving Jews stoned Stephen. Remember, those who opposed the word of grace not only opposed the gospel and Jesus but also opposed us, believers.

The second group consists of those who follow the word of grace.

Who are those who follow the word of grace? In short, they are the ones who follow the gospel. In other words, they follow the gospel that forgives the sins of those who believe in Jesus and grants eternal life. They are the ones who heard the gospel of Jesus Christ through Paul and Barnabas and turned back to God. They were the ones who followed the two apostles, Paul and Barnabas (v. 4). We can consider those who follow the word of grace in two main aspects:

(1) Those who follow the word of grace believe.

Look at Acts 14:1 - "Now at Iconium they entered together into the Jewish synagogue and spoke in such a way that a great number of both Jews and Greeks believed." They are the ones whom God had predestined to receive eternal life (13:48). Therefore, they received faith as a gift through God's sovereign grace and believed in Jesus by welcoming His word into their hearts. Even though it may seem unbelievable, God chose a people whom He grants faith, enabling them to believe in the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus, which are seemingly unbelievable events (v. 41).

(2) Those who follow the word of grace obey the word of God.

A prime example can be found in today's passage concerning the apostles Paul and Barnabas. They

boldly proclaimed the gospel of Jesus Christ even in the face of adversity and persecution. Look at Acts 14:3 - "So they remained for a long time, speaking boldly for the Lord, who bore witness to the word of his grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands." Even in a situation where unbelieving Jews stirred the hearts of the Gentiles, causing them to believe in Jesus (v. 2), Paul and Barnabas demonstrated even greater boldness in testifying to the word of grace. They performed signs and wonders as a testimony to God's grace in their ministry. They continued this powerful ministry for an extended period of time, even in the face of ridicule and danger. When they experienced insults and perceived a threat to their lives, Paul and Barnabas fled to the cities of Lystra and Derbe and the surrounding country, where they continued to preach the gospel (vv. 6-7).

We are those who follow the word of God's grace. As we grow in faith, believing in Jesus Christ, we must live in obedience to God's commandments (His word). This is because of God's grace.

Let us all follow the word of God's grace. Let us seek the wisdom to treasure the word of God: "How does God's grace come to us? It comes through His word. He has stored His grace in His word. The essence of the word is Jesus. In Jesus, grace and truth were abundant. Indeed, in Jesus, there is an abundance of grace and truth in the word. Jesus is the source of grace. He is the fountainhead of grace. Therefore, we must always treasure the word. We must receive the word abundantly and hold it in our hearts. The word is a treasure. The word is a seed that creates the future. The word is a healing power. The word is power. The word is wisdom. The word is life (Internet).

Yearning for the word of grace,

James Kim

(With a heart desiring to experience the blessing of obedience to the word)

‘We Preach the Gospel to You’

[Acts 14:8-18]

Many people today are eagerly awaiting the gospel. Outwardly, they may appear fine, but their corrupted souls are in despair, quietly waiting for the joyful news that will save them. Therefore, the most urgent task for saved Christians towards the desolate society and neighbors is to proclaim truth, freedom, and share the gospel. However, many Christians have several reasons why they do not engage in evangelism. First, they think that evangelizing would be imposing on others and is not respectful of their beliefs. Second, it stems from the fear of potential rejection when evangelizing. Third, it's due to a lack of confidence in their faith. They feel hesitant to confidently proclaim their belief in Jesus, as they may have many flaws in their lives, lack assurance of salvation, and not fully understand the content of the gospel. There may be various other reasons as well. Nevertheless, what we must clearly understand is that evangelism is fundamentally the work of God. Even if we speak clumsily, changing the hearts of souls is the work of the Holy Spirit and the work of God. If we do not proclaim the gospel, the only one who will rejoice is Satan. Evangelism is a spiritual battle. It is the beginning of the struggle to determine whether the forces of evil or the work of the Holy Spirit will prevail. Always remember the fact that salvation from sin and judgment is possible only through God's work of salvation. Whether we obtain the opportunity or not, we must engrave in our hearts that proclaiming the gospel in obedience is the mission of a Christian and we must run towards those who are waiting for the gospel (Internet).

Looking at today's passage in Acts 14:8-18, we see the image of Barnabas and Paul hurrying towards the Lycaonian people with the gospel of Jesus Christ. In particular, in verse 15, the two apostles explain to the Lycaonians the two reasons why they are preaching the gospel to them. As we meditate on these two reasons today, I pray that you and I may live lives worthy of this gospel.

The first reason they preached the gospel is to turn away from vain things.

Look at Acts 14:15 - "... We bring you good news, that you should turn from these vain things"

Here, the term "vain things" refers to the pagan religions that worship gods in human form (Yoo). When Paul and Barnabas fled from Iconium to the city of Lystra, about 30 miles northwest (v. 8, Park), Paul, who had never walked before, was miraculously healed by the power of God and began to walk (vv. 9-10). At that moment, when the crowd saw what Paul had done, they shouted in the Lycaonian dialect, 'The gods have come down to us in human form!' (Park). They referred to Barnabas as "Zeus," the Hellenistic name for Jupiter, the chief god of Rome, and called Paul "Hermes," the representative god (v. 12). In short, the Lystran crowd idolized Paul and Barnabas. They quickly prepared oxen and garlands, intending to offer sacrifices with the people at the city gate to the two missionaries (v. 13). At that time, Barnabas and Paul rushed into the crowd, tore their clothes, and shouted, "Men, why are you doing these things? We also are men, of like nature with you..." (v. 15). Then Paul and Barnabas proclaimed the gospel to them. The reason they did this was to lead them to turn away from these vain things, which refers to the sin of idolatry, worshipping people as gods (Rom. 1:23).

Today, God is also telling us to accept the gospel of Jesus Christ. Those who have not yet accepted Jesus as their Savior and Lord must hear the gospel that Paul and Barnabas preached. In order to do this, the first thing we must do is to abandon the vain things of this world, which means getting rid of idols. Our sinful nature tends to exchange the incorruptible glory of God for corruptible images of man, beasts, and creeping things (v. 23). In other words, our sinful nature replaces the truth of God with falsehood, preferring to worship and serve the creature rather than the Creator (v. 25). Therefore, accepting the gospel means repenting to God for this sinful nature of ours. We must turn back. We must renounce the sin of idolatry. If we are already a saint who has accepted the gospel, what God wants from us today is to live a life worthy of the gospel. This is also what the Apostle Paul commanded the Philippians: "Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ..." (Phil. 1:27). What does it mean to live a life worthy of the gospel? First, it means turning away. In other words, what needs to be discarded should be discarded. What is it that hinders you from drawing closer to the Lord? (2 Tim. 3:2-5) Is it self-love? Love of money? Pride? Arrogance? Slander? Resisting motherhood? Ingratitude? Unholiness? Ruthlessness? Lack of self-control? Fierceness? Not loving what is good? Betrayal? Impatience? Laziness? Loving pleasure? Having a form of godliness but denying its power? We must discard all these things.

The second reason they preached the gospel was to lead them back to God.

Look at Acts 14:15 - "... and turn from these vain things to a living God, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them." The ultimate purpose of Paul and Barnabas preaching the gospel to the Gentile Lystrans was to compel them to completely abandon the vain worship of idols and ultimately return to God. How long would the Lystran Gentiles continue to worship the dead gods like Zeus and Hermes, which were part of Greek mythology? They believed in these legends. In other words, the Lystrans were worshipping dead gods. Paul and Barnabas proclaimed the gospel to the Lystrans, urging them to forsake these dead gods and turn to the living God who created the heavens, the earth, the sea, and everything in them. They also declared to the Lystrans that while in past generations, all peoples went their own ways, including serving idols, God did not leave Himself without witness, for He did good by giving

rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying hearts with food and gladness (vv. 16-17). Clearly, God provided evidence to the Gentiles. This evidence was none other than the abilities and blessings manifested in the natural world. As an example, Paul and Barnabas heard about the good that God did by sending rain from heaven and providing fruitful seasons (v. 17, Park). These were specific expressions of God's universal love for the human world that He created (Yoo).

Unbelievers who do not serve God have no excuse. It is impossible to claim that they did not worship God because they did not know Him. The reason, as Paul explains in Romans 1:20-21, is this: "For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened." When Paul says that God did not hold past generations of all nations accountable for serving idols, he is not saying that their sin was not considered sin, but rather that, despite the fact that their sin deserved condemnation, God endured with persistent patience (Park). Why is it that God endures with such persistent patience? Paul explains the reason: "Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?" (2:4). The reason God endures patiently is to lead us to repentance. In other words, His patient endurance towards the Gentiles was meant to bring about repentance, to compel them to forsake the sin of idol worship and return to the living Creator God. However, in Acts 14:18, we see that even after hearing this gospel through Barnabas and Paul, the Lystrans did not forsake their idolatrous way of life and did not return to God. We can see that they still intended to offer sacrifices to Barnabas and Paul, but they were barely able to restrain them.

We should emulate the Thessalonian Church. Look at 1 Thessalonians 1:9 - "For they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God." The Thessalonian saints abandoned idols and turned to God. They most certainly forsook what needed to be forsaken and returned to the Lord. They turned to serve the living and true God (1:9). Furthermore, they eagerly awaited the coming of Jesus (v. 10).

The reason God is proclaiming this gospel to you and me today is because He desires for us to forsake all vain things, return to Him, and live a life worthy of the gospel. Additionally, God wants us, as we live a life worthy of the gospel, to also proclaim this gospel to dying souls living in the vanity and futility of the world. I hope and pray that you and I may fulfill the will of God.

With a heart desiring to forsake all vain things,

James Kim

(Praying for continuation to witness the work of repentance through the gospel)

Complete the Work of God!

[Acts 14:19-28]

The Korean word "사명" translates to "mission" or "calling" in English. The word "사명" consists of (1) a given mission and (2) orders received by an envoy. So, what is our common mission? Are we aware of our mission? There are survey statistics from the American Retail Association stating that 48% of salespeople give up after the first call, 25% after the second call, and 15% after the third call. In other words, 88% of salespeople conclude their efforts after making one to three calls. However, the remaining 12%, who persistently make calls, end up accounting for 80% of total sales. Similarly, in evangelism among Christians today, a small percentage of individuals contribute to the majority of the church's evangelistic efforts. To save a life more precious than the entire world, how should we proceed? We must recognize the mission of gospel preaching and make a commitment to convey the gospel, as per the conclusion drawn from the statistics (Internet).

In Acts 14:19-28, we see the example of Paul and Barnabas fulfilling the mission given by God. Today, focusing on this passage, let's meditate on four aspects of the work of God that Paul and Barnabas accomplished. May we hear the voice that God is revealing to our church and pray for the opportunity to wholeheartedly engage in the Lord's work.

First, the work of God involves proclaiming the gospel.

Look at Acts 14:21 - "And when they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples" Paul, who had been stoned and left for dead in Lystra, miraculously rose up after the disciples had gathered around what they thought was his lifeless body. When Paul and Barnabas returned to Lystra and Iconium, the Jewish opposition managed to stone Paul after persuading the crowds. Believing him to be dead, they dragged him out of the city. However, Paul had not died; he had fallen into a state of shock due to the severe beating with stones. At that moment, the disciples who had accepted the gospel through Paul and Barnabas surrounded him, possibly intending to bury his body. But miraculously, Paul got up, reentered the

city, and the next day went to Derbe with Barnabas, continuing to preach the gospel (vv. 19-21).

What is the work of God? It is the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ. However, we must not forget the reality of Satan's opposition. Satan's work is a constant opposition to the gospel and those who proclaim it. The Jews, obedient to Satan, planned to stone Paul and Barnabas to death in Iconium, but the disciples' intervention thwarted their plan. Nevertheless, they pursued Paul and Barnabas to Lystra, succeeding in stoning Paul. Despite this persistent opposition, our responsibility, amidst the help of God, remains the same: to engage in God's work, which is the proclamation of the gospel. This is our collective mission.

Second, the work of God involves making disciples.

Look at Acts 14:21 - "... and had made many disciples." In Derbe, where Paul and Barnabas went together, they preached the gospel and made many disciples. This fact demonstrates that, no matter how tenacious and strong Satan's opposition may be, it cannot overcome the work of God. God continued to use Paul and Barnabas to preach the gospel and, eventually, make many disciples in Derbe. This aligns with the Great Commission given by Jesus in Matthew 28:19-20: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations," and it shows that Paul and Barnabas were obedient to this command.

This Jesus' Great Commission has also been given to us. Our mission is to fulfill this Great Commission. Like Paul and Barnabas, we, too, must make many disciples. We are called to go and make disciples of Jesus, as Pastor Juan Carlos Ortiz mentioned in his book, '¿Eres Discipulo?' (Are You Disciple?) (Internet). In today's churches, membership requirements typically include three aspects: (1) attendance at gatherings, (2) financial contributions, and (3) living a morally mature life. However, being a disciple is different from being a member. A disciple is someone who is called to live the life of their teacher and gradually becomes someone who teaches their life to others. Therefore, discipleship is not merely the transmission of knowledge or promotion; it is an exchange of life. This is why Jesus said, "The words I have spoken to you are spirit and life," and being a disciple involves more than just acquiring the knowledge known to the teacher.

Third, the work of God involves strengthening the hearts of disciples.

Look at Acts 14:22b-23: "... they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God." After successfully completing their ministry in Derbe, Paul and Barnabas revisited the missionary destinations in reverse order—Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch—strengthening the hearts (faith) of the disciples. This task would not have been easy, as there were Jews who opposed the gospel and the messengers of the gospel in these cities. In a way, those who needed to be strengthened in faith were likely not the disciples who had heard the gospel and become followers through Paul and Barnabas, but rather Paul and Barnabas themselves. Yet, what is astonishing is that despite facing persecution and the threat of death, God enabled Barnabas and Paul, and later Paul alone, to continue their gospel work, discipleship, and ministry. By doing so, they were able to strengthen the hearts of the disciples in the face of adversity. When Paul and

Barnabas revisited these challenging missionary fields, it was an opportunity for God to personally strengthen the hearts of their disciples amidst danger and opposition. Therefore, Paul and Barnabas, through their perseverance in the midst of suffering, continued to strengthen the hearts of disciples. The key message they likely conveyed during this revisit to the disciples could be summarized into two main points:

(1) Paul and Barnabas recommended to the disciples that they must continue to abide in faith.

They made it clear that faith is not something to be initiated and then discontinued during the process; rather, it should persist in any circumstance.

(2) Paul and Barnabas imparted the teaching that disciples who believe in the Lord must inevitably undergo many tribulations to enter the kingdom of God.

The disciples, having witnessed Paul and Barnabas enduring much persecution from the Jews, would have realistically grasped the significance of this teaching (Yoo).

As disciples of Jesus, we must humbly receive these two recommendations from Paul and Barnabas. We should never interrupt our life of faith once initiated; rather, our life of faith must continue. From the beginning to the end, we should not waver in our faith. Additionally, as disciples of the Lord, we must not forget that enduring tribulations is a prerequisite for entering God's kingdom. We should never underestimate this; avoiding the pathway of hardship while thinking we can still live as disciples of Jesus is a misconception. We must never become lukewarm believers. It is crucial to keep in mind that trials and tribulations are indeed essential subjects for disciples of Jesus.

Fourth and last, the work of God involves establishing leaders in the church.

Look at Acts 14:23 - "And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed." As Paul and Barnabas revisited the missionary fields, they selected elders to oversee and teach the church, aiming to strengthen and establish the churches. They entrusted these elders to the Lord through prayer and fasting. While God undoubtedly used Paul and Barnabas to establish the churches, it was also impractical for the two leaders to personally shepherd all the churches in each region. Thus, by selecting and appointing other leaders, they sought to solidify each church.

Paul expressed this idea when he said, "And what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also" (2 Tim. 2:2). One of the tasks that a church must handle from God's perspective is to appoint faithful workers. Setting up faithful and growing leaders is a significant responsibility that a church must bear, especially when there is an abundance of harvest but a shortage of laborers. The church urgently needs to manage this task, particularly during times of plentiful harvest and limited workers.

Ultimately, Barnabas and Paul returned to Antioch, the place from which they were initially sent, and gathered the church. They reported all that God had done with them (v. 27). First and foremost, they confessed that the work of proclaiming the gospel, which they had undertaken by God's grace, was indeed done through God's grace (v. 26). They also reported the fact that, through this ministry, they preached the gospel to the Gentiles, made disciples, and established leaders in each church to strengthen them. We must be able to confess that, even though we have completed the work of God, it was sustained solely by the grace of God. Furthermore, we should, as stated in Luke 17:10, confess, "We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty."

An unworthy servant,

James Kim

(Gratefully acknowledging that God continues to work through even feeble individuals like me)

Do not Put a Yoke on the Necks of the Disciples!

[Acts 15:1-11]

The term “a yoke” refers to a wooden frame placed around the neck of animals to connect two cows or to harness animals for pulling carts, among other uses (Internet). In an abstract sense, it can also signify a heavy burden, and when used in the context of captive individuals, it symbolizes dependency and servitude. In the New Testament, it is often used metaphorically to represent a state oppressed by the law and sin. However, there are instances where it is used positively. For example, Jesus mentioned that His yoke is easy, and Paul referred to those who help others as fellow bearers of the yoke.

In today's passage from Acts 15:10, Peter is speaking, and he says, "Now then, why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of the disciples a yoke that neither we nor our fathers have been able to bear?" Today, I want to reflect on this passage under the title "Do not put a yoke on the necks of the disciples!" and seek the lessons provided by exploring three points.

First, what is the “yoke”?

In simple terms, it is the burden of the law (Park). What does the burden of the law mean? The answer can be found in today's passage, Acts 15:1, 5: "But some men came down from Judea and were teaching the brothers, 'Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved'" (v.1), "But some believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees rose up and said, 'It is necessary to circumcise them and to order them to keep the law of Moses'" (v.5). The burden of the law refers not just to the law itself but to the customs and regulations imposed under the pretext of the law, such as circumcision (Yoo). One of these demanded customs or regulations was circumcision. Their argument was that salvation could only be obtained by adhering to the law of Moses. In other words, the burden of the law implies the claim that one must keep the law of Moses to obtain salvation. This claim is a misguided teaching that salvation is received through human actions. Trying to impose such a yoke on the disciples is a form of

testing God (v.10). How does this constitute testing God? Clearly, salvation is received by God's grace, not by human deeds (works). If one argues that faith alone is insufficient for salvation and that circumcision or adherence to the law of Moses is necessary, it is testing the power of God's salvation despite knowing that salvation is not earned through human effort.

Charles Swindoll, in his book "The Grace Awakening," made the following statement: 'The one I consider the most dangerous heresy on earth is the emphasis on what we do for God, instead of what God does for us.' Often, in our journey of faith, we focus more on what we should do for God and for the body of Christ, rather than reflecting on what God has done and is currently doing for us. This shift in focus leads us away from dwelling in God's grace and into legalistic 'faith,' where our concern becomes more about our own glory than giving glory to God.

Second, who attempted to put a yoke on the disciples' necks?

It was the legalists. In today's passage, Acts 15:1, 5, the Bible mentions "Some men" and "some of the believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees." Who are these "some men"? They are Jewish believers from the Pharisee tradition who had already accepted Jesus as their Savior (Yoo). These Pharisee Jewish believers, zealous for the law of Moses, traveled about 500 kilometers from Judea to Antioch, claiming that Gentile believers must be circumcised according to Moses' customs to be saved. This is an absurd claim that ignores the miraculous salvation story God revealed to the Gentiles, as seen in Acts 10-14. For example, when God, through Peter, first saved Gentiles, including Cornelius and his family and friends in Acts 10, there was no mention of receiving salvation through circumcision; they were saved simply by hearing and believing the gospel. Acts 11 further emphasizes that the Gentile church in Antioch did not have circumcision imposed as a condition for salvation. However, the Jewish believers from the Pharisee tradition, who had received Jesus as their Savior, insisted that Gentile brothers and sisters could not be saved unless they were circumcised (v.1). Why did they insist on circumcision? The reason was their belief that being circumcised was the only way to be part of God's people, the true Jews (Yoo). In other words, these Pharisee Jewish believers mistakenly thought that even after accepting Jesus as their Savior, they still needed to receive circumcision to become God's people. Circumcision cannot be a definitive criterion for determining one's status as God's people. Only faith in accepting Jesus as one's Savior is the criterion that decisively confirms one's status as God's people. Therefore, Jewish believers who accepted Jesus could still receive circumcision according to the tradition handed down from Abraham, and they could also administer circumcision to their children. However, it was never the means by which salvation was obtained.

In Matthew 15, when the Pharisees and scribes came to Jesus and said, "Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat" (v. 2), Jesus responded to them as follows: "... Why do you break the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition?" (v. 3). The commandment of God is to "Honor your father and mother" (v. 4), but the Pharisees and scribes did not honor their parents by saying, "What you would have gained from me is given to God" (v. 5). Jesus rebuked them, saying, "So for the sake of your tradition, you have made void the word of God" (v. 6), quoting Isaiah 29:13:

"This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men" (Mt. 15:8).

We must be cautious about legalistic approaches to our faith. It is crucial not to violate God's commandments in favor of religious traditions or customs. We should not nullify God's word through our traditions.

Third, what is the faith of the disciples?

It is solely to believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will (Acts 15:11). The faith of Jesus' disciples is centered on believing that they are saved solely through the grace of the Lord Jesus. They do not think they were saved through circumcision or human merit and efforts. Due to the Pharisee Jewish believers who had accepted Jesus, there was considerable debate and dispute in the Antioch church. Because of the significant disagreement between Paul, Barnabas, and the Pharisee Jewish believers (verse 2), the church in Antioch decided to send Paul, Barnabas, and others to Jerusalem to seek a final decision from the apostles and elders (verse 2). While on their way to Jerusalem, they reported in detail to the believers in Phoenicia and Samaria about the conversion of the Gentiles granted by God (verse 3). The reactions of the believers in these two regions were greatly rejoiced (verse 3). Upon their arrival in Jerusalem, Paul, Barnabas, and their companions were welcomed by the apostles and elders, and they reported all that God had done through them (verse 4). At that time, Pharisee Jewish believers also presented their case: "It is necessary to circumcise them and to order them to keep the law of Moses" (verse 5). After much debate, Peter stood up and delivered a concluding sermon (verses 7-11).

In Peter's sermon, we can find a couple of aspects of the true faith of Jesus' disciples:

- (1) True disciples are those who believe in Jesus solely through God's grace and have received the Holy Spirit.

Look at Acts 15:8 - "And God, who knows the heart, bore witness to them, by giving them the Holy Spirit just as he did to us." This statement affirms that God, who looks at the heart rather than outward appearances, poured out the Holy Spirit on both Jews and Gentiles, confirming that salvation is obtained through faith in Christ alone (Park).

- (2) The faith of true disciples involves receiving a pure heart through God's work of purification by faith.

Look at Acts 15:9 - "And he made no distinction between us and them, having cleansed their hearts by faith." The faith of true disciples, who have received a pure heart through faith, involves living a sanctified life in the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit's sanctification.

True disciples of Jesus never bear the yoke of legalism. So, what yoke do true disciples bear? It is the yoke of Jesus. Look at Matthew 11:29-30: "Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

What is "spirituality"? Many people seem to perceive spirituality as something supernatural or the performance of extraordinary abilities. However, spirituality does not refer to something supernatural but rather to moral or ethical qualities. Spirituality means conforming to the personality, life, and thinking of Jesus Christ. In other words, spirituality refers to having spiritual qualities or a spiritual disposition. Therefore, saying that spirituality is excellent means that spiritual qualities are excellent. Jesus promised to call those who labor and are heavy-laden and provide them with rest. He says that taking His yoke and learning from Him is the way to find rest for our souls. To reach the point of finding rest while bearing the yoke is what true spirituality is about. A state where one is crushed by the weight of the yoke and cannot even gather their thoughts cannot be called spirituality. Jesus says His yoke is easy and His burden is light (v. 30). Although the weight of the cross is by no means light, because it is borne out of love for Jesus and is willingly carried for His sake, it can be perceived as light. This power, where even the weight of the cross can be felt lightly because of love for Jesus, is the foundation of spirituality. Pursuing spirituality in the midst of pain and suffering, finding rest in Jesus, and seeking spirituality that emulates His gentleness and humility in that context - this is the kind of spirituality I desire.

Longing for the grace of the Lord, who lightens the burden of my yoke and makes my heart light even while bearing it,

James Kim

(Pursuing spirituality that finds rest in Jesus even while bearing the yoke)

Do not Trouble Those who are Turning to God!

[Acts 15:12-21]

Recently, there was an article in the U.S. magazine "Christian Today" that investigated the growth trends of American churches. The study selected 100 growing churches and analyzed how they experienced growth through interviews with their pastors. Growing churches were found to share several characteristics, including ample parking, a clear vision for the future, creative programs, an open attitude towards new believers, and voluntary participation and service (Internet). Among these characteristics, I am particularly interested in the open attitude towards new believers. Do we have new believers in our church? In other words, do we have individuals living a new life with Christ? While posing this question, I want to challenge each of us to invest in evangelism, starting with ourselves. However, equally important is the thought that existing members, who can welcome new believers, should be. We need to open our hearts wide and sincerely welcome new believers. The book 'Principles and Strategies for Nurturing New Believers' by Sung-hoon Myung states that to succeed in nurturing new believers, there must be the 4Ms:

(1) The first M is Mind.

The entire church must consider new believers as their top customers and shift all focus to the perspective of new believers and non-believers. This worldview change, from the senior pastor to the church council and Sunday school, should treat new believers as kings and queens. Attitude is always more important than facts.

(2) The second M is Men.

Once the mindset has changed, well-trained caregivers or helpers responsible for new believers should be available. The key to the ministry of new believers lies in how many helpers are prepared to devote their lives to new believers.

(3) The third M is Method.

After people capable of caring for new believers are trained, a strategic methodology suitable for each church should be prepared. Rather than blindly adopting what works in other churches, principles applicable in any situation should be understood.

(4) The last M is Management.

For the ministry of new believers to succeed, there must be an excellent ongoing management system. There should be a leader responsible for the entire ministry of new believers, and a supporting staff should be ready.

In today's passage, Acts 15:19, after reporting on the Gentile mission work, James, the brother of Jesus, expresses his opinion to the assembled crowd: "Therefore my judgment is that we should not trouble those of the Gentiles who turn to God." The phrase "not trouble" in this context means "not burdening with a heavy load" (Park). Through James's words urging not to burden the Gentiles turning to God with heavy loads, I want to receive the lesson that God wants to give to each of us.

First, to avoid troubling those turning to God, we need to remain silent.

Look at Acts 15:12 – “And all the assembly fell silent, and they listened to Barnabas and Paul as they related what signs and wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles.” Indeed, after much debate in the Jerusalem church between Paul, Barnabas, and the Pharisaic Jewish believers regarding whether salvation comes through faith alone or through faith plus adherence to the law, especially circumcision, when Peter stood up to preach, the entire assembly fell silent (v. 12). As Barnabas and Paul recounted the signs and wonders God had done among the Gentiles through them, the assembly listened quietly (v. 12). In order not to trouble those turning to God, specifically the Gentile believers, the Jewish believers needed to remain silent. They had to refrain from insisting that salvation required not only faith in Jesus but also adherence to Moses' law, particularly circumcision. Instead, they heard in silence Peter's statement that both Jewish and Gentile believers were saved by the grace of the Lord (v. 11).

We should not burden newcomers to the church with heavy loads. In the book ‘77 Reasons People Hate Church,’ authored by Man-jae Lee, one of the reasons highlighted is the sixth: ‘It is uncomfortable that the church does not completely prohibit alcohol and tobacco.’ While not agreeing with all 77 reasons, when considering this one, we see how the church, by not remaining silent, may unintentionally impose a yoke or a heavy burden on those turning to God, like the Pharisaic Jewish believers. One specific example is the issue of alcohol and tobacco. If a church, with a Pharisaic attitude, treats alcohol and tobacco as criteria for true membership, it is misguided. Professor Sung-bin Im (Professor of Christian Ethics at the Presbyterian Theological Seminary) wrote under the title ‘Alcohol and Tobacco from a Christian Ethical Perspective’ that around the church, opinions such as the following are often heard: Do you know how much of a stumbling

block an extreme and exclusive attitude toward alcohol and tobacco has been to the mission of the Korean church? Do you know how many people have given up on becoming members because of overly high moral standards? By making people who attend church with great difficulty uncomfortable about their conscience due to such a trivial cultural issue as alcohol and tobacco, is it not ultimately hindering active spiritual life?' (Internet). A churchgoer once asked a pastor the following: 'Pastor, my husband still cannot quit drinking and smoking even though he goes to church. He seems to think he should quit but is struggling. Moreover, there are often situations in social life where he can't help it. He feels like he is sinning just by coming to church because of this problem. What should I do?' The pastor's response was: 'While studying the Talmud at a school for educating rabbis, I made it a rule that students were not allowed to smoke. Wondering how students who wanted to smoke could do so, one student went to the rabbi and obtained permission. The student asked the rabbi, 'What if a person smokes while reading the holy Talmud?' The rabbi replied, 'It is not allowed to smoke while reading the holy Talmud.' Then the student asked again, 'What if a person who smokes wants to read the Talmud?' At that point, the rabbi said, 'That is fine!' I think the same applies to faith and tobacco. A person attending church does not need to intentionally smoke. This is because smoking is harmful to one's body, and all doctors advise against it. However, even if a non-believer who still smokes comes to church, it is praiseworthy. We must warmly welcome those who, despite smoking, step into the church. It is more beneficial to the soul than not coming to church while smoking. The existing believers should not condemn new believers who cannot quit smoking. Rather than making it difficult for people who smoke to attend church, we should encourage and accept them (Internet).

First, we should not trouble those who are coming to the church for the first time.

To do so, we need to remain silent. In other words, we should not burden newcomers to the church with useless yokes. There is nothing else required for salvation except believing in the Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, we should welcome them in the name of the Lord. The primary concern is their soul's salvation, not things like alcohol and tobacco.

Second, to avoid troubling those turning to God, we need to seek the Lord.

Look at Acts 15:17 - "that the remnant of mankind may seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles who are called by my name, says the Lord, who makes these things known from of old." James quotes the words of the prophet Amos (Amos 9:11-12) in Acts 15:14-18 to explain Peter's speech in verses 7-11. In essence, James confirms that the core message of Peter's speech, stating that both Jews and Gentiles "believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus we shall be saved, even as they" (v. 11), is correct. James's intention is to emphasize that the inclusion of Gentiles as God's people was fundamentally part of God's plan from the beginning. In other words, James suggests that God had prophesied through the prophets that from the creation, those He loves include not only Jews but also Gentiles. Therefore, James urges that, just like the Jewish believers, the Gentile believers should believe in the grace of the Lord Jesus for their salvation (v. 11). In verse 19, James explicitly expresses his opinion: "Therefore my judgment is that we should not trouble

those of the Gentiles who turn to God." James advises the Jewish believers, especially those from the Pharisaic tradition, not to trouble those turning to God, meaning the Gentile brothers, with conditions other than believing in Jesus Christ for salvation (Park).

Those who seek the Lord are those who believe in the message of Acts 13:38-39. Therefore, those who do not trouble those turning to God are those who believe in the Lord. Look at Acts 13:38-39: "Let it be known to you therefore, brothers, that through this man (Jesus) forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, and by him everyone who believes is freed from everything from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses." Those who seek the Lord know that they cannot be justified by the law of Moses. They understand that they are justified only by believing in Jesus Christ, who grants forgiveness of sins. In other words, those who seek the Lord are the ones who believe in the truth that "the righteous shall live by his faith" (Hab. 2:4). Those who seek the Lord are the ones who, irrespective of being Jews or Gentiles, transcending nationality, culture, and each ethnic group's regulations, are called by the name of Jesus and believe in Him. They understand and believe in the gospel that everyone called by the name of Jesus, regardless of being Jews or Gentiles, receives salvation. Therefore, those who seek the Lord do not burden disciples with useless yokes and do not trouble them.

Third and last, there is something to be abstained from.

Look at Acts 15:20 - "but should write to them to abstain from the things polluted by idols, and from sexual immorality, and from what has been strangled, and from blood." While explaining or supporting Peter's words (vv. 7-11) to the Jewish believers of the Pharisaic tradition, James expressed his opinion not to trouble those turning to God among the Gentiles. After that, James did not try to unilaterally resolve the issue in a direction favorable only to the Gentile believers. Instead, he wrote a letter to them in verses 20-21, advising them to abstain from certain things, showing consideration for the position of Jewish believers. In other words, while James did not agree with the Pharisaic tradition of imposing conditions such as law observance, especially circumcision, for salvation, he did counsel the Gentile believers on how their lives, based on the Mosaic law, should be, urging them to abstain from certain things. James's admonition to the Gentile believers to abstain from certain things can be summarized into four categories (Yoo): (1) things polluted by idols, (2) sexual immorality, (3) what has been strangled, and (4) blood (v. 20). The term "things polluted by idols" refers to food consecrated to idols from the perspective of Jewish believers. Jewish believers never ate such food because, according to their faith, consuming this food would render them unclean, jeopardizing their status as God's chosen people. Furthermore, eating food consecrated to idols was even more unthinkable than consuming other impure foods. Therefore, James, considering the perspective of Jewish believers, urged Gentile believers in his letter to abstain from freely eating food consecrated to idols to maintain harmonious fellowship with Jewish believers. James's advice to abstain from sexual immorality refers not only to broad sexual crimes but also to incestuous relationships prohibited in the Old Testament. The reason is that Jewish believers condemned marriages between close relatives, whereas Gentiles did not consider it a serious issue. "What has been strangled" refers to the improper slaughtering of animals without properly draining the blood. When addressing Gentile believers, James urged them to abstain

from consuming meat from animals whose blood had not been properly drained. Lastly, James advised Gentile believers not to consume blood directly. James cautioned against these four items because, from the perspective of Jewish believers, these were considered taboo. Look at verse 21: "For from ancient generations, Moses has had in every city those who proclaim him, for he is read every Sabbath in the synagogues." Therefore, for Gentile believers who turned to God to have amicable fellowship with Jewish believers, James, through his letter, urged them to abstain from these four items.

To avoid troubling those returning to God, we must exercise restraint. Especially in our church, which seeks to progress as a united body with various cultural and linguistic backgrounds, it is crucial to respect and uphold our unity in the Lord by exercising mutual restraint. To achieve this, we need to be considerate and exercise restraint for one another. In 1 Corinthians 9:19-21, Paul expresses it this way: "For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them. To the Jews, I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law, I became as one under the law (though not being myself under the law) that I might win those under the law. To those outside the law, I became as one outside the law (not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ) that I might win those outside the law." In essence, Paul adapted to various circumstances to bring salvation to as many as possible (1 Cor. 9:22). His ultimate goal was to do everything for the sake of the gospel. As seen in 1 Corinthians 9:23, "I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings." We should not trouble those who are new to the church, especially those who have recently come to know Jesus as their Lord and Savior through evangelism. To achieve this, we need to be still, seek the Lord, and exercise restraint.

Seeking for those returning to the Lord,

James Kim

(With the hope that our church becomes a church that sincerely welcomes new believers)

The Letter of Comfort

[Acts 15:22-35]

All of us are individuals in need of both giving and receiving comfort in our lives. Henry Nouwen spoke about the awkward comforter in this way (Internet): There was an ugly feeling. This feeling was kind, but because the skin on its face was rough, a friend, the sweet potato, always teased it, calling it a potato. The sweet potato had been so hurt that it eventually developed potato rot. The sweet potato went to the hospital for treatment. The doctor examining the sweet potato said, 'Sweet Potato, you have a severe case of potato rot. So, from now on, if others call you a potato, you will die. So, for a while, don't go out and rest quietly at home.' Worried, the sweet potato returned home. The story spread among its friends. The close friend, the potato, felt so sorry after hearing the story. Therefore, he decided never to call the sweet potato a potato again. To comfort the sweet potato, he went to its house. And he called out, "Sweet Potato!" However, there was no answer. "Sweet Potato..." But the sweet potato continued to maintain silence. Unable to contain his curiosity, the potato said, "Sweet Potato, are you sleeping?" Eventually, the sweet potato died (Internet). Reading this anecdote reminded me of Job 16:2, where Job refers to his friends who came to comfort him as miserable comforters. Despite their intention to comfort, Job's friends ultimately failed to provide solace; rather, they only increased his distress.

In Robert Strand's book 'The Spirit of Comfort,' there is an introduction by Henry Nouwen. Nouwen states that the word "comfort" means "to be with the lonely person," not to take away their pain but to be present with them. How many people around us, including ourselves, are in need of comfort? In today's passage, Acts 15:30-31, the Bible says, "... they sent a letter along with them, stating, 'The apostles and elders, your brothers, To the Gentile believers in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia: Greetings. We have heard that some went out from us without our authorization and disturbed you, troubling your minds by what they said'" (NIV). Reading these verses, with the words "letter" and "the words of comfort," we can say that the letter sent by the leaders of the Jerusalem church to the Antioch church is a 'letter of comfort.' Therefore, today, under the title "The Letter of comfort," I will reflect on this letter

in four aspects, hoping that we will be established as burning comforters of love, writing actual letters of comfort to those around us who are in need.

First, the Sender

The individuals who sent this letter of comfort were none other than the representatives of the Jerusalem church, the apostles, and elders. Look at Acts 15:23 - "They sent the following letter by them: The apostles and elders, your brothers, To the brothers among the Gentiles in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia. Greetings." These leaders heard about the events at the Antioch church from Paul, Barnabas, and others who came up from there (v. 2). After hearing about "everything God had done among the Gentiles" (v. 4) and the argument put forth by some Pharisees who believed that Gentiles must be circumcised and required to obey the Law of Moses (v. 5), there was much discussion (v. 7). After hearing Peter and James' accounts, they made a decision regarding the issue. The representatives of the Jerusalem church, the apostles, and elders decided, in agreement with James's proposal, to send a letter to the Gentile believers, instructing them not to trouble those turning to God with unnecessary requirements but to abstain from things polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from things strangled, and from blood (vv. 19-20). This decision was deemed acceptable, and they chose individuals to go with Paul and Barnabas to deliver the letter to the Antioch church (v. 22).

Reflecting on the senders of this letter of comfort, I pondered how this message could apply to us. The thought that came to mind is the fact that our Lord is our ultimate sender. In other words, our Lord sends us into this world.

Second, the Messengers

The people who delivered this letter of comfort were "Judas and Silas," leaders from the Jerusalem church. Look at Acts 15:22: "Then the apostles and elders, with the whole church, decided to choose some of their own men and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. They chose Judas (called Barsabbas) and Silas, men who were leaders among the believers." The decision of the representatives of the Jerusalem church, including "the whole church," was reported to "the whole church" (Yoo). Subsequently, the entire church selected individuals to deliver the decision to the churches in the Antioch region. The chosen leaders were Judas, also known as Barsabbas, and Silas, recognized leaders among the brothers (Yoo). In verse 32, they are referred to as "prophets." After being sent to Antioch, they gathered the assembly, read the letter, and provided "much encouragement" before returning to the Jerusalem church representatives who sent them (v. 33).

Thinking about Judas and Silas, the messengers who carried the contents of the decision made by the Jerusalem church to the Gentile believers in Antioch, we receive a lesson that emphasizes our responsibility to faithfully fulfill the tasks entrusted to us. Again, just as Judas and Silas faithfully carried out their responsibilities as those sent, realizing the intentions of the senders—the representatives

of the Jerusalem church, apostles, and elders—we, too, need to faithfully carry out the intentions of our sender, the Lord who sends us into this world. Judas and Silas' responsibility was to take the official letter containing the decision made by the entire Jerusalem church to the Antioch church and verbally deliver its content to the Gentile believers (v. 27). Similarly, we, as messengers or ambassadors of the Lord, need to proclaim something. That something is none other than the gospel of Jesus Christ. We are to take the gospel and spread it to the world around us.

Third, the Delivered Message

Through Judas and Silas, what was the content of the message delivered to the Antioch church? The contents are recorded in Acts 15:24-29, and we can summarize them in a few points.

- (1) The first point is about an incident where certain individuals, without prior approval from the apostles and elders of the Jerusalem church, went down to Antioch and troubled the Gentile brothers.

Look at Acts 15:24 - "We have heard that some went out from us without our authorization and disturbed you, troubling your minds by what they said." The representatives of the Jerusalem church, the apostles, and elders, explain that those who went to Antioch and troubled the Gentile brothers by teaching them that they must be circumcised according to the law of Moses to be saved were not sent by them (v. 1). They clarify that they did not authorize or instruct these individuals who caused distress among the Gentile brothers.

- (2) The second point is about the selection of Judas and Silas, along with Paul and Barnabas, to be sent by the Jerusalem church representatives to the Antioch church.

Look at Acts 15:25-26: "So we all agreed to choose some men and send them to you with our dear friends Barnabas and Paul—men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." Here, the representatives of the Jerusalem church refer to the previously mentioned messengers, Judas and Silas (v. 23). These two are mentioned again in verse 27: "Therefore, we are sending Judas and Silas to confirm by word of mouth what we are writing." Their role is to affirm the crucial decision contained in the letter through their oral testimony. This confirms that the content sent by the leaders of the Jerusalem church, as approved and sent by them, aligns with the verbal testimony of Judas and Silas. This plays a significant role in silencing the situation caused by certain individuals from the Jerusalem church who created issues in the Antioch church without permission (Yoo). An interesting point here is that the leaders of the Jerusalem church, referring to Barnabas and Paul, say, "our dear friends Barnabas and Paul—men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." This usage of "our" indicates a sense of brotherhood between the saints

of the Jerusalem church and the Antioch church, emphasizing that they are one in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ (vv. 23, 32). Additionally, it highlights the high esteem and respect Barnabas and Paul held among the leaders of the Jerusalem church, as they were individuals who did not spare their lives for the sake of the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

(3) The third point is the content that refers to the essential matters decided at the Jerusalem church meeting.

Look at Acts 15:29 - "You are to abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality. You will do well to avoid these things. Farewell." These essential matters include four things that Gentile believers should abstain from: "food sacrificed to idols," "blood," "the meat of strangled animals," and "sexual immorality." These four items were not absolute requirements for the salvation of Gentile believers but were deemed necessary for maintaining harmonious fellowship and friendship with Jewish believers, with whom they would continue to have regular contact in daily life (Yoo). The statement, "You will do well to avoid these things," more accurately reflects the meaning of the Greek sentence, conveying, "By being careful to avoid such things, you will behave rightly" (Yoo). It's crucial to note that these core decisions were not merely decisions made by the leaders of the Jerusalem church, but as stated in verse 28, they were decisions made under the directive guidance of the "Holy Spirit". Look at verse 28: "It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us not to burden you with anything beyond the following requirements." This statement aligns with the perspective expressed by the apostle James in verse 19: "It is my judgment, therefore, that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God." What does this show? It demonstrates that, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, the entire Jerusalem church accepted the Gentiles who turned to God and believed in Jesus as "brothers" (vv. 23, 32).

Fourth and last, Recipient

The recipients of the letter of consolation were none other than the Gentile brothers in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia. Look at Acts 15:23 - "They sent the following letter by them: The apostles and the elders, your brothers, To the Gentile believers in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia." According to Professor Sang-seop Yoo, if we consider Syria and Cilicia as administrative units within the Roman province, and Antioch as the capital of this region, these three names essentially refer to one region. In that case, we commonly refer to that region as Antioch. The leaders of the Jerusalem church sent the letter to the Gentile believers who lived in this region through Judas and Silas. Judas and Silas went down to Antioch, gathered the people, and orally delivered the letter. How did the Gentile believers in the Antioch region react? Look at Acts 15:30-31: "So when they were dismissed, they went down to Antioch, and after gathering the congregation, they delivered the letter. And when they had read it, they rejoiced because

of its encouragement." The recipients of the letter of consolation, the believers in the Antioch region, joyfully received the recommendations or comforting words conveyed in the letter sent by the leaders of the Jerusalem church.

When we look at the Prayer for Peace by Saint Francis, it includes these words: "To understand rather than be understood, to comfort rather than be comforted, to love rather than be loved" Of course, our instinct is to seek understanding rather than to understand, to receive love rather than to give love, and to be comforted rather than to comfort. However, the teachings of Jesus emphasize that there is greater blessing in giving than in receiving. Therefore, we should strive to live a life of giving comfort rather than seeking it. To achieve this, let us all, as taught in today's scripture, exert effort to write "letters of comfort."

Desiring a letter of comfort from the Lord,

James Kim

(Although I should live a life of giving comfort rather than seeking it ...)

Carry the Essential Burden!

[Acts 15:28]

In the article ‘The Church Being Like the Church,’ written by Pastor Jeong-woon Seo (Honorary President of the Presbyterian Theological Seminary), he emphasizes that the essence of the church lies not in institutions, organizations, buildings, or facilities, but in people who believe in and follow Jesus as their Savior and King. He emphasizes that the fundamental functions of the church, as seen in the Book of Acts, include worship, prayer, preaching, education, fellowship, and service guided by the teachings of the Word and the Holy Spirit, rooted in faith, hope, and love. However, the pastor questions why there is a focus on non-essential elements like buildings and facilities instead of the core functions of the church. He suggests that although the church seems to handle its essential functions, it may not be truly following the teachings of the Word and the Holy Spirit, leading to a ritualistic and habitual practice of worship, prayer, preaching, education, fellowship, and service, lacking genuine faith, hope, and love. Reflecting on historical church experiences, he notes that the most authentically church-like communities were those that, in times of political, social, and religious persecution, discerned and held onto essential elements, adopting a martyr-like attitude (Internet).

I think the reason why I invest life in non-essential things is because there is no persecution. Satan hopes that the church will not be church-like, so he attacks the essence of the church. The evil spirits and offspring of Satan persecute the church, attacking its essence. However, for those of us living in a world of religious freedom without such persecution, we may not feel the need to defend the essence of the church. The reason is that, in the absence of persecution, our passion to safeguard the essence of the church seems to have waned, allowing Satan to know that we may overlook the non-essential aspects of the church. What is even more frightening is the fact that we are losing the ability to distinguish between the essence and non-essence of the church. Because of this loss, in the midst of indiscriminate changes, we are transforming the Lord's church into a worldly institution, and this deeply concerns me.

Looking at the context of Acts 15:28, in verse 1, it emphasizes that certain people came down from

Judea to Antioch and were instructing the Gentile believers in Antioch that they must be circumcised according to the law of Moses to obtain salvation. They attempted to impose an unbearable yoke (v. 10), meaning the burden of the law. This constitutes a sin of "testing God" (v. 10) by questioning and doubting the salvation plan established by God's grace (Park). Despite salvation being through faith in Jesus Christ alone and by grace, our nature tends to focus on our own actions rather than relying on grace. This is because of a lack of humility to truly realize our own incapability and unworthiness. Pursuing salvation through works rather than relying on the grace of Jesus is a foolishness born out of pride.

So why should we not bear non-essential burdens? In other words, why should we no longer bear the burdens of the law? The reason is that Jesus has already fulfilled and carried the burdens of the law on the cross (Mt. 11:28). Therefore, we no longer need to carry unnecessary heavy burdens. However, those who still seek their own righteousness rather than relying on the righteousness of Jesus cannot find true rest or peace in the Lord. Instead, the Bible refers to the lives of those who live with such non-essential burdens as a burdensome life (Acts 15:19) and a life that disturbs the soul (v. 24). To rid ourselves of these burdens, the Scripture urges us to heed the words: "but we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will" (v. 11). We must cast off the non-essential burden of the law through the grace of the Lord Jesus.

So, what were the essential burdens that the Antioch church believers needed to bear? If we look at Acts 15:20, 29, the Bible mentions four things: "things polluted by idols," "sexual immorality," "things strangled," and "blood." Avoiding these is what the Gentile believers needed to "abstain from." According to The Bible Exposition commentary, these four items can be divided into two categories: (1) Commands and (2) Concessions. Worshiping idols and committing sexual immorality are clearly commanded to be avoided in the Bible. Particularly, the Jerusalem church, in a letter to the Antioch believers, instructed them to stay away from these two widely spread sinful practices among Gentiles, as seen in 1 Corinthians 8-10. The reason these two items were not a problem for Jews or Gentiles was because it was God's command. However, there was an issue regarding concessions. Eating and drinking things related to idols, such as their meat and blood, could cause division between Jewish and Gentile believers since, from a Jewish perspective, these were considered unclean. However, what demonstrated the unity of the church without division was the mutual concessions made by Jewish and Gentile Christians. The Jews argued that the Gentiles did not need to be circumcised, and the Gentiles accepted new eating habits by refraining from eating meat sacrificed to idols (v. 31). What fruit did this bear?

- (1) Strengthened the unity of the church by preventing division into legalistic and grace-oriented groups.
- (2) Through mutual concessions, the church became a witness community to the lost Jews.

The fact that the church still identified with Jews, especially in your Lord, demonstrated the power of a witness community by showing that Jewish and Gentile believers could be united in witnessing.

(3) The decisions from both sides brought blessings to many Gentile believers.

Not only in the Antioch church (v. 31), but also during Paul's second missionary journey, sharing this letter with various churches strengthened the faith of the church, leading to church growth (16:5). Ultimately, when we bear essential burdens, we will experience well-being and peace of heart (v. 29).

To be a true church, we must cast off non-essential burdens, such as unnecessary yokes, and willingly bear essential burdens with gratitude.

With a heart of gratitude to God who reveals the essential and non-essential elements of the church,

James Kim

(With a heart of gratitude for no longer needing to bear the burden of the law)

The Ministry of Comfort

[Acts 15:35-41]

Today, we may not fully understand how many people are living with emotional wounds and conflicts. Therefore, there are many with fragile hearts (1 Thess. 5:14). Apostle Paul urges comforting those with weak hearts (v. 14). How can we truly comfort those with fragile hearts? In the preface of Robert Strand's book, 'Spirituality of Comfort,' Henri Nouwen says that "comfort" means "being with the lonely." Comforting does not mean taking away pain; rather, it is being there together. How many people around us, including ourselves, need comfort?

We have already reflected on the "The letter of comfort" centered on Acts 15:22-35. Thinking about the letter of comfort that Jerusalem church leaders sent to the Antioch church, we were encouraged to write letters of comfort. Today, while meditating on Acts 15:35-41, focusing on Paul's second missionary journey, let's draw three lessons on how we should handle the ministry of comfort.

First, revisiting is crucial in the ministry of comfort (Go back!).

Look at Acts 15:36 - "After some days, Paul said to Barnabas, 'Let us return and visit the brothers in every city where we proclaimed the word of the Lord, and see how they are.'" After delivering the letter of comfort to the Antioch church with Judas and Silas (v. 32), Paul and Barnabas went down to Antioch, where they stayed, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord with many others (v. 35). After some time, Paul proposed to Barnabas that they revisit the places of their first missionary journey (v. 36). Why did Paul want to revisit the places with Barnabas? The reason was to check how the brothers were doing. In other words, Paul and Barnabas wanted to revisit the cities where they had proclaimed the word of the Lord during their first missionary journey to see how the brothers in those cities were doing. It was to check on their spiritual well-being. In essence, the purpose of Paul and Barnabas's revisit to the places of their first missionary journey was not for evangelism but for the nurture of the brothers who had already believed (Yoo).

What is "nurture"? "Nurture" is the continued preservation of the fruit obtained in evangelism. It means helping spiritually young believers start and grow well in their Christian lives (Bible study materials). How can we help new Christians start well and grow? To start well, the foundation of faith must be solid. Therefore, spiritually young believers urgently need the foundational teachings of the Bible concerning salvation. The reason is that spiritually young believers may try to have a trustworthy assurance only by feeling emotionally saved. However, if they commit sins, the assurance of salvation can easily be shaken in the midst of guilt. Therefore, the most urgent and crucial task is to instill the assurance of salvation in spiritually young believers. Also, to help them grow well, it is necessary for them to understand that salvation depends on what Jesus Christ has done and promised, not on their emotions or actions. Like watering a planted tree, to help spiritually young Christians grow well, we must continue teaching them the Word of God. Therefore, rather than being led by emotions, we must help them be led by God's Word (truth). The most crucial principle of nurture is the "example."

Paul also advises the Corinthians and us in nurturing spiritually young Christians: "Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ" (1 Cor. 11:1). In nurturing spiritually young Christians, the most important principle is that we, first, diligently imitate Jesus and show Him to them through our lives.

Second, what is crucial in the ministry of comfort is reconciliation (Do not quarrel!).

Look at Acts 15:39 - "And there arose a sharp disagreement, so that they separated from each other. Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus." Consider that Paul proposed to revisit the places of their first missionary journey, and Barnabas accepted. However, the problem between them was "John, called Mark" (v. 37). In other words, Paul and Barnabas had a disagreement, and Barnabas wanted to take his cousin John, called Mark, with them on the second missionary journey. However, Paul thought it was not appropriate because John, called Mark, had left them during the first missionary journey in Pamphylia and returned to Jerusalem (v. 38). As a result, Paul and Barnabas had a sharp disagreement and parted ways (v. 39). Their dispute was not just a quarrel; it was a severe disagreement based on a substantial difference of opinion (Yoo).

Whose perspective do you think is correct? Paul's perspective or Barnabas's perspective? Was Paul's perspective correct, or was Barnabas's perspective correct? Paul's perspective was that it was not appropriate to bring John, called Mark, with them on the second missionary journey because he had left them during the first missionary journey and returned to Jerusalem. On the other hand, Barnabas's perspective was to bring his cousin, John, with them. Professor Sang-sub Yoo seems to support Paul's perspective in his commentary. However, my personal opinion is that instead of saying one person's perspective is correct, both Paul's and Barnabas's perspectives are valid. The reason is that they simply had different priorities. In other words, Paul was task-oriented, while Barnabas was people-oriented or relationship-oriented. Task-oriented individuals want to finish the work first and then deal with issues related to people. These people go to work and finish their tasks before thinking deeply about how others feel about the work. However, it

does not mean that task-oriented individuals are cold-hearted; it's just that they prioritize their tasks. People-oriented individuals say that people come first. They believe that people need to feel good to work effectively. Therefore, they prioritize people over tasks and think that people should feel good about their work before they can effectively complete qualitative tasks. The problem between Paul and Barnabas was not about who was right or wrong; it was that they did not respect each other's differences, failed to find a solution, and quarreled before parting ways. Regarding this incident, John Calvin said, 'Even in the most important matters, we must learn to control our zeal well. If our zeal is not well regulated, we should not be swayed by it' (Calvin, Park). This statement is truly empathetic. We need to control our zeal and be cautious of excessive zeal. Especially in the body of the Lord's church or in missionary work, it is not wrong for individuals to have different priorities, but what is more important is to respect each other's differences, reconcile, and work together harmoniously. Even though Paul and Barnabas had a serious difference in perspective, after parting ways, Paul chose Silas and left for the mission field after receiving the grace of the Lord from the brothers in Antioch (v. 40). Barnabas, on the other hand, sailed to Cyprus with Mark. However, God worked through their separation, bringing about good results. Later, Paul praised Barnabas, and Mark became well-regarded (Col. 4:10). We are individuals who have received the duty of reconciliation from God (2 Cor. 5:18). Therefore, we should become peacemakers, not peace-breakers. Just as parents who break peace in their homes cause their children to be hurt rather than comforted, in the church, we should not become peace-breakers. As believers reconciled with God in Jesus Christ, we should become peacemakers in our relationships with others. When we do so, those around us, our brothers and sisters, will be able to receive comfort.

Third and last, in the ministry of consolation, it is important to strengthen the church (Make the church firm!).

Look at Acts 15:41 - "He went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches." After the dispute with Barnabas, the Apostle Paul eventually left on his second missionary journey with Silas. As we have previously meditated, Silas was one of the leaders in Jerusalem, along with Judas, who received the official letter (letter of consolation) from the leaders of the Jerusalem church, came to the Gentile church in Antioch, read the letter, and encouraged the brothers with many words to strengthen them (v. 32). Afterward, he returned to Jerusalem, then came back to the Antioch church and took on ministry responsibilities (Yoo). Silas was a suitable fellow worker for Paul (McArthur). The reason is that Silas, as a prophet (v. 32), proclaimed and taught the word of God. Also, being a Jew, Silas could enter synagogues open only to Jews and, as a Roman citizen (16:37), enjoy the same privileges and protections as Paul. Additionally, as a respected leader within the Jerusalem community, Silas could help reinforce Paul's teaching that Gentiles are saved by the grace of God through faith in Jesus Christ alone. Together with this new fellow worker Silas, Paul traveled through "Syria and Cilicia," revisiting the churches and strengthening them (15:41). Paul's ministry of strengthening the churches is consistent with what we have already seen in Acts 14:22: "strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God." Also, if we look at Acts 15:32, we can see that Silas, like Paul, took on the ministry of strengthening the brothers: "Judas and Silas, who were themselves prophets,

encouraged and strengthened the brothers with many words." How can we strengthen our brothers and sisters around us? By being a reliable support for them. A reliable support is like a sturdy tree with deep roots, standing firm and unwavering even in the face of storms. It means standing firmly in faith, unwavering and faithful to God's Word, even in the face of temptations, trials, and difficulties. Additionally, to strengthen those around us, we need to be a solid support for them. A solid support involves using God's Word to encourage them. We must encourage them to exert their strength in "believing in the Son of God" and "growing to the measure of the stature of Christ" (Eph. 4:13). In doing so, we should help them reach "the fullness of Christ's mature measure." When they do, they will not be swayed by the cunning tricks of human deception and temptations, remaining steadfast in the essence of all teachings (v. 14).

If we look at Acts 9:31, which we have already meditated on, the Bible says: "So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was being built up. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it multiplied." Here, the phrase "comfort of the Holy Spirit" reveals the unique nature of the Holy Spirit. The Greek original word for the Holy Spirit is 'Parakletos,' which means 'Comforter.' So, we can say that the Holy Spirit is the 'Spirit of Comfort.' When we refer to the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of Comfort, what meaning is implied? One of the meanings implied is that the Holy Spirit is the One who gives comfort. When does the ministry of the Holy Spirit's comforting work manifest most effectively? The ministry of the Holy Spirit's comforting is most evident during times of suffering and testing. The work of the Holy Spirit's comforting is directly proportional to the magnitude of trials. In other words, the greater the trial, the more significant the comfort.

"For as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, so through Christ,
we share abundantly in comfort too" (2 Corinthians 1:5).

Wanting to receive the ministry of the Holy Spirit's comfort,

James Kim,

(Praying to endure the ministry of peace-making and solidifying by God's grace)

A Church Growing Daily in Faith and Numbers (1)

[Acts 16:1-5]

One day, during a church leadership Bible study on Acts 4, I gained insights into how the Lord established His church (referred to as the early church) and noticed a pattern. Reflecting on how the Lord built the early church, I identified five elements in the pattern, which I call the "Top to Bottom Method": (1) Prayer (Acts 4:31, cf. 1:14-15), (2) Being filled with the Holy Spirit (4:8, 31), (3) Preaching the gospel (vv. 8-12), (4) Growth in believers (v. 4, cf. 2:47), and (5) Loving community (4:32-37). However, I was surprised to realize that the pattern of how our churches are built in contemporary times is the exact opposite, which I refer to as the "Bottom to Top Method."

(1) Church:

In the Lord's method, the first priority is prayer, but in the worldly method, the focus is on building the church as a community. While efforts are made to unify hearts and minds within the church, observing many churches attempting to establish themselves with diverse visions and goals makes it clear that this cannot be considered God's way.

(2) Number of Church Members:

The worldly second method seems to prioritize increasing the number of church members. It raises concerns that the increase may not be due to people hearing the gospel and being saved but rather a result of "sheep-stealing," as mentioned in the book "The Purpose-Driven Church." The focus appears to be on horizontal transfer, not on people coming out having heard the name of Jesus Christ.

(3) Evangelism/Mission:

The third method involves reluctantly engaging in evangelism and mission.

(4) Being Filled with the Holy Spirit:

Only at the fourth stage, it seems, is there a seeking after being filled with the Holy Spirit. Even though this should be the first step, in the worldly method, it is often placed at the end, creating a sense of mystery or emotionalism rather than being biblically grounded.

(5) Prayer:

Even prayer is conducted with an attitude that seeks acknowledgment of our sovereignty rather than recognizing God's sovereignty, holding onto His promises, and praying. The focus is often on our circumstances, feelings, and thoughts rather than a posture of humbly calling out to God.

In Acts 16:5, the Bible records, "So the churches were strengthened in the faith and grew daily in numbers." Today, centering around this scripture, I want to meditate on how our church, under the title "A church growing daily in faith and numbers," can become a church where faith and numbers increase each day.

First, for our church to become one where faith and numbers grow daily, we must all become disciples of Jesus.

Look at Acts 16:1 - "Paul came to Derbe and then to Lystra, where a disciple named Timothy lived, whose mother was Jewish and a believer but whose father was a Greek." After the disagreement with Barnabas and the separation (15:39), Paul, along with Silas, went on their first missionary journey to Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches (v. 41). In Acts 16:1, Paul arrived in Lystra, passing through Derbe, and encountered Timothy. The region of Lystra was where a remarkable miracle occurred during Paul's first missionary work, healing a man who had never walked (cf. Acts 14). This led to a tumultuous incident where the locals wanted to offer sacrifices to Paul and Barnabas, thinking they were gods (Yoo). Lystra, as a city with a significant non-Jewish population, was a focal point for the spread of Christianity, as God used Paul and Barnabas in their first missionary efforts to preach the Gospel and perform miracles. After many years, when Paul returned to Lystra with Silas, he found a few believing Jews in this predominantly Gentile city. Among these believers, Paul encountered a new individual, Timothy, who was a disciple (Yoo). According to Acts 16:1, Timothy's mother was a Jewish believer named Eunice, and his father was a Greek. Considering the biblical context and Timothy's background, he can be described as a "half-Jew," meaning his mother was a believing Jewish woman, and his father was a Greek. Timothy's mother, Eunice, is mentioned in 2 Timothy 1:5, described as

having a sincere faith, similar to Lois, Timothy's grandmother. Both women were known for their genuine and steadfast faith, making Timothy a fortunate possessor of such a precious faith (Park).

True disciples of Jesus have a sincere faith without deception. The term "sincere faith" signifies a faithful, unsophisticated, and genuine belief. As an example, we can reflect on the faith of Abraham in Romans 4:18-21.

(1) Abraham's sincere faith was hope against hope (v. 18).

Despite being about a hundred years old and Sarah's womb being dead, he believed in God's promise that his descendants would be as numerous as the stars. In other words, Abraham's faith was a hope for a son in an impossible situation, beyond human medical capability.

(2) Abraham's sincere faith did not weaken in the face of an impossible situation (v. 19).

He knew the deadness of his body and Sarah's womb, yet his faith did not falter.

(3) Abraham's sincere faith, in an impossible situation, grew even stronger, giving glory to God (v. 20).

"He did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God."

(4) Abraham's sincere faith was the confidence that God could fulfill His promise (v. 21).

"Being fully persuaded that God had the power to do what He had promised." Sincere faith holds on to God's promise.

As true disciples of Jesus, we must heed the words of 1 Corinthians 13:5: "Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you— unless, of course, you fail the test?" Now, you may be familiar with Niagara Falls. In 1860, the renowned tightrope walker Blondin attempted to walk on a tightrope above Niagara Falls. A year earlier in 1859, Blondin had successfully carried his manager, Harry Colcord, on his back across the tightrope above Niagara Falls. This feat drew a large crowd eager to witness Blondin's tightrope walk. Tying a rope about 300m long at a height of approximately 50m above the rushing waterfall, Blondin posed a question to the gathering admirers: 'Do you believe I can walk across this tightrope from this side to the other?' The crowd enthusiastically responded, 'Of course!' to which Blondin asked, 'Do you believe I can walk across this tightrope carrying someone on my back?' Again, the crowd replied, 'Of course!'

Yet, when Blondin invited any volunteer from the crowd to step forward and be carried on his back, no one volunteered. What does this story tell us? Despite the crowd claiming to believe in Blondin, their faith ultimately proved to be hypocritical and insincere (Internet).

With God's grace, having become disciples of Jesus,

James Kim

(Seeking faith that hopes against hope)

A Church Growing Daily in Faith and Numbers (2)

[Acts 16:1-5]

I would like to share an article titled 'Living Together with Others' by Miroslav Volf, Henry B. Wright Professor of Theology at Yale University, published in the Christian Today newspaper on July 25, 2007. The society we live in is racially, culturally, and religiously diverse. In such a society, if we perceive differences in race, culture, or religion as exclusive, it creates tension and inevitably leads to conflicts. In order to avoid merely coexisting and fostering conflicts, the author suggests four things that need to be considered (Christian Today):

(1) 'An intention to embrace one another.'

To achieve this, we need to imagine others not as factors limiting ourselves but as potential enrichments.

(2) 'Try seeing from each other's perspective.'

To live with the intention of embracing each other, a reversal of perspective is necessary. In other words, when looking at others, we need to see them from their own point of view. Also, it is essential to see ourselves through the eyes of others.

(3) 'Mutual intervention.'

It involves understanding how the other wishes to be understood and deciding whether to fully or partially agree with their understanding. This is where dialogical mutual intervention becomes crucial.

(4) 'Embracing others.'

Christians should be able to embrace beyond pure lineage, nationality, culture, or ethnicity.

Reading this article, I reflected on its applicability to our church. Diverse ministries (Korean, English, Hispanic) respecting diversity while striving for unity within the Lord can be facilitated by such an approach. In the spirit of mutual embrace, efforts should be made to change perspectives, acknowledging differences under the premise that complete agreement might not be possible. Amidst this, it is crucial to recognize the need for mutual intervention. In this context, let us no longer perceive ourselves as "others" but rather embrace each other under the concept of unity, preparing to be instruments in building the church as one heart and one mind in the Lord.

We have already learned that for our church to become a growing community of faith, centered on Acts 16:1, each of us needs to be a disciple of Jesus. Furthermore, as disciples of Jesus, we learn the importance of having "sincere faith," just like Timothy (2 Tim. 1:5), meaning a genuine and non-hypocritical faith. As an illustration, we contemplated the faith of our forefather Abraham, examining four aspects to test and confirm whether we are truly rooted in faith: (1) Abraham's faith was a belief in the impossible, hoping against hope (Rom. 4:18). (2) Abraham's faith remained unshaken even in seemingly impossible situations (v. 19). (3) Abraham's faith, amid impossible circumstances, grew stronger, ultimately bringing glory to God (v. 20). (4) Abraham's faith was a firm conviction that God could fulfill His promises (v. 21). Today, focusing on Acts 16:1-5, I would like to contemplate two remaining aspects to receive guidance on how our church can indeed become a community of growing faith each day.

Second, for our church to be a community of growing faith, each of us must strive to become a praised disciple of Jesus.

Look at Acts 16:2 - "Timothy was well spoken of by the believers in Lystra and Iconium." Timothy, a disciple of Jesus who possessed "sincere faith," received praise from the "brothers," meaning the Christian believers, in Lystra and Iconium. When contemplating why Timothy received praise from these two local communities, it is attributed to his genuine and non-hypocritical faith. Furthermore, as a true disciple, he emulated Jesus in his life, which earned him praise from fellow believers. As previously pondered, becoming a disciple of Jesus during His time meant primarily learning, obeying, and living in imitation of the Lord. Although Timothy did not physically walk with Jesus, he lived in emulation of Him. In other words, Timothy was a person who, aspiring to reflect Christ, progressed systematically and progressively in all his actions toward that purpose. This commitment led to him receiving praise from the Christians in Lystra and Iconium. However, being a disciple praised by Jesus doesn't imply receiving praise from everyone. Even though sincere believers like Timothy may receive praise, caution is necessary when praised by worldly people. One should be aware that receiving praise from the devil's crowd may lead to becoming like the devil. True disciples, when praised, must redirect

that praise to God and not seek personal glory (Park). As Proverbs 27:21 states, "The crucible for silver and the furnace for gold, but people are tested by their praise."

Communities of disciples, like Timothy, who receive praise, become churches that are worthy of praise. A church where disciples of Jesus, striving to emulate Him, gather and are praised is a "Christian Church," much like the Antioch church mentioned in Acts 11:26. When Barnabas, along with Saul (Paul), systematically taught and thoroughly trained the large crowd gathered at the Antioch church for a year, the result was that the disciples of Antioch, through qualitative growth, gained the nickname "Christians" from non-Christians for the first time. The term means "followers of Christ." How well-disciplined the saints of the Antioch church were that non-Christians could say, 'Those people are followers of Christ' when looking at them! We hope our church becomes a "Christian Church" like the Antioch church. We all wish to hold Jesus in our hearts and become disciples who, resembling Jesus, proudly proclaim and follow Him. Richard Foster once said, 'Perhaps the greatest malady of the Church today is its members, who are not disciples of Christ. It affects all aspects of church life and is the reason for the low spiritual level of local congregations' (Internet). We must never settle for a low spiritual level. Instead, we earnestly desire to become, as 1 Corinthians 11:1 suggests, "imitators of Christ." Therefore, like Paul, we can exhort others, saying, "Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ."

Third and last, for our church to become a growing church in faith and number each day, all of us must observe God's commandments.

Look at Acts 16:4 - "As they went from town to town, they delivered the decisions reached by the apostles and elders in Jerusalem for the people to obey." When Paul wanted to take Timothy, a disciple of Jesus praised by the believers in Lystra and Iconium, with him during his missionary journey, he had Timothy circumcised because of the circumcised Jews in that region (v. 3). The reason was that Timothy's father was a Gentile, and Paul judged that Timothy's uncircumcision would pose a problem for Jewish evangelism (v. 3) (Yoo). It's important to note that Paul did not succumb to the legalistic and Pharisaic claims of Jewish believers who insisted on circumcision for salvation, as mentioned in Acts 15. In other words, circumcising Timothy was not a means of salvation for him. It was done considering the Jews in Lystra and Iconium (Yoo). Here, we can see Paul's wisdom. He became all things to all people, seeking their salvation (1 Cor. 9:22). Thus, while free to everyone, he made himself a slave to everyone to gain them (v. 19). To the Jews, Paul became like a Jew, and to the Gentiles without the law, he became like one without the law. He did all this for the sake of the gospel, to share in its blessings (v. 23). After circumcising Timothy, Paul, Silas, and Timothy traveled to various cities, urging them to follow the decision made by the apostles and elders in the Jerusalem church (v. 4). This decision was the set of regulations mentioned in Acts 15:20 and 29, which the Gentile believers were to observe. These regulations stated, "Abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals, and from sexual immorality. You will do well to avoid these things" (v. 29). The reason Paul, Silas, and Timothy urged the Gentile believers in those regions to observe these regulations was to

maintain harmony between Jewish and Gentile believers (Park). Perhaps at that time, within the churches in the regions revisited during the first missionary journey, there were many Gentile believers mixed with a few Jewish believers (Yoo). That's why Paul and his companions, in revisiting these churches, encouraged the majority of Gentile believers to observe the regulations set by the apostles and elders in Jerusalem for the sake of the few Jewish believers.

When we reflect on our church, we must make an effort to foster harmony among the majority of our Korean ministry members and the minority of our English and Hispanic ministry members. We need to be especially cautious in our efforts to promote harmony when considering one another. For example, in our interactions with English ministry brothers and sisters, we must refrain from treating them like children. Even if they are much younger than you, your children, or grandchildren, it is essential to respect their dignity. Similarly, when thinking about our Hispanic ministry brothers and sisters, we should cast aside any biases or prejudices by avoiding terms like "Mexican" when referring to them and embrace them with the pure love of the Lord. The commandment from God that we must uphold to ensure harmony among our three ministries is to "love one another." Just as Jesus loved us, the members of our church's three ministries must exert effort to love one another. We should have humble hearts, eager to learn and teach from one another, and we must make a conscious effort to comfort and uplift each other, showing patience and endurance. To fulfill our responsibility of fostering harmony, each of us must not only become "peacemakers" but also "peacekeepers."

Renowned Bible teacher and commentator William Barclay spoke about the meaning of service: 'The world evaluates a person based on how many people they govern or how many people they can command with one finger. Some judge based on intellectual prowess and academic excellence or the number of executive roles held. Many assess a person's greatness based on their bank balance, assets, and material possessions. However, the evaluation that Jesus gives has nothing to do with these things. The Lord's sole criterion is how many people one serves. In that lies true greatness' (Internet).

Desiring earnestly to receive praise from the Lord,

James Kim

(Praying to be established as someone who keeps the double commandments of the Lord)

Missionary Work Led by the Holy Spirit

[Acts 16:6-10]

I came across an internet article under the title 'At the Crossroads of Change in Korean Overseas Mission,' which reported that there is a possibility of change in Korea's overseas mission approach following the incident of the Sam-mool Church volunteer team being abducted in Afghanistan, as published by the U.S. newsweekly Time on July 27. The article provided a detailed overview of the current state of Korean missions, stating that, as of last year, Korea sent 16,000 missionaries to over 150 countries worldwide, positioning itself as the second-largest missionary-sending country after the United States. It emphasized that missionaries are most heavily dispatched to China, followed by Russia, Europe, and Southeast Asia. Additionally, it mentioned that in China, where missionary activities are prohibited, missionaries engage in activities such as research and entrepreneurship. Time pointed out some negative aspects of the fervor for evangelism, such as causing excessive competition between churches. It also expressed concern that the intensified competition might lead to a performance-oriented approach to missions, focusing more on showcasing accomplishments rather than genuine service. According to the article, 'There is a tendency to send missionaries to more dangerous areas in the process of trying to send as many missionaries abroad as possible. Also, with increased competition, there is a fear of a results-oriented approach to missions' (Internet). My thoughts on the Sam-mool Church volunteer team's mission work in Afghanistan are as follows: rather than critically assessing and speaking, I believe that their missionary work is truly precious, and those missionaries are truly admirable and beautiful. Furthermore, my perspective is that now is not the time to criticize, but rather a time to pray for them. In prayer, we should extend our prayers to missionaries who go to various corners of the world to proclaim the gospel, as well as their families and ministries. As for the August District Bible Study ('World Vision'), during the District Directors' Bible Study, we challenged ourselves to broaden our prayer areas progressively. Our homes are mission fields, our relatives are mission fields, our workplaces and companies are mission fields, our neighbors are mission fields, our home countries and the United States where we live are mission fields, the countries where the missionaries sponsored by our church are working are mission fields, and so on. We need to pray for these mission fields.

I would like to focus on Acts 16:6-10 under the title “Missionary work led by the Holy Spirit,” contemplating a couple of points to receive lessons about what it means to be led by the Holy Spirit in missionary work.

First, missionary work led by the Holy Spirit encounters interruptions when the Holy Spirit restrains it.

Look at Acts 16:6-7: "And they went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia. And when they had come up to Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them." Paul, along with his fellow workers Silas and Timothy, during their second missionary journey, encountered Timothy, a disciple of Jesus who was well-spoken of by the brothers in Lystra and Iconium (vv. 1-3). As they traveled through various cities, delivering the apostolic and elders' decisions from Jerusalem to the Gentile brothers to observe (v. 4), there was a history of strengthening the faith and increasing in numbers daily in many churches (v. 5). Then, in verse 6 of today's passage, Paul, Silas, and Timothy, intending to embark on missionary work together, planned to go to Asia, but the Holy Spirit prevented them from speaking the word in Asia. Therefore, Paul and his companions traveled through the regions of Phrygia and Galatia again (v. 6), attempting to go to Bithynia but were hindered by the Spirit of Jesus (v. 7). Isn't it strange? Paul and his companions were eager to proclaim the word of God in Asia and Bithynia, but the Holy Spirit prevented them. Therefore, Paul, Silas, and Timothy found themselves turning toward another region, Macedonia (v. 10). Isn't it perplexing why the Holy Spirit would hinder Paul and his companions from proclaiming the gospel when they had the right intentions? Shouldn't it seem odd that the Holy Spirit prevented the proclamation of the gospel? The key point to consider here is the priority from God's perspective. In other words, the Holy Spirit did not hinder Paul and his companions because He didn't want them to proclaim the gospel but rather because He had already planned for the gospel to be proclaimed in another place before Asia and Bithynia. That other place was Macedonia (v. 10).

Preaching the gospel is God's desire and a responsibility we must bear. Therefore, there is no situation where the Holy Spirit of God would prevent the proclamation of the gospel. However, it is a fact that the priority of proclaiming the gospel, according to God's perspective, lies within His divine plan for certain regions. Often, we struggle to discern God's priorities clearly. Certainly, our intentions to do everything for the glory of God are admirable, but when it comes to deciding what comes first and what comes next, we often find ourselves confused about God's priorities. Thus, in our times of contemplation and prayer to seek the Lord's will, we must be mindful that our priorities align with God's priorities. God's priority for Paul and his companions was not Asia or Bithynia; rather, it was Macedonia. Consequently, when Paul and his companions were unaware of God's priority, they enthusiastically set out for missionary work, but the Holy Spirit hindered (did not permit) them from going to Asia or Bithynia. Although the Bible does not explain how the Holy Spirit prevented Paul and his companions from going to Asia and Bithynia, the essential point is that when the Holy Spirit hindered them, Paul and his companions did not persist in their own desires but obeyed the Holy Spirit's hindrance. The

lesson we should draw from this is that when the Holy Spirit prompts us to stop, we must know how to apply the brakes. In other words, when the Holy Spirit says, 'stop,' we should respond with a 'yes' and obey. However, it seems that, much like a driver who presses the accelerator pedal too deeply and cannot quickly apply the brakes, we, in our eagerness to do the Lord's work, often fail to use our spiritual brake pedal effectively when the Holy Spirit says, 'stop.' We must know when to stop. We should not carelessly continue running without realizing the moments when we need to halt. If the Holy Spirit says to stop, we should respond with a willing 'yes' and obey. To achieve this, we need spiritual sensitivity. When we are spiritually sensitive at all times, we can perceive the leading of the Holy Spirit. Our Holy Spirit does not merely vaguely reveal the Lord's will; rather, He does so clearly, providing distinct guidance with a straightforward 'yes' or 'no.' Yet, why do we sometimes fail to realize when the Holy Spirit hinders us? The reason lies in our spiritual dullness. The cause is that God's Word does not sharpen our minds as it should. Therefore, as Paul encourages in Romans 12:2, we should not conform to the patterns of this world but be transformed by the renewing of our minds. When we do this, we can discern what is good, pleasing, and perfect according to the will of God.

Second, engaging in missionary work under the guidance of the Holy Spirit involves obedience when the Holy Spirit opens the way.

Look at Acts 16:10 – “After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.” Since the Holy Spirit hindered Paul and his companions from going to Asia and Bithynia, they went down to Troas, a gateway to Macedonia, passing through Mysia (v. 8). While staying there, Paul had a vision at night where a man from Macedonia stood and implored him, saying, 'Come over to Macedonia and help us.' Paul accepted this request as God's will to preach the gospel to the Macedonian people ('concluding') after recognizing it as God's call. Immediately after the vision, he made efforts to leave for Macedonia (v. 10). When the Holy Spirit prevents us from going through a certain door, He is the God who, without fail, opens another door for us. Although Paul and his companions sought to go to Asia and Bithynia, the Holy Spirit closed that door. However, through the vision, the Holy Spirit opened the door to Macedonia, which represents Europe. The fact that the Holy Spirit opened the door to Macedonia through a vision raises the question of whether the Holy Spirit still communicates His will to us through visions. A vision is considered a revelation where a visible form is the focal point (Park). Personally, I believe that in this current age, unlike the time of Paul, the Holy Spirit communicates His will to us not so much through visions but through the Word of God. In other words, I believe that the Holy Spirit reveals God's will to the spirits that hold onto and pray with God's Word. When the Holy Spirit has blocked the door we were trying to enter, He surely opens another door. In our pursuit of God's will, the door Paul and his companions were trying to enter was Asia and Bithynia, but the Holy Spirit closed that door. However, ultimately, through a vision, He opened another door for them – the door to Macedonia, or Europe. The fact that the Holy Spirit opened the door to Macedonia through a vision raises the question of whether the Holy Spirit still communicates His will to us through visions. A vision is considered a revelation where a visible form is the focal point. Personally, I believe that in this current

age, unlike the time of Paul, the Holy Spirit communicates His will to us not so much through visions but through the Word of God. In other words, I believe that the Holy Spirit reveals God's will to the spirits that hold onto and pray with God's Word.

One word that I am pondering in today's passage is 'concluding' (v. 10). In English, versions like NIV or NASB use the word 'concluding.' This means that Paul and his companions 'concluded' that God had called them to preach the gospel to the people of Macedonia. What is the more concrete meaning of this word? According to Word Pictures in the New Testament commentary, the word 'concluding' means 'to make go together,' 'to coalesce or knit together,' 'to make this and that agree and so to conclude.' When thinking about the meaning of this word, Paul and his companions, while praying with the vision Paul received, used the reasoning God had given to each of them and 'concluded' that going to Macedonia to preach the gospel was the Lord's will. To borrow Calvin's words, Paul and his companions were sufficiently convinced (being fully persuaded) through the vision that the Lord had communicated His will for them to go to Macedonia to preach the gospel (Calvin). What we can consider here is that, in discerning the Lord's will, the first thing is not to conform to this age but to renew our minds for transformation (Rom. 12:2). Therefore, in a spiritually sensitive environment, we need to discern the doors that the Holy Spirit closes and opens. He clearly closes one door and opens another; that is God. The next important point is to pray together to discern whether it is the Lord's will. When using the reasoning God has given, that is, being filled with the reasoning from God's Word, when we agree together, we should move forward with peace, faith, and boldness given by the Lord.

To carry out missionary work under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we need to be spiritually sensitive and discern the doors the Holy Spirit closes and opens. We should not try to open a door that the Holy Spirit has closed, seeking to fulfill our own will. Instead, when the conclusion is reached that the Holy Spirit is hindering, believe and pray that the Holy Spirit will open another door. At that time, the crucial thing is our obedience to the Holy Spirit. When we are obedient to the Holy Spirit, the Lord will accomplish His will through us at His time.

Seeking spiritual discernment,

James Kim

(Praying for faithful handling of missionary work according to the guidance of the Holy Spirit)

Spiritual Sensitivity

[Acts 16:6-7]

‘If you do not sharpen a dull blade, it will require more effort’ (Prov. 10:10). Similarly, for Christians, who are the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God (Eph. 6:17), if their minds are not sharpened, they will have to rely on human strength, not the power of the Spirit, in their spiritual lives. As a result, they become spiritually insensitive and unable to discern the Lord’s will, leading to confusion. On the other hand, Christians whose minds are sharpened by the Word of God possess spiritual sensitivity and discernment. They are responsive to the leading of the Holy Spirit and can distinguish which doors the Spirit closes and which doors He opens. Therefore, they boldly proclaim the gospel in obedience to the guidance of the Spirit of Jesus Christ.

In today’s passage, Acts 16:6-7, Paul, Silas, and Timothy demonstrated this sensitivity. When the Spirit prevented them from speaking in Asia, they obeyed. When they attempted to go to Bithynia but were not permitted by the Spirit, they obeyed. In other words, Paul and his companions were obedient to the leading of the Spirit. They did not enter the closed door when the Spirit closed it. Eventually, they passed through Mysia and went down to Troas (v. 8). While staying there, Paul had a vision at night (v. 9). In the vision, a man from Macedonia pleaded with Paul to come and help them. Acknowledging this vision as God’s call to go and preach the gospel to the people of Macedonia, Paul and his companions immediately tried to go to Macedonia (v. 10). In essence, they acknowledged that the Spirit had opened the door to Macedonia and exerted effort to enter through that door. Reflecting on the phrase "concluding" in verse 10, it can be understood as making a joint decision based on prayer and the reasoning derived from God-given intellect. The believers, having spiritual discernment, discussed and concluded that God’s will was for them to go to Macedonia. Calvin’s perspective emphasizes that through the vision, Paul and his companions were fully persuaded of the Lord’s will. Thus, the ability to reach such a conclusion is not possible without a sharp mind, a mind sharpened by the Word of God. The reason I think this way is that only those who pray centered on the Holy Spirit and God’s Word can surrender their own will and seek God’s will (Mt. 26:39). In other words,

those who are led by the Holy Spirit and God's Word in prayer are the ones who, through a transformed heart (Rom. 12:2), exhibit a humble attitude to obey God's will. Ultimately, when we pray to God guided by His Word and the leading of the Holy Spirit, we can discern His will in spiritual sensitivity and obediently submit to it.

As Christians, we need to be spiritually sensitive. Therefore, we must have spiritual discernment and obediently follow the guidance of the Holy Spirit. When the Holy Spirit closes a door, we should cease our efforts to enter through that door and instead obey the leading of the Holy Spirit. Additionally, we need to hold onto God's Word and pray to Him. At that moment, the Holy Spirit will open another door for us. We must discern God's will in spiritual sensitivity, using the wisdom He has given us, and enter through the door He opens. In doing so, the Spirit of Jesus, the Holy Spirit, will empower us to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ, bringing about the work of salvation.

In summary, Christians with spiritual sensitivity, discernment, and a mind sharpened by the Word of God can discern the closed and open doors guided by the Spirit. When the Spirit leads them to close one door, they should not strive to enter it. Instead, they trust that the Spirit will open another door and prayerfully strive to find a new mission field. At such times, obedience to the Spirit's leading is crucial. When the Spirit says, "Stop," believers should respond with a willing "Yes" and obey. To achieve this, believers need spiritual sensitivity, being aware of the Spirit's leading. The spiritual brake pedal should be well-utilized when the Spirit says, "Stop." Christians must be attentive to discern when to halt instead of rushing forward without considering the need to pause. Ultimately, believers need spiritual sensitivity to distinguish between the closed and open doors, and when directed by the Spirit, they must yield and obey. Spiritual discernment is essential to recognize the leading of the Spirit. Prayerful dependence on the Spirit and aligning priorities with God's priorities are crucial for effective Christian living and mission. May believers continue to pray and seek the Lord's will, staying sensitive to the Spirit's guidance in all endeavors.

Seeking spiritual sensitivity,

James Kim

(Praying to discern God's will and obediently submitting to it)

The Power of Prayer

[Acts 16:11-40]

Ray Prichard said in an article titled 'Prayer Beyond Thought': Our prayers are too small! ... To the father of the Reformation, Martin Luther, Frederick Myconius was a good friend and assistant. In 1540, Myconius was waiting for the day of his death due to illness. While awaiting death, he sent a letter to Luther, bidding a fond farewell. Luther, upon reading the letter, immediately replied, 'I command you to live in the name of God, because I still need your help in the work of reforming the church. ... The Lord will not allow me to hear that you have died, and He will ensure that you live longer than me. I am praying for this. This is my wish, and my wish will be granted because I only desire to glorify the name of God.' This may seem bold and audacious, but the important thing is that when Luther's reply arrived, Myconius, who had no strength to speak, rose up and lived for another six years. He passed away two months after Luther's death. What an amazing testimony to the power of prayer! Do you want to pray like this? Pray with faith (Internet).

During last week's Wednesday prayer meeting, while meditating on Psalms 69, we reflected on four ways in which someone pleases God more. The first of these is being a seeker of the Lord or a one who looks to the Lord or a prayerful one, as it was learned from Psalms 69:6. David, the psalmist, earnestly sought God when he was in a deep pit without a foothold due to the persecution of many strong and numerous enemies who sought to cut off his life (v. 1). Especially in the midst of such suffering, when even his brothers avoided him, and in the loneliness where there was no one to pity or comfort him, David, due to not finding anyone (v. 20), sought God even more. Look at Proverbs 8:17 - "I love those who love me, and those who seek me find me." We must pray earnestly to God. Therefore, we must experience the power of prayer. I will focus on Acts 16:11-40 under the title "The power of prayer," contemplating how the power of prayer manifested through three events, and I hope to receive the grace He gives.

The first incident where the power of prayer manifested was in the

frequent trading Lydia and her household.

In conclusion, the prayerful abilities manifested in Lydia and her household led them all to believe in the Lord and receive baptism (Acts 16:15). The Apostle Paul and his companions, acknowledging that God had called them to go and preach the gospel in Macedonia under the guidance of the Holy Spirit (v. 10), sailed from Troas to Samothrace and then straight to Neapolis on the next day (v. 11). From there, they reached Philippi, which was the leading city of the district of Macedonia and a Roman colony, and stayed there for several days (v. 12). On the Sabbath day, they went outside the city gate to the riverbank, presuming that there was a place of prayer, and they met a woman named Lydia, a dealer in purple goods from the city of Thyatira. In the context, it is noteworthy that Paul, who typically used Jewish synagogues as a starting point for his missionary journeys, did not mention a Jewish synagogue in Philippi. This omission suggests that there was no formal Jewish synagogue in Philippi, so Paul and his companions had to find a place of prayer. There, they encountered Lydia, a woman engaged in the lucrative business of selling purple goods. Lydia was a woman of significant wealth, likely due to the prosperous purple dye industry in Thyatira near Ephesus. Purple dye, often associated with nobility, was in demand, making it a lucrative trade, especially among the aristocracy. What is astonishing is that the Lord opened Lydia's heart to heed Paul's message, as indicated in verse 14: "The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul." This exemplifies the power of prayer – when we entreat God, He opens the hearts of those we desire to share the gospel with, enabling them to respond to the message we convey. In other words, prayer plays a crucial role in enabling people to accept the gospel of Jesus Christ. Of course, the act of opening hearts rests within the sovereignty of God. In addition to Lydia, there were other women at the place of prayer, but God chose to open Lydia's heart to listen to Paul's message. This narrative, however, can also be seen as occurring within the context of Paul and his companions' prayers. Referring to Ezekiel 36:37, God similarly speaks to the people of Israel and, by extension, to us: "Thus says the Lord God: This also I will let the house of Israel ask me to do for them: to increase their people like a flock." While God executes His will and plans within His sovereignty, we must be aware that He accomplishes His promised word through our prayers.

Once, I remember hearing a sermon on a Christian radio broadcast, centered around the passage we read today, delivered by a pastor of a certain immigrant church. The words of that pastor, saying, 'Praying apostle Paul met praying Lydia,' still linger in my memory. It was a message that resonated deeply. Lydia, who worshipped God, had not yet heard the gospel and accepted Jesus as her Savior. When Lydia was gathered with other women in prayer, God prevented Paul and his companions from going to Asia and directed them to Macedonia. Eventually, by opening Lydia's heart to listen to Paul's words, God made her the first convert in the church at Philippi. How amazing is this salvation story orchestrated by God? Ultimately, in Acts 16:15, the author Luke records it this way: "And after she was baptized, and her household as well, she urged us, saying, 'If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay.' And she prevailed upon us."

The second incident where the power of prayer manifested was in the case of a possessed slave girl.

This second event, similar to the first event of Lydia's salvation, involves Paul and his companions encountering a demon-possessed slave girl while going to a place of prayer. In verse 16, it states that Paul and his companions were going to a place of prayer when they were met by a slave girl who had a spirit of divination and brought her owners much gain by fortune-telling. In other words, both events are related to prayer. In the first incident, the power of prayer led Paul and his companions to Lydia at a place of prayer, resulting in her salvation. In the second incident, as Paul and his companions were going to a place of prayer, they encountered a slave girl possessed by a spirit of divination. In the name of Jesus Christ, they healed her (v. 16). The significant difference between the two incidents is that while Lydia received salvation, the possessed slave girl experienced deliverance from a physical affliction rather than spiritual salvation. In essence, the slave girl did not believe in Jesus for salvation but was immediately healed of her affliction through the power of Jesus' name. Here, we witness that prayer in the field of mission is a powerful tool representing the work of God's power. An interesting question arises: Did this fortune-telling woman, like a shaman, have knowledge of the way of salvation? In verse 17, she loudly proclaimed, "These men are servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation." While the Korean Bible may suggest that the possessed woman seemed to know the way of salvation, the original Greek text does not include the definite article "the" before "way of salvation." Her proclamation implies that the possessed woman was declaring that among many ways of salvation, Jesus Christ was one of them. The possessed woman, for many days, followed Paul and his companions, shouting that they were servants of the Most High God proclaiming a way of salvation to the onlookers. Perhaps Paul and his companions were bothered and distressed by her persistent cries as she followed them. It's likely that although she acknowledged the Most High God, her understanding of salvation was distorted. Therefore, after enduring the annoyance for many days, Paul, in frustration, turned to the possessed girl and commanded the spirit to come out in the name of Jesus Christ. At that moment, the spirit left her (v. 18). It was the power of Jesus Christ within Paul that compelled the demon to obey.

In Acts 3:6-8, we see a similar healing incident. At the Beautiful Gate of the temple, a man who had been lame from birth and was begging received healing when the Apostle Peter, in the name of Jesus of Nazareth, told him to rise and walk. As Peter took him by the right hand and lifted him up, the formerly lame man stood up, walked, and praised God. The basis for this healing miracle is the authority of Jesus. Just as the lame man received healing through the power of Jesus operating through the Apostle Peter, in today's passage Acts 16:11-40, the possessed girl was healed not so much by Paul's ability but by the power of Jesus working through Paul. We must experience the power of Jesus through prayer and actively seek healing in the name of Jesus Christ.

The third incident where the power of prayer manifested occurred with a jailer and his household.

This final third incident is related to the second one. Since Paul healed the demon-possessed girl in the name of Jesus Christ, the girl's owners, realizing their hope of gain through her fortune-telling was gone, seized Paul and Silas and brought them to the market (v. 19). Eventually, the authorities tore off their clothes, beat them severely, and then imprisoned them, instructing the jailer to guard them securely (vv. 22-23). Around midnight, despite facing potential execution the next day, Paul and Silas prayed and praised God in the prison (v. 25). Suddenly, a great earthquake occurred, shaking the foundations of the prison, and all the doors opened, and everyone's chains were loosed (v. 26). Seeing this, the jailer, thinking that the prisoners had escaped, drew his sword to kill himself (v. 27). However, Paul prevented him, and the jailer, trembling with fear, fell down before Paul and Silas, asking, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" (v. 30). Paul's response was straightforward: "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household" (v. 31). Subsequently, Paul shared the message of the Lord with the jailer and everyone in his household, leading them to believe in God (v. 34). As a result, great joy came to that household.

When reflecting on the story of the salvation of the jailer and his household, a crucial verse that cannot be overlooked is verse 25: "About midnight, Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them." In this passage, the prayer offered by Paul and Silas was not a plea for rescue from the prison but rather a prayer of praise and glory to God. It was a prayer that, in the midst of the darkness of the prison, expressed gratitude and joy for suffering in the name of Jesus. This highlights the attitude of the apostles, who rejoiced in being considered worthy to suffer disgrace for the sake of Jesus' name (5:41). This is the power of prayer. The ability of prayer to praise God and give glory resulted in a miraculous earthquake that shook the foundations of the prison, opened the prison doors, and loosened everyone's chains (v. 26). As a consequence, not only were Paul and Silas delivered from imprisonment, but the jailer and his entire household experienced the salvation of believing in God (v. 34).

Pastor Andrew Murray expressed the power of prayer by saying, 'The reason why so many Christians, workers for Christ, have so little influence in the world is just this one thing: they work without praying. They devote themselves earnestly to study in their libraries and to the work of the church, pouring their hearts into preaching and interacting with people, but they lack constant prayer. The power of prayer, the channel of power from the sure promises and comfort of the Holy Spirit, is absent. The reason for the lack of a powerful spiritual life is simply the sin of not praying!' (Internet).

Wishing to experience the power of prayer more deeply,

James Kim

(Asking for the manifestation of the power of the gospel)

Meetings of Prayer Warriors

[Acts 16:16]

When we look at the encounters in our life journey, we can see that, from our perspective, there are both positive and negative encounters. Positive encounters are those that uplift and bring joy, providing us with benefits. On the other hand, negative encounters are challenging, causing distress without apparent benefits. How does God view all these encounters? Personally, I believe that the encounters in our life journey are not coincidences. They are all encounters permitted by God within His sovereignty. In each encounter, there is undoubtedly a divine purpose, even though we may not always understand God's intentions. With confidence, we believe that our encounters are within God's will. When we remain faithful in our encounters within the Lord, God unfolds His purpose, allowing us to witness His glory.

In the context of Acts 16:16, we see the apostle Paul and his companions, Silas and Timothy, having three encounters. The first encounter is with Lydia, a woman who worships God and engages in the trade of purple goods (v. 14). The second encounter, mentioned in the passage, is with a slave girl possessed by a spirit of divination (v. 16). The third encounter is with a jailer (vv. 27ff). When evaluating these encounters, the first and third encounters with Lydia and the jailer are considered positive. The reason is that both Lydia and the jailer, through Paul's ministry, came to believe in Jesus Christ and received salvation. Furthermore, God used Paul to bring not only Lydia and the jailer but also their entire households to faith, leading them to receive baptism (vv. 15, 34). Therefore, these encounters are deemed positive as they resulted in great joy for all involved. In contrast, the encounter with the slave girl possessed by a spirit of divination is considered negative. The reason is that this girl greatly troubled Paul (v. 18). Moreover, when Paul cast out the spirit in the name of Jesus Christ, the owners of the girl were angered (v. 20). Eventually, Paul and Silas were beaten, severely mistreated, and thrown into prison (v. 23). From our perspective, this encounter is deemed negative as it brought suffering, persecution, and unjust imprisonment. If we were to experience such encounters where we endure hardship, mockery, and unjust imprisonment, could we consider them positive encounters? And if, like Paul, we were imprisoned unjustly after helping someone who had greatly troubled us, would we be inclined to pray and praise God as Paul did in prison (v. 25)? How could Paul and Silas pray and praise God in deep confinement? Such actions can only be carried out with absolute trust in God. Even though

they could not discern God's specific will, their actions reflect the conviction that they were in God's will.

As I meditated on this passage, I found the providence of God to be intriguing. The reason is that when Paul and Silas arrived in Philippi (v. 12), they were seeking a place of prayer (vv. 13, 16), and their place of prayer turned out to be the deep prison. Isn't it interesting? The fact that God makes us pray not only in places like a worship hall but also in places as deep as a prison is intriguing, isn't it? Paul and Silas, through their prayers and praises in the deep prison, experienced a miracle when a sudden earthquake occurred, shaking the foundations, opening the doors, and loosening everyone's chains (v. 26). However, a greater miracle occurred through the encounter with the slave girl possessed by a spirit, despite it being seemingly negative. As a result of this encounter, the jailer, who guarded Paul and Silas, not only believed in Jesus for salvation but also his entire household received salvation (vv. 33-34). How marvelous is the providence and the work of God in this situation? Isn't this truly a miracle among miracles? A suicidal jailer not only survived but also received salvation for his soul, and through him, his entire household was saved. Isn't this a miracle among miracles? God accomplished such miracles through these encounters. God allowed Paul and Silas, who were seeking a place of prayer, to meet Lydia and be the means of salvation for her and her whole family. Furthermore, God permitted them to encounter the jailer in the deep prison, resulting in the salvation of the jailer and his entire household. How precious are these encounters within the Lord? In the midst of these precious encounters, God also allowed the encounter with the slave girl possessed by a spirit. From our perspective, it may seem like a negative encounter, causing great trouble for Paul. However, in the end, God used this encounter to lead Paul and Silas to find their place of prayer ("deep prison"). Moreover, God, through this place of prayer, made Paul and Silas pray and praise Him, revealing His glory. Isn't it amazing?

Encounters of those who pray are all good encounters. The reason is that they are encounters permitted and orchestrated by the good God. Even though from our human perspective, some encounters may seem unfavorable, the good God uses them to work together for good (Rom. 8:28). Therefore, from God's perspective, these encounters are also considered good. Through these encounters of praying individuals, God accomplishes the work of salvation. Thus, God reveals to us His nature as the Savior and writes it deeply in our hearts. Therefore, we praise the God of salvation, rejoice, and find joy in being His people. Let us pray and expect what kind of encounter the God of salvation will permit today for you and me. Victory!

Looking to the God of salvation who oversees all encounters,

James Kim

(Praying to meet with God, and meeting with God to have precious encounters permitted by Him, I pray to witness the glory of God.)

Pride of a Christian

[Acts 16:35-40]

In today's world, it seems that many people are trapped in feelings of inferiority and discouragement. Constantly repeating negative thoughts like "I am nothing, I don't deserve grace or blessings" can lead to the frightening consequences of self-abuse. This can result in a life where self-worth is lost due to inferiority and discouragement, as individuals repeatedly criticize themselves, saying, "I am wretched, I am a sinner, I am unworthy of a happy life." What is inferiority complex? In the context of the dictionary, an inferiority complex refers to "evaluating oneself as less valuable than others." Even in Chinese, an inferiority complex means "having a mindset that regards oneself as humble and looks down on oneself." Ultimately, inferiority is an emotion that devalues oneself, comparing one's stature, appearance, abilities, education, etc., to those of others and thinking that one falls short or is worthless. Individuals with an inferiority complex often have low self-esteem due to an unhealthy self-concept. When caught up in feelings of inferiority, a person becomes passive, loses confidence in everything, and is unable to be proactive due to these emotions. Typically, individuals who feel inferior tend to magnify their shortcomings and believe they are lacking compared to others.

C.S. Lewis, a British scholar at the University of Cambridge and a philosopher, stated that the greatest weapon Satan uses to destroy the personality and consciousness of modern people is the comparative sense, which is the aftermath of an inferiority complex. Many people, including Christians, are attacked by this weapon of Satan and live with feelings of inferiority, leading to a passive life and a lack of self-confidence. Internally, they are anxious and fearful and are plagued by self-abuse. Among those who feel inferior, some exhibit symptoms of perfectionism to conceal the aspects of feeling inferior. They meticulously strive to cover and disguise their feelings of inadequacy. However, as Christians, we should live with pride. What does pride for a Christian mean? Pride for a Christian means positively valuing one's own existence. According to Dr. J. Hardfield, a psychologist from the UK, when we give ourselves a sense of self-confidence by saying, "You're wrong. It's over now!" we can only use about 30% of our actual abilities. In contrast, when we instill confidence in ourselves by saying, "You can do it! You are special! Why can't you do it when others can?" we can unleash up to 500% of our abilities.

As Christians, we can only find our positive self-worth within Jesus. We can never find anything to boast about outside of Jesus. In Jesus, we become new creations seeking eternal pride and infinite dignity granted to us within His gospel. Therefore, as new creations in Jesus, both I and you, we, as God's children, have opened our eyes to view ourselves from His perspective. For instance, looking at Isaiah 43, when we observe ourselves from the perspective of God's love, realizing how He values us as precious and honored helps us understand the true worth of our existence.

Paul and Silas, being Romans, also had a sense of pride.

As we have already contemplated, even when Paul and Silas were unjustly accused and imprisoned, they prayed and praised God (Acts 16:25). In the midst of God's intervention, Paul and Silas could have escaped, but they chose to stay, leading to the joyful conversion of the jailer and his household (verse 34). Later, as the day dawned, the magistrates sent officers to release Paul and Silas. Instead of leaving quietly, Paul and Silas, through the jailer, were informed: "The magistrates have sent to let you go. Now therefore come out and go in peace" (vv. 35-36). What follows is Paul's intriguing response: "But Paul said to them, 'They have beaten us publicly, uncondemned, men who are Roman citizens, and have thrown us into prison; and do they now throw us out secretly? No! Let them come themselves and take us out'" (v. 37). How remarkable is Paul's boldness! Noteworthy in this context is Paul's revelation of his Roman citizenship. When Paul, through the name of Jesus Christ, cast out the spirit from the slave girl, her owners, realizing their loss of profit, dragged Paul and Silas to the authorities (v. 19). When accused before the magistrates, Paul did not assert his Roman citizenship, despite being Jewish and causing a disturbance in the city according to the accusations (vv. 20-21). But in today's passage, only now does Paul assert that he and Silas are Roman citizens, despite having Roman citizenship. Yet, they were unjustly denied a proper trial according to Roman law and were thrown into prison (Yoo). Therefore, Paul boldly declared, "Let them come themselves and take us out." But why Paul is revealing his Roman citizenship only now is not clear. If Paul had declared to the magistrates that he and Silas were Roman citizens when they were being brought before them, they might not have endured severe physical suffering and beatings. Why Paul chose not to disclose his Roman citizenship at that moment, enduring the pain and suffering first, and revealing it later, is an intriguing question. However, one clear fact is that because Paul and Silas did not assert their Roman citizenship initially, the jailer and his household eventually came to believe in God (v. 34). If they had identified themselves as Roman citizens when the owners of the divining spirit, who had been healed, brought charges against them, they might not have been thrown into prison. In that case, the miraculous intervention of God in the prison, leading to the jailer and his household believing in God (v. 34), might not have occurred, and there might not have been any record in the Bible of such a remarkable story of salvation through the prayers of Paul and Silas. When contemplating this extraordinary story of salvation brought about through the prayers of Paul and Silas, their attitude is similar to other apostles who rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name (5:41). Looking at today's passage, Acts 16:35-40, when Paul and Silas declare their Roman citizenship as they are being released from prison, we see in verse 38 that the magistrates were afraid, as the Bible records. This fear is understandable because, during that time, those who possessed Roman citizenship were entitled to a very fair and just legal process compared to non-citizens. The magistrates had violated the

law by severely beating and imprisoning Paul and Silas without due process, and if this fact were reported to Roman authorities, they would face serious consequences. Therefore, they personally came to the prison, apologized to Paul and Silas, escorted them out, and urged them to leave the city (v. 39). How dignified Paul and Silas must have appeared as they left the prison! When observing their pursuit of justice for themselves as Roman citizens and their acceptance of Roman hospitality, it is evident that Paul and Silas carried a sense of pride in their Roman citizenship.

Now it might be different, but in the past, having U.S. citizenship was not just a wishful thinking. Immigrants often expected that, even if they couldn't obtain citizenship right away, acquiring U.S. permanent residency would be enough to be recognized as enviable U.S. citizens by people around the world. It was probably around 1995 when I first went to Korea. I had a visa but did not go beyond the airport, as I had visited the Korean consulate in Fukuoka, Japan. At that time, I went with my cousin who was living in Busan. When we landed in Japan and tried to enter, my cousin wrote something and handed it over, and the personnel directly corrected it for me, allowing me to enter. On the other hand, my cousin, being a Korean citizen, was asked to correct the document and return. My cousin felt very upset at that time. It felt like the power of U.S. citizenship, a small aspect of my own life, was evident. Enjoying the rights as a U.S. citizen can bring comfort even in small aspects of one's life.

We should take pride in being Christians. Why should we take pride in being Christians? The reason is that our citizenship is in heaven, not in the United States or Korea. Look at Philippians 3:20-21: "But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself." As citizens of heaven, you and I are the people of heaven waiting for the Lord Jesus Christ to come again. When He returns to this world, we will be transformed suddenly to be like the glorious body of Jesus. Therefore, we should live with pride. We should never have feelings of inferiority or discouragement and live passively. Also, we should never have material prosperity and secular pride like the church in Laodicea (Rev. 3:16), because secular pride ultimately becomes the cause of spiritual poverty. Instead, even in material poverty, we should have spiritual pride and move toward the heavenly kingdom. Only those who have received justification through faith, like you and me, can have the pride that says, "I can do all things through him who strengthens me" (Phil. 4:13). The reason is that the Lord has overcome the world. Look at John 16:33: "... In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world."

As Christians, we should live in this world with such pride, being strong and courageous. We should boldly live with confidence in the Lord. We must never live in fear and anxiety. Why? Look at Isaiah 41:10 - "Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand."

Low self-esteem,

James Kim (Wishing us to live with pride in the Lord)

Let us Become Contagious Christians.

[Acts 17:1-9]

The term "Infectious Greed" refers to a phrase coined by Alan Greenspan, the chairman of the Federal Reserve Board, to describe the turmoil in the stock market caused by corporate misconduct. In 2002, amidst accounting scandals involving major corporations such as Enron and WorldCom, Greenspan remarked that the incentive of stock options had blurred the judgment of executives. He introduced the term "Infectious Greed" to highlight the contagious nature of unethical behavior in the business world. He is reported to have said the following about the U.S. economy: 'It seems like infectious greed has taken hold of our economic system. It's not that human desire has grown larger than in the past. The space to pursue desire without reservation has become incredibly vast' (Internet). This concept of contagious greed is reminiscent of biblical teachings, which often associate strong contagion of vices, such as greed, with sin. In Mark 8:15, Jesus warns his disciples, saying, "Be careful! Watch out for the yeast of the Pharisees and that of Herod." Here, the "yeast of the Pharisees and that of Herod" symbolize the evil tendencies of the Pharisees and the secularism of Herod. Yeast, in this context, is a metaphor for the pervasive influence of negative traits. In Jewish tradition, yeast is seen as spiritually impure, representing the evil tendencies within humans. The warning to avoid the yeast of the Pharisees and Herod emphasizes the rapid and widespread nature of these negative influences. It serves as a cautionary message to be vigilant against the quick spread of religious formalism and secularism within the hearts of individuals and communities.

In Matthew 13:33, Jesus spoke a parable about the kingdom of heaven, saying, "He told them still another parable: 'The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into about sixty pounds of flour until it worked all through the dough.'" In this context, Jesus used the word "yeast" in a positive sense. Essentially, He conveyed that, just as yeast causes dough to rise and spread, the kingdom of heaven would also expand with the dissemination of God's gospel. To achieve this, believers need to become contagious Christians who spread the influence of Jesus. This phrase is quoted from the title of the book "Becoming a Contagious Christian," written by Pastor Bill Hybels of Willow Creek Community Church in Chicago. The idea of being contagious for Jesus is exemplified by the apostle Paul. After encountering Jesus

on the road to Damascus, Paul became a person of strong spiritual contagion. He was even nicknamed "a real pest" (Acts 24:5). Why did the apostle Paul earn such a nickname? The reason lies in his passionate proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ, spreading it fervently and contagiously.

Paul preached the gospel in the Bible. Take a look at today's passage, Acts 17:2: "As was his custom, Paul went into the synagogue, and on three Sabbath days, he reasoned with them from the Scriptures." After experiencing the power of God's salvation and healing in Philippi, Paul, along with Silas and Timothy, came to Thessalonica as mentioned in Acts 17:1. Following his customary practice, he entered the synagogue over three Sabbaths, presenting the gospel to the Jews first (Rom. 1:16) (Park). Why did Paul and his companions choose Thessalonica, passing through Amphipolis and Apollonia, to preach the gospel (v. 1)? The reason would likely be the strategic importance of Thessalonica in Paul's missionary work (Yoo). To elaborate, Thessalonica was the capital of Macedonia at the time and the largest and most prosperous city among all cities in Macedonia. Many ethnic groups resided there, with a significant population of Jews who held considerable influence in the city. Thessalonica was strategically located at the crossroads of a highway connected to Rome and a sea trade route. Due to its diverse population and strategic position, Paul saw an excellent opportunity to spread the gospel widely in this city (Yoo). How did the Apostle Paul preach the gospel to the Jews living in the region of Thessalonica?

(1) Paul reasoned with them (v. 2).

The term "reasoning" implies that Paul engaged in dialogue and debate, presenting arguments and counterarguments to the Jews (Park).

(2) Paul explained and gave evidence of the gospel's meaning (v. 3).

In other words, he taught the Jews about the gospel, emphasizing the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, providing evidence based on the Scriptures.

(3) Paul proclaimed to the Jews that Jesus, who had died on the cross and risen after three days, is the Christ (v. 3).

When Paul preached the gospel to the Jews, their reactions varied. Among them, a significant number of devout Greeks and not a few leading women believed in the gospel after hearing it, resulting in a remarkable salvation story (v. 4). Here, "devout Greeks" refers to Greeks who had converted to Judaism, and "leading women" refers to the wives of influential figures (Yoo). Upon believing in Jesus, they followed Paul and Silas (v. 4). However, some of the Jews were filled with jealousy after hearing Paul's gospel (v. 5). These jealous Jews, witnessing a large crowd of devout Greeks following Paul and Silas and not a few leading women also joining them, were envious. The reason for their jealousy was that the conversion of these devout Greeks was a significant loss for the Jewish synagogue (Yoo). In their envy, they gathered a mob using market thugs and suddenly attacked the house of Jason, where Paul was staying (v. 5). In the midst of this

impromptu attack on Jason's house, the enraged Jews, unable to find Paul and Silas to bring them before the city council, dragged Jason and some believing brothers before the city authorities (vv. 5-6). Afterward, they accused Jason and the believers of welcoming men who were causing trouble all over the world and being opposed to Caesar's decrees by claiming that there is another king named Jesus (vv. 6-7). However, the city authorities who had jurisdiction over legal matters at that time were greatly disturbed by these accusations but ultimately did not accept the charges made by the Jews against Paul and his companions (v. 8). This can be inferred because if the city authorities had accepted the accusations of the jealous Jews, they would not have released Paul and his companions upon receiving a bond from Jason and the believing brothers (v. 9) (Yoo).

Regardless of the varied reactions, the lesson is that we should continue to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ. The passage introduces '10 Preaching Tips from Preaching Experts' (Internet):

(1) 'Don't try to do by yourselves.'

Pastor Ki-dong Kim, known as the 'Sweet Potato Evangelist,' says that excuses such as "I am introverted," "I don't know the Bible well," or "I have not been attending church for long" all stem from a misconception that one is responsible for the act of evangelism. We are merely instruments of evangelism, and the entire process is 100% under God's responsibility. Realizing this allows us to boldly step forward.

(2) 'Find souls crying under the lamppost.'

Finding evangelism targets from nearby is a fundamental aspect of evangelism. Pastor Ik-tae Ryu, the author of the 'Lifetime One-Person Evangelism Method,' emphasizes the need to start with people we know, stating, 'Evangelism is not just about delivering the gospel when you meet but continues until the person truly accepts it.' Street evangelism is good, but being a "mentor" up close until a person properly accepts the gospel is true evangelism.

(3) 'See and see again.'

There is no shortcut in evangelism greater than frequently meeting face-to-face. Common among those known as "evangelism kings" is their persistence. Pastor Ki-dong Kim, the 'Sweet Potato Evangelist,' who waited in front of his house every morning, praying each time he encountered someone, and Professor Byung-wook Lee, the 'Doctor Evangelist,' who went through several rotations more than other doctors to frequently see and preach the gospel to patients, exemplify this. As faces become familiar, the walls of the heart easily crumble.

(4) 'Start with praise.'

"You look much younger," "The water in this restaurant is amazing," etc., starting a conversation with compliments is essential. Pastor Ki-dong Kim believes that praise softens the heart like making it easy for chopsticks to go in. Of course, it does not mean praising outwardly while harboring ill feelings inside. Seeking things to compliment eventually leads to understanding the person on a human level, and at that point, the zeal to evangelize sincerely emerges.

(5) 'Humility is the only foundation.'

When people criticize, saying, "Why is someone who preaches so arrogant? Always boasting about their well-being..." 'Sweet Potato Evangelist' Pastor In-a Kim states that such criticisms are commonplace in evangelism. However, having learned from the Bible that the path of evangelism is one of hardship, the key is to lower oneself in the face of prideful opponents. Pastor Kim recounts an incident where he volunteered to take care of a child because a person claimed they didn't have time to attend church due to their child. Despite receiving treatment worse than a nanny who would receive payment, Pastor Kim remained unaffected, believing that if the gospel enters their heart through such acts, it's worth it. Remember that this attitude eventually opens doors like an iron fortress.

(6) 'Understand personality and temperament.'

Although charging ahead recklessly may yield unexpected results, understanding and approaching the person makes a much more effective impact. Drawing from numerous evangelism experiences, Pastor In-a Kim, who has recognized that people often believe in Jesus based on their personality or temperament, tailors his approach accordingly. For someone fervent in faith, she prays passionately, while for someone meticulous and rational, she takes a more factual approach.

(7) 'Collaborate with the church.'

The mission of evangelists includes helping the target individual reconnect with a good church. In evangelism, the role of the church accounts for 50%. Pastor Ik-tae Ryu emphasizes, 'Evangelists should ride the waves of the church.' Feeling the Holy Spirit throughout the entire evangelizing church makes the evangelist's activities more active and brings about rapid changes in those who come seeking.

(8) 'The evangelist is a reflection of a Christian.'

While not every Christian can become a 'saint,' evangelists should bear in mind that they are seen by others as representatives of Christians. If an evangelist constantly complains or harbors ill thoughts about others, the gospel will not be effectively conveyed. Starting with emphasizing positive values and presenting one's own positive life from the beginning is crucial, as expressed by

Pastor Ki-dong Kim.

(9) 'Experience the Holy Spirit first.'

Pastor Kyung-seol Min of Kwangjin Church asserts that the most crucial aspect of evangelism is for the evangelist to genuinely experience the Holy Spirit and convey that joy. Without a genuine understanding of why one is engaging in evangelism and lacking confidence in faith, a person entering evangelism would be akin to 'the blind leading the blind.' In evangelism, more important than any technique is for the person to show transformed behavior through the gospel. This is why evangelists should not neglect prayer and reading the Bible to become a vessel filled with the Holy Spirit.

(10) 'Love souls sincerely.'

Pastor Ik-tae Ryu emphasizes the need to resolve to ensure that the person being evangelized is recorded in the Book of Life. If one prays for and maintains constant interest in the person they are trying to evangelize, they cannot bear the thought of leaving that soul unsaved. With such a mindset, there is no room for giving up or experiencing failure, even after countless rejections. It becomes a continuous effort to try again.

I sincerely pray that all of us may be set as zealous evangelists who genuinely love souls. I fervently wish that our Lord would establish us all as gospel bearers who spread the message of Jesus. Therefore, I pray that, through us, God's kingdom (heaven) may be expanded, just as the precious workers of the Lord, like the apostles Paul, Silas, and Timothy, proclaimed the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ in the Bible.

Desiring to be deeply infected by the love and gospel of Christ,

James Kim

(Wishing for the spread of the love and gospel of Jesus Christ)

The Noble-minded People

[Acts 17:10-15]

When I look at the grass in our backyard, I somehow feel that it's not as lush as it should be. Here and there, it seems a bit yellowish, as if certain parts are dying. The reason is that I haven't taken good care of the grass; it's a result of our failure as a couple to fulfill our responsibility. To be more specific, we haven't been watering the grass regularly, and as a result, it's not growing as lush as it could be. Sometimes we forget to water it, and at other times, I honestly admit that there are moments when I find it wasteful and choose to overlook watering it. Inwardly, I think about the rising cost of water and reasons like not many people actually look at the backyard grass, etc. Unlike the grass in our backyard, the Bible mentions a "well-watered garden" (Isa. 58:11). Here, a "well-watered garden" refers to a "spring that never fails." Can you imagine such a garden? In such a garden, anything planted would thrive because there's an ample supply of water. It would grow steadily, just like a tree planted by the streams, yielding fruit in season, and its leaves never withering (Ps. 1:3). This is the kind of heart (spirit) that is compared to a "well-watered garden." The Bible calls it "good soil" (Mt. 13:23; Mk. 4:20). It's like the parable where some seeds fall along the path, others on rocky ground, some among thorns, and still others on good soil. The seeds that fall on the path, rocky ground, or among thorns don't bear fruit, but the seeds on good soil may produce a harvest of a hundredfold, sixtyfold, or thirtyfold. Here, the seed falling on "good soil" refers to someone who hears and understands the word of God (Mt. 13:23; Mk. 4:20).

In today's passage from Acts 17:10-15, we see people who hear and understand God's word through the ministry of Paul. In other words, individuals like good soil emerge. They are truly people resembling a well-watered garden. These people are none other than the Bereans. Interestingly, the name Berea means "well-watered" or "a place with much water." As we have previously meditated on Acts 17:1-9, Paul, who had been spreading the gospel of Jesus, faced opposition from jealous Jews in Thessalonica. Seeking refuge from them, he found safety in Berea, where he continued his ministry along with his companions. Eventually, due to the hostility of the Thessalonian Jews who traveled about 80 kilometers from Thessalonica to Berea, Paul and Silas fled urgently by night, and the Berean brothers put Paul on a ship to Athens for his safety. An

intriguing point in today's passage is found in verse 11, where it states that the Bereans were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica. What does it mean to be "noble-minded"? Primarily, it refers to an attitude and demeanor of respect, gentleness, honesty, and courtesy, often associated with those born into a good family or of noble birth. In the context of today's passage, being "noble-minded" implies that the Bereans possessed a more elevated spirit than those in Thessalonica. So, what does it mean to have an "elevated spirit"? It entails diligently studying the Scriptures every day, akin to the image of a tree by a stream that absorbs water continuously (Ps. 1:3). The term "elevated spirit" suggests a profound commitment to daily engage with and internalize the teachings of the Bible. The Bereans were noble-minded because they earnestly and wholeheartedly accepted the word of God with a zeal and willingness to learn (v. 11). In essence, the Bereans, having heard the gospel through Paul, wholeheartedly embraced the word of God. This illustrates a passionate reception of God's word, resembling a sponge soaking up water. Just as a sponge tightly squeezed absorbs water from a container, noble-minded individuals eagerly read, study, and absorb God's word, desiring that it penetrates deeply into their hearts. Furthermore, noble-minded individuals don't merely accept the word blindly; they also validate it through the written Scriptures to ensure alignment and consistency. Verse 11 emphasizes that the Bereans examined the Scriptures daily to verify whether Paul's preaching aligned with God's written word. This dual capacity—receptive to God's word and discerning through the Scriptures—is truly commendable. Having a receptive heart for God's word, coupled with the ability to scrutinize and confirm it, is a precious quality. It allows individuals not only to absorb the truth but also to discern and validate teachings against the authoritative word of God.

In a textbook used by American students titled 'The American Patriot's Handbook,' Abraham Lincoln is introduced with the following words: 'He, despite facing financial difficulties and limited formal education, became a great man by 'reading and rereading the Bible.' It is said that the only inheritance young Lincoln received from his stepmother was a Bible with stained pages. His mother Nancy, whenever she could find time, would sit on a log chair, open the Bible, and share its stories with him. In his early years, Lincoln, facing financial challenges, devoted himself to reading the Bible instead of receiving formal schooling. The Bible became Lincoln's closest companion. It was his sole textbook, his mother Nancy was his only teacher, and the content of his education was solely the stories from the Bible. Through the Bible, he cultivated his future. When the North-South Civil War broke out during Lincoln's presidency due to the issue of slavery, the nation was in turmoil. Despite the chaotic war situation, Lincoln remained unwavering. His advisors once asked him, 'How can you remain so calm when the country is in such a precarious state?' Lincoln responded with a confident voice, saying, 'I have meditated on the Bible and prayed to God, entrusting the future of the nation to Him. God has assured me that we will prevail as long as we stand on His side.' Eventually, as Lincoln believed, the North-South war concluded with the victory of the Union Army. When the war ended, and the emancipated slaves in jubilation wanted to express their gratitude to Lincoln, they presented him with a meaningful gift - a Bible. They raised \$580, adorned a leather-bound Bible with gold leaf, and engraved on the cover a depiction of Lincoln removing the shackles from the enslaved African Americans, symbolizing their liberation. Touched by this precious gift, Lincoln expressed, 'I cannot find words to adequately thank you for your gift of love. I believe the Bible is the most valuable gift that God has given to humanity. From my youth, I have meditated on the treasures of the Bible, believing it contains the

precious riches of Jesus Christ. Through difficult times during the ongoing Civil War, I found strength by memorizing Psalms 34:6, 'This poor man cried out, and the Lord heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles.' This verse lifted me from despair and discouragement." Indeed, President Lincoln was a noble Christian leader much like the people of Berea. Theodore Roosevelt, the 26th President of the United States, who admired Lincoln, summed it up by saying, 'President Lincoln is a man made of one Bible. He applied the truths he learned from the Bible to his practical life, making his entire life a glorious testimony. He breathed with the Bible and lived with the Bible; he was a great man of God' (Internet).

I pray that, starting with myself, all the saints in our church would become noble Christians like President Lincoln and, likewise, like the people of Berea. I hope that both I and all of you diligently study and carefully examine the word of God every day. May we receive God's word with eager and open hearts, not only diligently but also passionately love and cherish the word of God by fervently confirming it in the Scriptures.

Wishing to be established as noble Christians,

James Kim

(Devoting to the careful examination and meditation of God's word)

Something New

[Acts 17:16-21]

What new items have you recently purchased, or what would you like to buy? Of course, it might be a new car or a new house, but perhaps the most common among young people is a 'cell phone' or 'computer.' What about the older generation? In the book 'What Is Marketing' by Paul Smith, it is mentioned that when introducing a new product or service, selecting the right target customers is crucial. Customers are divided into different groups based on their attitude toward 'something new': 'innovators,' 'early adopters,' 'early majority,' 'late majority,' and 'resistant group.' Innovators, comprising about 2.5% of the total, are consumers who love being the first to use 'something new.' Early adopters, accounting for approximately 13.5% of customers, are those who observe innovators enjoying new things and make purchases. In marketing, these are considered 'opinion leaders' and have a significant influence on the success of a new product. Once innovators and early adopters have embraced 'something new,' the majority of consumers finally start purchasing. The majority, representing about 34% each, is divided into 'early majority' and 'late majority.' Of course, some people resist 'something new' (resistant group), comprising about 16%. The era we live in seems to be constantly flooded with new things. For example, with advancements in science and technology, new phones and computers continue to be introduced. As a result, the desire to keep buying and acquiring new things is constantly stimulated. This phenomenon is referred to as "new-item syndrome," meaning the belief that new things are always better than old ones.

In today's passage from Acts 17:16-21, we can see that when Paul took refuge in Athens after escaping from Berea, he observed that the people of Athens had a great interest in "something new" (v. 21). More specifically, the Athenians were intrigued by new religious teachings or new gods. Why were the people of Athens so interested in these new religious teachings or gods? The reason was their curiosity and thirst for knowledge. As a result, Athens was a city filled with idols. When Paul saw the city of Athens filled with idols, he was deeply disturbed (v. 16). This anger was what we might call righteous indignation. Paul's anger was rooted in God's Word, and it was a righteous anger directed by

the Spirit of God (Yoo). Therefore, Paul could not contain this holy anger, and he engaged in discussions with Jews and devout persons in the synagogue and debated daily with those in the marketplace ("Areopagus") (v. 17). It is likely that Paul's missionary activity focused on the synagogue centered around the Sabbath, and the debates in the marketplace occurred daily (v. 17). Among the people Paul debated were philosophers from two different schools of thought: the Epicurean philosophers and the Stoic philosophers. The Epicureans considered "pleasure" as the highest goal in life and believed that the most valuable aspects of pleasure included freedom from pain, irritating passions, and tranquility free from fear of death. The Stoics, on the other hand, taught that pleasure and pain were irrelevant to human happiness. While the Epicureans believed that the gods took little interest in humans, the Stoics believed in the providence of God. When Paul presented the gospel and testified about the death and resurrection of Jesus, the philosophers had various reactions. Some dismissed Paul as a "babbler" and others thought he was proclaiming foreign deities (v. 18). The term "babbler" refers to someone who gathers bits of information like a bird picking up seeds. In other words, some philosophers considered Paul's message as insignificant information. Others thought Paul was proclaiming unfamiliar spirits or new gods. Here, "foreign deities" refers to spirits or gods that were unfamiliar or new to them. Consequently, some people took hold of Paul and brought him to the Areopagus, the official council of the city, which held significant authority in matters of religion and education, to inquire about this "new teaching" (v. 19). Look at verse 20: "For you are bringing some strange things to our ears. We wish to know therefore what these things mean." The Athenians who heard Paul's preaching referred to his gospel as "strange things." For them, the message of Jesus Christ was not just one among many gods but a completely new and unfamiliar deity. Thus, they were eager to learn more about this new teaching. The surprising reaction was that all the citizens of Athens and the foreigners residing there did not spend their time on anything else but either telling or hearing something new concerning the testimony Paul presented, namely, the gospel of Jesus Christ (v. 21). The reason behind this was not necessarily a genuine belief in Jesus but rather a desire for knowledge and curiosity about the new doctrine that Paul was proclaiming (Park).

In our lives, there are indeed various dimensions of desires: appetite, sexual desire, sleep, desire for material possessions, power, affection, honor, knowledge, creative desire, and more. Recently, human desires are often categorized into five stages: (1) Physiological Desires: such as appetite, sexual desire, and sleep, which are necessary for self-preservation, (2) Possession Desires: including desires for material wealth, domination, and power, (3) Recognition Desires: encompassing affection, display of oneself, and desire for honor, (4) Self-Realization Desires: the stage of desiring a morally valuable life or seeking to fulfill societal values, (5) Transcendent Desires: the higher-level desire for self-transcendence. Knowledge desire falls under the fourth stage, "Self-Realization Desires." The knowledge desire observed in the people of Athens indicates a strong desire to pursue things they consider valuable, whether it be acquiring new knowledge or creating something new. To properly satisfy such desires, the people of Athens would likely need to uproot their lower desires for material wealth, power, or honor. Pursuing true value in life while simultaneously seeking material wealth, power, or honor would not be an easy task.

We must be cautious of knowledge desire. Especially in a pluralistic, multi-religious society like ours, we, like the people of Athens, need to be vigilant against new religions, gods, or teachings. Otherwise, we run the risk of being misled. We should not even look at or listen to various religions, their teachings, etc., if we cannot firmly stand against them. Satan strives to tempt believers and lead them away from faith. Consider the wisdom of King Solomon, stated in Ecclesiastes 1:16-18: "I said in my heart, 'I have acquired great wisdom, surpassing all who were over Jerusalem before me, and my heart has had great experience of wisdom and knowledge.' And I applied my heart to know wisdom and to know madness and folly. I perceived that this also is but a striving after wind. For in much wisdom is much vexation, and he who increases knowledge increases sorrow." Even Solomon, the wisest king in the world, realized that pursuing wisdom and knowledge led to increased vexation and sorrow. We must exercise restraint and caution in our knowledge desire. It is crucial not to pursue the teachings or knowledge of various religions just for the sake of interest. Otherwise, in a pluralistic world, we might end up in religious syncretism and lose the purity of our Christian faith. The knowledge we should seek is the knowledge of Jesus Christ alone. The reason is that knowing Jesus Christ is the most noble knowledge (Phil. 3:8). We need to exert effort in getting to know Jesus Christ and grow in the knowledge of Him (Hos. 6:3, Eph. 4:13).

Desiring to grow in knowledge of Jesus Christ,

James Kim

(Praying to know myself by knowing God)

Credible Evidence

[Acts 17:22-34]

In the year O.J. Simpson turned 60, he was arrested and taken into custody without bail in a hotel room at the Palace Station Casino in Las Vegas. Simpson claimed ownership of high-value sports memorabilia in the hotel room, including baseballs, memorabilia plaques, photos, and a cellphone. According to the prosecution, Simpson and his associates attempted to detain two victims using firearms. Simpson faces a total of 11 charges, including first-degree kidnapping, robbery, burglary, attempted kidnapping, and attempted robbery. The first-degree kidnapping charge was later added. While this story may have faded from public memory, you may recall the O.J. Simpson case that created a stir in the mid-90s (Internet). At that time, O.J. Simpson, a former professional football player and renowned sports commentator, was accused of being a suspect in the gruesome murders of his ex-wife and her boyfriend near his upscale residence in L.A. However, he was ultimately acquitted of the double murder charges on October 3, 1995, when 12 jurors voted for his not guilty verdict in the Los Angeles Superior Court. Ironically, the families of the victims, Nicole Brown Simpson and Ronald Lyle Goldman, filed a civil lawsuit against Simpson for compensatory damages. Surprisingly, the L.A. court acknowledged Simpson's liability in the same case, and he was ordered to pay \$8.5 million in compensatory damages to the victims' families. How could the same murder case result in a criminal verdict of not guilty and a civil verdict of liability for compensatory damages? Understanding this puzzle around the O.J. Simpson murder case reveals the fundamental principles of the U.S. legal system, distinguishing between civil and criminal judgments. The O.J. Simpson Double Murder Charge was a criminal case, and the court applied the "Beyond a Reasonable Doubt Standard." This standard requires federal or state prosecutors to prove the suspect's criminal charges beyond any reasonable doubt to the 12 jurors, making it the highest level of legal scrutiny. It means that all 12 jurors must unanimously agree that there is no reasonable doubt for the suspect to be convicted. On the other hand, the Wrongful Death Action filed by the victims' families against O.J. Simpson was a civil lawsuit (specifically a Torts Case). In civil lawsuits, a lower standard of legal scrutiny called the "Preponderance of Evidence Standard" is applied. This standard means that whichever party provides

more persuasive evidence than the other side wins the case. For instance, if there is 49% evidence of Simpson's innocence and 51% evidence of guilt, the victims' families would win. In this scenario, only 9 out of 12 jurors need to agree for a guilty verdict. The reason U.S. law imposes such a high burden of proof on prosecutors in criminal cases is the belief that releasing ten guilty individuals is preferable to wrongfully imprisoning one innocent person. Consequently, Simpson was acquitted in the criminal trial due to the prosecution's inability to meet the high burden of proof. Therefore, the prosecution needed compelling evidence to support the facts alleged in the criminal case.

So, what is the sure or credible evidence that you and I believe in Jesus as our Savior? In other words, why do you believe in Jesus? God has provided us with credible evidence for believing in Jesus Christ, and that evidence is none other than the resurrection of Jesus. In other words, God raised Jesus from the dead (v. 31). The most powerful evidence for the historicity of the resurrection of Jesus Christ is the fact that His tomb was found empty. There have been various attempts to explain this empty tomb by theories, and here are about five of them (Internet):

(1) The first theory suggests that no one knew about Jesus Christ's tomb.

Some historians argue, "The tomb where Jesus Christ was buried was unknown to anyone. Therefore, no one could verify the fact that Jesus Christ's tomb was empty." However, this theory has several weaknesses. According to Matthew 28:1, at least two women, including Mary Magdalene and the mother of James, confirmed that Jesus Christ's tomb was empty.

(2) The second theory claims that the empty tomb was a different tomb.

This theory argues that Mary Magdalene and the other Mary, believing that Jesus Christ was buried, went to the wrong tomb. Since Joseph of Arimathea was a prominent Jewish leader, the low-status women could only observe from a distance and, therefore, mistakenly went to the wrong tomb later. However, Jesus Christ's tomb was not just one of the ordinary tombs in a common burial ground; it was a distinct tomb owned privately by Joseph of Arimathea.

(3) The third theory suggests that the resurrection of Jesus Christ was a legend.

Some historians say that the resurrection of Jesus Christ is an artificially created legend that developed over a long period. They argue that since the stories about the resurrection of Jesus Christ were recorded 200-300 years after His death, during this time, legends or corruption of the scriptures could have occurred. However, the Gospels and the First Corinthians, which mention Jesus Christ's resurrection, were recorded and affirmed by eyewitnesses (individuals present at the resurrection) who directly experienced and testified to the resurrection event. Therefore, the idea that a large number of eyewitnesses (the empty tomb) conspired to fabricate the same resurrection event is nearly impossible.

(4) The fourth theory is the spiritual resurrection theory.

This theory claims that Jesus Christ's body decayed in the tomb, but only His soul was resurrected. However, when Jesus resurrected, He asked His disciples to touch His hands, feet, and side wounds to verify that He had a resurrected physical body, not just a spiritual one.

(5) The fifth theory is the hallucination theory.

This theory argues that the witnesses of Jesus Christ's resurrection experienced hallucinations. Hallucinations only occur in individuals with specific mental disorders. However, the eyewitnesses of the resurrected Jesus Christ had various backgrounds and different personalities, including both men and women. Hallucinations are highly individual experiences, so it is nearly impossible for two people to experience the exact same hallucination. Moreover, Jesus Christ appeared to more than 500 people simultaneously (1 Cor. 15:6), interacted with His disciples, shared meals with them, and allowed them to examine His resurrected form. Such events are impossible in the context of hallucination.

Looking at Acts 1:3, Jesus mentioned, "After His suffering, He presented Himself to them and gave many convincing proofs that He was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God." New Testament scholar George Beasley-Murray provided six credible pieces of evidence for the resurrection of Jesus: (1) the empty tomb, (2) Jesus appearing in His resurrected body, (3) the existence of the Church and worship of Jesus, (4) testimony emerging from the experiences of Christians, (5) the prophecies of Jesus, and (6) the alignment of resurrection and biblical predictions. Why did God raise Jesus from the dead? The reason is to establish Jesus as the judge of the entire world. Acts 17:31 states, "For He has set a day when He will judge the world with justice by the man He has appointed. He has given proof of this to everyone by raising Him from the dead." This fact ultimately teaches two things (Yoo):

(1) The repentance of people from all nations involves forsaking the idols they worshiped.

Therefore, when Paul preached to the Athenians, a people known for their strong religious inclinations, gathered at the official resolution body of the city called the "Areopagus," which held significant authority in matters of religion and education (v. 22), he admonished them in verse 30: "In the past, God overlooked such ignorance, but now He commands all people everywhere to repent." In the era before the resurrection of Jesus, people who worshiped various pagan gods without acknowledging the Creator and the sovereign order of divine providence went unpunished. However, with the decisive advent of the new era of salvation brought about by the resurrection of Jesus, God, who had previously overlooked such

ignorance, now commanded all people to repent (Yoo).

(2) It teaches the need to believe in the resurrected Jesus.

Observing the Adenites' worship of various gods, including an altar dedicated to the "unknown god," Paul declared in verse 23, "What you worship as unknown, I now proclaim to you." He revealed the true God, the Creator and Lord of all, who governs providence (vv. 24-25). Paul preached about God's creation of all nations through one man (v. 26), the primary purpose of creating humanity to dwell on the earth together, establishing harmony and setting the boundaries of time and territory for people to seek God (v. 26). Paul emphasized that God's ultimate purpose was to lead humanity to seek Him (v. 27, Yoo). Therefore, Apostle Paul proclaimed to the Adenites that they should repent of the sin of idol worship and turn to serve the true God alone. This incredible power of the gospel and the history of salvation manifested itself prominently in Thessalonica. Consider 1 Thessalonians 1:9: "for they themselves report what kind of reception you gave us. They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God." Paul's preaching led the Thessalonians to receive the word of God, which is indeed at work in they who believe (1 Thess. 2:13) and become imitators of the Lord in the midst of much affliction, receiving the joy of the Holy Spirit through receiving God's word (1:6-7). The response of the Adenites to Paul's preaching is recorded in today's passage (Acts 17:32-34), showing varied reactions to his message. Some responded with mockery or expressed a desire to hear more later (v. 32). However, a few individuals, including Dionysius, a member of the Areopagus council, a woman named Damaris, and others, believed in Paul's message (v. 34).

How will you respond? Indeed, how will you respond to the Word of God, which declares that Jesus Christ died on the cross, and God raised Him from the dead, appointing Him as the Judge of the whole world? Clearly, God has ordained the day when He will judge the world with justice (v. 31). Moreover, He has appointed the resurrected Jesus Christ as the Judge. The voice that God speaks to us through today's passage can be summarized in two messages: the first message is "Repent" (v. 30), and the second message is "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household" (16:31).

Praying for restoration of tears of repentance,

James Kim

(Wishing for the widespread proclamation of the gospel of salvation)

Do not be Afraid but Go on Speaking!

[Acts 18:1-11]

What fears do you have? In psychology, fear is categorized into normal fear and phobia. Normal fears include fear of the unknown, fear of public criticism, and fear of change. These fears are all related to human perceptions and concepts. On the other hand, phobias are much more diverse. Some fear thunder and lightning, some fear blood, and others fear the dark or even non-existent ghosts. This wide range of fears is also referred to as "Phobia" in English. Phobia is an irrational reaction associated with a specific object that disrupts behavior, and the main symptoms are anxiety and fear. Psychologists classify phobias into over 100 types based on the object causing fear. For example, acrophobia is the fear of heights, claustrophobia is the fear of enclosed spaces, and nyctophobia is the fear of darkness. What phobias do you have? Acrophobia, claustrophobia, or perhaps a fear of public speaking? Do you fear interacting with people? Do you feel anxious, blush, or tremble when standing in front of a crowd, not knowing how others perceive you?

Today's passage from Acts 18:1-11 tells us that when Paul arrived in Corinth after leaving Athens, he faced opposition from the Jews who opposed him when he testified that Jesus is the Christ. In the face of such challenging circumstances, the Lord appeared to Paul in a vision at night and said, "Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent" (v. 9). When we examine why Paul, who was under persecution and opposition, could boldly proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ without fear, we can find four reasons in today's passage.

The first reason is that Paul had excellent fellow workers.

Among these fellow workers, we encounter a couple in today's passage from Acts 18:2 as Paul arrives in Corinth. They are none other than Aquila and his wife Priscilla, recent Jewish immigrants from Italy due to Emperor Claudius's command to leave Rome. When Paul arrived in Corinth, he went to Aquila and Priscilla, and they became his hosts, working together in making tents (v. 3). During

weekdays, Paul engaged in tentmaking with them, and on the Sabbath, he entered the synagogue, reasoning and persuading Jews and Greeks (v. 4). Other significant fellow workers we already know are Silas and Timothy (v. 5). These two had accompanied Paul from Thessalonica to Berea and then to Athens, eventually arriving in Corinth on the same journey as today's passage. Imagine the strength and encouragement Paul must have received from these co-workers. Silas and Timothy, who had been with Paul through persecutions from Thessalonica to Berea, and now they joined him in Corinth. How significant must this support have been for Paul? Another co-worker was Titius Justus, a God-fearing Gentile believer (v. 7). When Paul faced persecution from the Jews opposing his testimony about Jesus being the Christ (v. 5), he took refuge in the house of Titius Justus, a Gentile believer who lived next to the synagogue. It was a change of residence from the house of Aquila and Priscilla, showing the various co-workers and their roles in Paul's ministry. When thinking of Paul's fellow workers, I am reminded of Ecclesiastes 4:9-10: "Two are better than one because they have a good return for their labor. If either of them falls down, one can help the other up. But pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them up." The Bible emphasizes the value of companionship in ministry, stating that the labor of two people is more fruitful and that they can support each other in times of difficulty.

The second reason is that Paul saw the fruit of preaching the gospel.

Look at Acts 18:8 - "Crispus, the synagogue ruler, and his entire household believed in the Lord; and many of the Corinthians who heard him believed and were baptized." When Paul fearlessly proclaimed the gospel in Corinth, Crispus, the synagogue ruler, and his whole household believed in the Lord. Not only that, but many Corinthians who heard Paul also believed and were baptized. How empowering and fulfilling must this have been for Paul? Witnessing the eternal fruits of the gospel amidst persecution, the believers formed in the Corinthian church—Paul's spiritual children—must have brought tremendous joy to his heart. For Paul, these fruits were his "joy and crown" (Phil. 4:1). The salvation of souls, the fruit of the gospel, was a great source of joy for Paul. Despite persecution, he boldly proclaimed the gospel, and the eternal impact of his ministry brought immense joy.

The third reason is that Paul was held captive by the word of God.

Look at Acts 18:5 - "When Silas and Timothy came from Macedonia, Paul devoted himself exclusively to preaching, testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Messiah." As Silas and Timothy came down from Macedonia, Paul, having reliable co-workers such as Silas and Timothy in Corinth, could now invest more time in preaching the gospel. In verse 5, it says Paul testified to the Jews that Jesus was the Messiah. Paul, being anchored in God's word, testified boldly despite facing opposition from the Jews. Being immersed in the word of God, Paul spent more time engaging in gospel testimony. It is evident that the more time we spend meditating on and investing in God's word, the more our faith grows, making us bolder and unshaken in the face of fear and challenging situations.

The fourth reason is that God was with Paul.

The Lord appeared to Paul in a vision at night when he was facing persecution and said, "Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent" (v. 9). Why did God say this? Look at verse 10: "For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you because I have many people in this city." God's promise to Paul was not that he would never face violence or persecution again, but that no harm would come to him, regardless of any persecution he might face (Park). Why did God give such a promise to Paul? The reason was that there were many people in the city who belonged to the Lord (v. 10). In other words, because there were many people in Corinth who needed to be saved, the Lord planned and arranged for the continued testimony of the gospel through Paul. Therefore, the Lord preserved Paul's life and commanded him to fear not, be silent not, but boldly preach the gospel through a vision at midnight. In the end, holding onto this promise, Paul resided in Corinth for one year and six months, successfully carrying out the ministry of preaching the gospel.

Like Paul, we should not be afraid but speak out. We should not be silent but proclaim the gospel. Why is that? The reason is that God says to us, "Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent" (18:9). Why should we not be afraid and be silent but proclaim the best news, the gospel of Jesus Christ? Look at Isaiah 41:10 - "So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand."

Not being afraid and proclaiming the word of God,

James Kim

(Relying on Immanuel God who is with us)

'If God's Will'

[Acts 18:12-23]

What is indeed God's will for me? We often find ourselves frustrated not knowing God's will and plans for us as we live each day. There are times when we face uncertainty about the job we should pursue, the school we should attend, and the decisions we need to make in various situations. Furthermore, there are moments when we ponder over God's will for our lives. Certainly, God must have a plan and will for those who believe, but how can we discern God's will? This is both our concern and the topic of our prayers. In the midst of such pondering, we often pray to know whether what we are planning or deciding to undertake aligns with God's will. How can we discern God's will? To answer this question, we need to consider some examples of what we can mistakenly perceive as ways to discern God's will (Internet):

(1) Casting Lots:

Some people may resort to casting lots when faced with difficulties in choosing between two or more options. They might pray to God, use the casting lots method, and consider the outcome as God's will before implementing it. While instances of decisions being made through casting lots are recorded in the Old Testament (e.g., dividing the land of Canaan, identifying Achan's sin, appointing Saul as king), these occurred during a time when the Bible was not yet complete. Now that the Bible is complete, and the Holy Spirit indwells believers, such specific methods are not necessary. Relying on casting lots may end up depending more on chance than on God, and it can even test God rather than glorify Him.

(2) Another commonly used method is the so-called "Virgil's Book."

Romans used a book called 'Virgil' when making decisions about their career or any other matter. The practice originated from Romans randomly opening the book and taking the first thing that caught their eye as the basis for their decision. Christians also seem to use variations of this method,

using the Bible instead of 'Virgil.' However, this method is highly risky because it ignores the overall meaning of God's Word and selects only a portion of the Bible, subjecting decisions to its dominance. Despite its dangers, many Christians continue to use this method today. They read a certain Bible verse and use the impression suddenly received from the Scripture to justify their decisions. Conversely, if a Bible verse contains unfavorable content, they become filled with fear and anxiety. Our hearts tend to lean in one direction. Depending on the state of our hearts, the Scripture may have great significance for us at times and not at other times. Some people seek to discern God's will through dreams or visions. While this is not entirely wrong, attributing significant meaning to dreams and relying on them for guidance in our actions and future is superstitious and perilous.

So, how can we know God's will? First, we should diligently read and meditate on the Bible, comparing the principles, doctrines, promises, and teachings of the Scripture with the governing principles of our lives. We need to examine whether our decisions align with God's will. Those who consistently read and meditate on the Bible will find it less challenging to discover God's will compared to those who do not. The following methods may also help in discerning God's will.

(1) Focus on God.

Question yourself about the purpose of undertaking this task and inquire whether it aligns with God's work.

(2) Obey what God has already commanded.

Before embarking on something new, obey what God has already commanded. In fact, much of God's will is already revealed to us, but often, we choose not to obey and seek different paths.

(3) Pray.

It is essential to pray to God. Through His Word, through others, and through our own hearts, we should pray to allow God to work.

(4) Study the Bible.

God speaks to us through the Bible. To know God's will, we must consistently read the Bible. While reading, it's important to seek principles rather than searching for specific words or sentences to rationalize oneself.

(5) Accept counsel.

Those who are well-versed in the Bible and have mature faith should accept counsel.

(6) Set priorities.

Consider the priorities of all tasks. Past experiences can be helpful in making these considerations. Of course, the ultimate criterion should be the Bible.

Pastor John MacArthur encourages checking five principles in his book 'The Will of God' and suggests immediate implementation if they are satisfying. The five principles are as follows: God's will involves receiving salvation, being filled with the Holy Spirit, becoming sanctified, being obedient, and experiencing suffering. If all these basic principles are being fulfilled, the last principle is that you can do whatever you desire because the one asserting our heart's desires is God Himself, provided these principles are being implemented in our lives.

In today's passage, Acts 18:21, we see Apostle Paul bidding farewell to the brothers and sisters in Ephesus, stating, "If it is God's will, I will return to you." As we have already reflected, Paul, amidst persecution and hardships in Corinth, received a vision from the Lord, who said, "Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent" (v. 9). He obeyed this divine command and taught God's word boldly for one year and six months while residing in Corinth (v. 11). Having faced challenges in the region, Paul now encounters difficulties again. When the new proconsul Gallio takes office, the opposing crowd seizes the opportunity to bring Paul to trial. They accuse Paul of persuading people to worship God in ways contrary to the law, and Gallio, considering it a dispute within the Jewish community, refuses to be involved, saying, "You are asking about a matter of their law. Deal with it yourselves" (v. 15). Gallio drives them away from the judgment seat, and Paul continues his ministry without hindrance. The clear will of God here is that, for the sake of the gospel, Paul is protected from harm, allowing him to continue preaching to the many people in Corinth. God's intention is evident: to extend salvation to His people through the proclamation of the gospel. Consequently, Paul remains in Corinth for a significant period, fulfilling God's purpose. As he bids farewell to the Corinthian brothers and sisters, he, along with Aquila and Priscilla, travels to Ephesus. Notably, Paul had intended to minister in Ephesus during his second missionary journey, but the Holy Spirit prevented him (16:6). However, as we see in today's passage, Paul now visits Ephesus during the conclusion of his second missionary journey. In Ephesus, he engages in discussions with the Jews at the synagogue and receives a positive response from some (18:19-20). Though urged to stay longer, Paul insists on leaving, saying, "If it is God's will, I will return to you" (v. 21). Eventually, he sets sail, lands in Caesarea, greets the Jerusalem church, and then returns to Antioch. In summary, Paul, led by the Holy Spirit and committed to God's will, proclaims the gospel even in the face of opposition. The passages illustrate how God's will unfolds in protecting His messengers, providing opportunities for gospel proclamation, and guiding Paul through various regions on his missionary journeys. The question we can raise here is, 'Was it indeed God's will for Apostle Paul to return to Ephesus?' After bidding farewell to the brothers and sisters in the Ephesian church, saying, "If it is God's will, I will return to you," and leaving Ephesus, was it God's will for Paul to return to Ephesus? The answer is "Yes." God permitted Paul to come back to Ephesus, making it the focal point of his third missionary journey (18:23-21:16). The question arises: 'Why did God allow Paul to return to Ephesus as the central city for his third missionary journey?' God's will and plan seem to have chosen

Ephesus strategically. Ephesus was the capital of Roman Asia, a hub for administration and transportation, and a religious center for the worship of the Greek goddess Artemis (known in Roman as "Diana"). It attracted an annual influx of pilgrims and generated substantial tourism revenue for merchants (19:25-27). By bringing Paul back to Ephesus, God aimed to use this city as the epicenter to evangelize the entire region of Roman Asia. An interesting point is that the name of the city, Ephesus, means "patience" or "endurance." God had endured much to establish His gospel in Ephesus, and despite persecution and trials, the Ephesian church persevered in faith, earning praise from the Lord (Rev. 2:2). In conclusion, the return of Paul to Ephesus was not a coincidence but a result of thorough preparation and God's guiding hand. The Lord allowed Paul to revisit Ephesus, enabling him to pioneer the Ephesian church, nurture its believers with God's Word, and faithfully proclaim the gospel amidst enduring persecution in the region. The unfolding of Paul's third missionary journey centered around Ephesus was not accidental but a pre-planned and guided outcome (Yoo).

Proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ is indeed the will of God. Jesus, through His sacrificial death on the cross and resurrection, offers salvation and righteousness to all people. Paul, like Christ, lived and died for the sake of the gospel. We, too, are called to live by faith, enduring difficulties and proclaiming the gospel just like Paul and the believers in the Ephesian church.

With a heart that desires to abandon personal desires and live according to the will of the Lord,

James Kim

(Wishing to live with the heart of our Father God, who loves and saves souls)

One with a Through Knowledge of the Scriptures

[Acts 18:24-28]

I will present a Bible nonsense quiz with 7 questions that I found on the internet. The person who laughs the most may have a prize (Internet): (1) Among the biblical figures, who cannot do arithmetic? (Moses) (I don't know what to count), (2) Among the biblical figures, who receives a perfect score of 100 if they take a test? (Miriam) (Because she does it in advance), (3) Among the biblical figures, who always wants someone to look at them? (Barabbas), (4) Among the biblical figures, who is the best at business? (Sarah), (5) Among the biblical figures, who is the worst at business? (Zechariah), (6) Among the biblical figures, who has the most beggarly mentality? (Magdalene Mary), (7) Among the biblical figures, who has the sharpest ears? You have to keep secrets well in front of this person (You'll hear it). There was a pastor who really liked beef soup. This pastor and a young woman were having a conversation about the Bible. After finishing her Bible study, the young woman asked the pastor if she could treat him to a meal (Internet):

Sister: Pastor, what kind of food do you like?

Pastor: I want to eat beef soup.

Sister: I can't eat beef soup.

Pastor: God told us to eat beef soup because it's good for our bodies.

Sister: Pastor, I read the Bible ten times, and this is the first time

I've heard that beef soup is good.

Pastor's response: "And God saw that it was good" (Gen. 1:10).

There is a "Hand Pictograph" that gives brief but important teachings on how to walk with God's word. In this hand pictograph, it explains how to internalize God's word in the heart through the hands. The five fingers represent the fundamental methods: listening, reading, studying, memorizing, and meditation, which helps apply the teachings of the Bible to daily life. Meditation, representing the

thumb, involves walking with God's word in a way that is practical in daily life.

(1) Listening: How will you listen to the Word of God?

One issue with listening is that while a preacher can speak about 125 words per minute, our minds have the capacity to hear over 1,000 words per minute. Consequently, about 90% of the mental energy focused on listening remains unused. Therefore, simply listening is not enough, and a good way to overcome this is to take notes.

(2) Reading: Guidelines for effective and enjoyable Bible reading.

Reading the Bible and studying it require different approaches. The goal of reading the Bible is to find joy and gain new strength, while Bible study aims to increase certainty and provide specific application. Setting a goal to read the entire Bible in a year is a good approach.

(3) Study: Personal exploration.

The key to effective Bible study. When studying the Bible, one should analyze the given passage with a prayerful mindset to find answers to three questions: First, what is the content of this passage? Second, what is the meaning of this passage? Third, how will I apply this passage to my life? These three questions can be summarized as observation, interpretation, and application.

(4) Memorization: Memorizing the Bible transforms your life.

God's Word can transform our lives, and one of the most effective things a Christian can do is to fill their heart with God's Word through memorization.

(5) Meditation: Practical methods for scriptural meditation.

While there are four basic ways to consume the Word—listening, reading, studying, and memorizing—if these methods are not connected to meditation, holding onto God's Word firmly is not possible. The reason for meditation is to know who God is through it. Meditation involves reviewing, analyzing, and transforming the words into thoughts and thoughts into actions. When meditating on God's Word, start with prayer, wait with an expectant heart, and pay attention. The crucial thing is not only to consume but also to digest what is consumed (Internet).

In today's passage, Acts 18:24-28, we encounter a man named Apollos, described as someone proficient in the Scriptures. After the Apostle Paul said his farewell to the Ephesian believers, stating,

"If it is God's will, I will return to you" (v. 21), Apollos, a Jew from Alexandria, Egypt, known as a prominent city of learning and with a considerable Jewish population, arrives in Ephesus (v. 24). In a sense, Apollos can be considered the successor to Paul in the Ephesian church. The author, likely Luke, introduces Apollos in verse 24, stating, "He was a learned man, with a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures." The term translated as "learned" in Greek is "logios," which can be interpreted in two ways: first, as "an eloquent speaker," and second, as "learned" or "scholarly." Apollos was not only knowledgeable but also an eloquent orator. Perhaps Apollos was even more skilled in rhetoric than Paul, as some Corinthian church members criticized Paul's speaking abilities (2 Cor. 10:10). The absence of such criticism against Apollos in today's passage suggests that he was exceptionally gifted in oratory. Additionally, considering the followers of Apollos mentioned in 1 Corinthians 1:12 and 3:4, we can infer that he was highly effective in his communication skills. In verse 24, Apollos is described as being "competent in the Scriptures," indicating his scholarly activities. This statement provides us with three insights into Apollos's scholarly pursuits (Yoo):

First, Apollos was a learner in the way of the Lord.

Look at Acts 18:25 - "He had been instructed in the way of the Lord" This phrase indicates that Apollos received systematic and thorough education in the way of the Lord. Here, the "way of the Lord" refers to the content concerning the suffering and resurrection of Christ prophesied in the Old Testament (Lk. 24:19, 27, 44; Acts 13:29). In other words, Apollos underwent thorough training to understand the Old Testament through the lens of Christ. As a result, he could accurately teach about the Old Testament prophecies concerning Christ. Of course, he was still unaware that Christ was Jesus of Nazareth.

Second, Apollos taught the Scriptures with fervent passion.

Look at Acts 18:25 - "He had been instructed in the way of the Lord, and he spoke with great fervor and taught about Jesus accurately" Here, the word translated as "fervor" in Greek is "zeo," which means "to boil with heat" or "to be fervent." This term suggests that Apollos's passion in teaching the Scriptures was ignited by the Holy Spirit. When Apollos taught about the prophecies of Christ in the Old Testament, he could do so accurately and passionately because the Spirit of God was within him (Yoo).

Third, Apollos' accurate teaching had temporal limitations.

In other words, his excellent knowledge of the Scriptures was limited to knowing only the baptism of John. Look at Acts 18:25 - "He had been instructed in the way of the Lord, and he spoke with great fervor and taught about Jesus accurately, though he knew only the baptism of John." However, this doesn't mean that Apollos was completely unaware of Jesus. In verse 25, it states that Apollos spoke and taught about Jesus in detail. He had an accurate understanding of the Messiah prophesied in the Old

Testament but did not know that the prophesied Messiah was Jesus. In essence, Apollos lacked an understanding of the core of the gospel. Recognizing this deficiency in Apollos' teaching, Aquila and Priscilla invited him to their home and explained to him the gospel about Jesus that they knew. Look at Acts 18:26 - "He began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they invited him to their home and explained to him the way of God more adequately." With the help of Aquila and Priscilla, Apollos gained a more thorough understanding of Jesus as the Christ and his ministry. Now, free from any limitations or deficiencies, he left Ephesus and went to the province of Achaia, probably to the capital city Corinth. Through the grace of God, he provided much help to those who believed (v. 27). He vigorously refuted the Jews in public, proving from the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ (v. 28). Apollos was a person equipped with the ability to interpret and present the Old Testament Scriptures perfectly in light of Jesus Christ. Therefore, he had no reason to lose in debates with the Jews (Yoo).

Indeed, how can we become individuals proficient in the Scriptures like Apollos?

(1) We need to have in-depth knowledge of the Scriptures.

To achieve this, like Apollos, we must continually and systematically learn the Scriptures. In other words, we need thorough biblical education. Superficially studying the Bible will not make us proficient in it. We should strive to become knowledgeable Christians in matters related to the Bible, just like Apollos. It is necessary to read and study both the Old and New Testaments. Additionally, beyond the Bible itself, we should read books on biblical doctrines. Doctrinal studies are crucial. However, we acknowledge that there is a lack of systematic doctrinal study in our church education.

(2) We need to pray to God.

In other words, we should seek not only to understand God's Word but also to ask God for the ability to communicate effectively, just as Apollos did. Looking at scholars or professors who have profound knowledge of the Scriptures, sometimes we notice a lack of communication skills when they pass on their knowledge to students. Therefore, like Apollos, we need to pray for the ability to communicate effectively.

(3) We need an unceasing passion for the Lord's Word.

In other words, our fervor for learning the Lord's Word should not end with gaining knowledge but extend to passionately proclaiming and teaching it. It's like military training, where practicing shooting is essential, but the real understanding comes from using the gun in actual combat. In other words, practical experience is crucial. Our passion should not only end with thorough biblical education but also extend to an ardent desire to obey His Word in our daily

lives. Thus, we pray that, like Apollos mentioned in today's passage, we may all become proficient in the Scriptures.

With the desire to become individuals proficient in the Scriptures,

James Kim

(Wishing you a deeper and richer experience in the joy of meditating on God's Word)

Apollos who Was a Great Help

[Acts 18:27]

The Reverend Kwang-bok Lee, as reported in the Gospel Newspaper of North America, wrote the following under the title 'Pastors and Saints': 'According to the results of experiments by animal researchers, mice give up running away just by hearing the sound of a cat. Even though they could escape by just stepping aside, they tremble in fear at the sound of a cat. This relationship is precisely a predator-prey relationship. ... Sheep are the same. As soon as the predator appears, they give up running away, surrendering everything, even their lives, to the predator. That's why sheep cannot survive alone. They need someone to be with them.' In this context, "sheep" refer to saints, but who is the "predator"? It is the false prophets. Reading this article, I realized that sheep need someone to be with them. Sheep cannot survive without someone helping them. When thinking about the church, this can also be applied to saints—without pastors' help, they cannot survive. In other words, considering Acts 18:27, I reflect on the lesson that, looking at myself, I should be a "pastor who is a great help" to our church members.

Focusing on Acts 18:27, under the title "Apollos who was a great help," I will meditate on five aspects of how Apollos, who was great help, was. I hope to proclaim how I, as a pastor, can become a person who is a great help to our church members, and I encourage you to contemplate how you, as members, can be a great help to each other in the church.

First, Apollos was competent in the Scriptures.

Look at Acts 18:24 - "Now a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was an eloquent man, competent in the Scriptures." Apollos, a Jew from Alexandria, emerges in Ephesus. He came from Alexandria, a city in the Roman Empire known for being a major center of education and philosophy. According to some scholars, the pride of Alexandria at that time was its university library with seventy thousand books. Apollos was a man of great learning and was skilled in the Scriptures. The phrase "competent in the Scriptures" implies two meanings: being articulate and

possessing scholarly knowledge. Moreover, he was "competent in the Scriptures," signifying not only a deep understanding of the Scriptures but also the ability to effectively use them to thwart the snares of the devil (Calvin). This brings to mind 2 Timothy 2:15: "Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth."

Second, Apollos was fervent.

Look at Acts 18:25 - "He had been instructed in the way of the Lord. And being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately the things concerning Jesus, though he knew only the baptism of John." Apollos was already in a state of systematic instruction in the way of the Lord. In other words, he had a thorough understanding of the prophecies about Christ's suffering and resurrection in the Old Testament. Therefore, he could teach accurately about the Old Testament prophecies concerning Christ. Furthermore, Apollos had fervor in his teaching. The adverb "fervently" in the original Greek text translates to "burning with zeal." Calvin remarked, "He (Apollos) burned with holy zeal to teach. Doctrine without zeal is like a sword in the hands of a madman, either unused, still cold, or used in vain boasting. We see learned people become lazy. Others become more ambitious. And the worst thing is that quarrels and disputes make the church difficult. Therefore, doctrine without zeal is not attractive." This reminds us of Romans 10:2: "For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge."

Third, Apollos was bold.

Look at Acts 18:26a: "He began to speak boldly in the synagogue." Apollos boldly proclaimed the way of the Lord in the synagogue in Ephesus. Apollos' boldness was based on the Old Testament Scriptures. If a person has faith and assurance in believing God's Word, they can be bold. If Apollos had been passionate but lacked competence in the Scriptures, his boldness could have been emotionally driven and would likely have dissipated. However, because his boldness was grounded in God's Word and accompanied by passion, he could boldly proclaim the message. This brings to mind Acts 4:31: "And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness."

Fourth, Apollos had a learning attitude.

Look at Acts 18:26b - "... When Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately." Although Apollos was skilled in the Scriptures, he only knew the baptism of John. Priscilla and Aquila, recognizing the deficiency in his teaching, invited him to their home and explained the way of God more accurately. The lesson we learn here is Apollos' humble attitude, a willingness to learn. Even though he was a highly educated scholar, he accepted correction from ordinary believers. The willingness to hear and receive correction is not an easy task, especially for someone as learned as Apollos.

A saint who is a great help to others is one with a humble and teachable spirit. Apollos demonstrates that a learner's attitude is crucial. Proverbs 1:5 says, "Let the wise hear and increase in learning."

Fifth and last, Apollos was a person who understood grace.

Look at Acts 18:27 - "And when he wished to cross to Achaia, the brothers encouraged him and wrote to the disciples to welcome him. When he arrived, he greatly helped those who through grace had believed." Apollos, after learning the way of God through Priscilla and Aquila (v. 26), came to prioritize grace over knowledge. Having a clear understanding that Jesus is the Messiah prophesied in the Old Testament (v. 26), Apollos recognized the precedence of grace. Now, he, through grace, became a source of great benefit to those who believed. Knowledge can lead to pride, but the love of Jesus Christ humbles us. This brings to mind 1 Corinthians 8:1-3: "Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. If anyone imagines that he knows something, he does not yet know as he ought to know. But if anyone loves God, he is known by God."

A pastor who is a great help to others is knowledgeable in the Scriptures. Additionally, he possesses zeal and a teachable spirit. He is bold, understanding the grace of God. I aspire to be such a beneficial pastor to the congregation.

Desiring to be a pastor who is a great help to the saints,

James Kim

(Seeking to be knowledgeable in God's grace through the Bible)

I Sincerely Want to Become His disciple.

[Acts 19:1-7]

A short while ago, during a general assembly, an elderly Korean pastor sent an email to several pastors in our association, including an interesting article as an attachment. The article's title was "A Shocking 'Confession' from Willow Creek Community Church." In their research, Pastor Cally Parkinson and Pastor Greg Hawkins, who are executives in the church, recorded the results of their long-term study on Willow Creek Community Church in their new book titled "Reveal: Where Are You?" Even Pastor Bill Hybels, the senior pastor of the church, described the research results as "earth shaking," "ground breaking," and "mind-blowing." According to the report, Willow Creek Community Church confessed that what they had been doing for years to produce genuine disciples of Jesus Christ and what they had taught to millions of people (pastors?) was wrong. They admitted to increasing the numbers but not producing disciples. Pastor Bill Hybels himself said, 'We made a mistake. We should have taught people who believe in Jesus to take responsibility for becoming self-feeders when they become Christians, reading the Bible during the week and actively practicing their spiritual lives. We failed to do that' (Internet). After reading this article, I want to commend such a large, famous, and influential church for conducting its own research and making a shocking confession. The confession, especially that they increased numbers but did not truly produce disciples of Jesus Christ, serves as a wake-up call for all of us. Pastor Yong-gi Cho, well-known for his cell church model, stated the solution to the theology of church growth as follows: 'Faith-bubble believers are the result of bubble faith. The loss of the purity of the gospel in bubble faith ultimately produced bubble believers. In this process, the Korean church lost the purity of the gospel. This is the most decisive and fundamental cause of stagnation in church growth. By overly emphasizing material blessings and success, pastors have turned saints into passive beings who hope to receive blessings rather than transforming their personalities and lives to resemble Christ. Today's Christians are not personally assimilated into the crucified and resurrected life of Jesus Christ, living with their lives and faith separated. As a result, trust in Christianity and the church has disappeared, and the preaching of the gospel and church growth has fundamentally hit a wall' (Internet).

How are we, my church, and all of you truly doing? Are we genuinely being conformed to the life of

the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ? In other words, are we, you and I, truly disciples of Jesus? Who is a disciple?

(1) A disciple is a learner.

In Greek, a disciple is called 'mathetes,' which is a noun derived from the verb 'manthano,' meaning 'to learn.' If the term disciple is derived from the verb 'to learn,' we can define a disciple as a learner. A disciple is someone who continues to learn. In this sense, being admitted to the school of Christ means there is no graduation.

(2) A disciple is the one who follows the Lord.

Jesus called people who were busy with their work to follow Him (Mk. 1:17; 2:14). In the contemporary Jewish literature of Jesus' time, following someone is immediately understood as becoming that person's disciple. Disciples, in order to follow the Lord, abandoned everything, including family (1:20) and possessions (vv. 18, 20). As a requirement for those following Him, Jesus demanded in Luke 14:25-35 that one must hate family and even one's own life and forsake all possessions.

In the gospels, the word "disciple" is used 238 times, describing someone who denies oneself and takes up the cross (Mt. 16:24), forsakes all possessions (Lk. 14:33), hates one's own life (v. 26), abides in Jesus' words (Jn. 8:31), loves one another (13:34, 35), bears fruit (15:7, 8, and more (Internet). How can we know if we are true disciples? Today, we can consider three aspects centered around Acts 19:1-7.

First, true disciples of Jesus believe in Him.

In today's text, Acts 19:4, we see that the 12 disciples Paul encountered in Ephesus (vv. 1, 7) had a limited understanding of Jesus (Park). These 12 disciples were likely believers who had received John's baptism about Jesus, possibly taught by Apollos (Park). Apollos, whom we have already reflected upon as competent in the Scriptures (18:24-28), learned about the way of the Lord early on but knew only the baptism of John (v. 25). The 12 disciples in Acts 19:1-7, whom Paul encountered in Ephesus, likely heard about Jesus from Apollos during a time when he only knew John's baptism (18:25). Therefore, Paul, upon meeting these 12 disciples in Ephesus, said to them: "Paul said, 'John's baptism was a baptism of repentance. He told the people to believe in the one coming after him, that is, in Jesus'" (v. 4). He explained to these disciples, who knew only John's baptism (v. 3), that the one John spoke of as coming after him was none other than Jesus.

Revelation 14:12 states: "This calls for patient endurance on the part of the people of God who keep his commands and remain faithful to Jesus." The lesson taught here is that as disciples of Jesus who believe in Him, we must remain faithful to Him until the end. Despite any suffering, adversity, or persecution, disciples of Jesus endure, persevere, and overcome with a patient and enduring faith in Jesus.

Second, true disciples of Jesus have received the Holy Spirit.

In today's passage, Acts 19:2, when Paul encountered the 12 disciples in Ephesus, he asked them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" They replied, "No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit." So, when Paul asked them what baptism they had received, they answered, "John's baptism" (v. 3). Scholar F. F. Bruce suggested that these 12 disciples in Ephesus believed in Jesus but were unaware that Jesus imparts the baptism of the Holy Spirit, and therefore, they likely had not received the Holy Spirit (Park). From this perspective, these 12 disciples were more ignorant about the Holy Spirit than Apollos, who knew only John's baptism. Eventually, Paul testified to them about Jesus being the one John spoke of and urged them to believe in him (v. 4). They were then baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus (v. 5). Jesus' disciples receive the Holy Spirit when they accept Him as their Savior and Lord. Romans 5:5 says, "And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us." When we believe in Jesus, God gives us the Holy Spirit along with His love. Therefore, as a hymn chorus proclaims, 'The Spirit has come, the Spirit has come, the Spirit sent by my Lord has come. Let's proclaim this joyful news to the whole world, the Spirit has come.'

Third, true disciples of Jesus utilize the gifts of the Holy Spirit for the benefit of others.

Look at Acts 19:6 - "And when Paul had laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they began speaking in tongues and prophesying." After Paul exhorted the 12 disciples he met in Ephesus to believe in Jesus, baptized them in the name of the Lord Jesus, and laid hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them. The manifestation of the Holy Spirit's coming was evident as God bestowed spiritual gifts upon them. Consequently, they spoke in tongues and prophesied. Why did God give the gifts of the Holy Spirit to those who believed in Jesus? The reason is to build up the church (1 Cor. 14:4, 12, 26).

In a word, a disciple of Jesus can be called a "Christian." As we have already reflected upon in Acts 11:26, the saints of the Antioch church were "called Christians first in Antioch," just as the true disciples of Jesus are truly Christians. Even though unbelievers referred to the saints of the Antioch church with the term "Christians" in a derogatory manner, considering how much these people (disciples) believed in and followed Jesus Christ, living lives resembling Him, it is evident why they were called by such a name. Reflecting on this, we should strive to become true Christians like the saints of the Antioch church.

In Henry Nouwen's book "The Living Reminder," the author views ministry as reminding, and ministry leaders as those who remind people of Jesus. Indeed, both you and I should become Christians who remind others of Jesus, true disciples of Jesus. It is my hope that, as believers in Jesus and recipients of the Holy Spirit, we may effectively use the gifts of the Spirit to build up the church, just as the Antioch church did, and that our church may, like the Antioch church, gain the nickname "Christians" among unbelievers.

Sincerely desiring to become a true disciple of Jesus,

James Kim

(Wishing to be shaped into someone who reminds others of Jesus)

The Growing of the Word of the Lord

[Acts 19:8-20]

A. W. Tozer, who was called a prophet of the 21st century, stated in his book "That Incredible Christian," "Today's churches are filled with feeble Christians. They must be entertained with something interesting to come to church. ... Therefore, they remain at a weak level, both morally and spiritually. They are barely holding on to a faith they don't even understand well with feeble hands" (Internet). What is the cause? Similar to a salesperson who highlights only the positive aspects of their product and hides the negatives, unbalanced evangelists hide the negative aspects and talk only about the positive, and we fall into a false gospel. It is like emphasizing the promised land without the wilderness, or highlighting only the resurrection without the cross. This is a false gospel. We live in a world where fake truths prevail, and such false truths are proclaimed from church pulpits, nurturing weak Christians who seek comfort rather than service.

We need to become genuine disciples filled with true truth. Our church needs to become a church filled with true words. How can we achieve this? In today's passage, Acts 19:20, the Bible says, "So the word of the Lord grew mightily and prevailed." With this passage as the central theme, I would like to receive three teachings on how the prevailing of the word can manifest in our church under the title "The growing of the word of the Lord."

First, for the growing of the word of the Lord in our church, all of us must listen to the Word of the Lord.

Look at Acts 19:10 - "This went on for two years, so that all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord." If we look at Acts 18:19-21, before going up to Jerusalem at the end of his second missionary journey, Paul visited Ephesus, where he had preached during his first missionary journey. The Jews there responded positively to Paul's message, showing a favorable reaction and requesting him to stay longer. Paul refused but promised to return if God granted him the opportunity, which he did in

fulfillment of that promise (19:1). In Acts 19:8, Paul spent three months teaching intensively in the synagogue about the kingdom of God. During this time, some people stubbornly resisted and blasphemed the message in front of the crowd (v. 9). They not only did not believe in Paul's proclaimed word but also hardened their hearts. This reveals their spiritually irrecoverable state of stubborn unbelief. In this state, they came out aggressively, attacking Paul's gospel in public. Therefore, Paul set apart the disciples and lectured daily at the Hall of Tyrannus for two years (v. 10). The Western text tradition indicates that Paul's focused teaching time at the Hall of Tyrannus was from the fifth hour to the tenth hour (around 11 AM to 4 PM) (Metzger). This well reflects the cultural custom of the Asia Minor region, where the time from 11 AM to 4 PM was essentially a period for avoiding the heat, taking a nap, or having a break. Utilizing this break time, both Jews and Greeks earnestly learned God's word from Paul (Yoo). As a result, those living in Asia, whether Jews or Greeks, heard the word of the Lord (v. 10). "Asia" here refers to the region along the western coast of Anatolia, which includes areas beyond Ephesus, such as northern Bithynia, eastern Galatia, and southern Lycia, bordered by the Aegean Sea (J.A. Harrill). Even though Ephesus itself had a population of around 250,000, considering the population of the surrounding areas, the numbers would have been much larger. This indicates how many people heard God's word at the Hall of Tyrannus (Yoo).

The term "the growing of the word of the Lord" in this context refers to the geographical spread of the word of the Lord, with a large number of people hearing the gospel and accepting Jesus as their Savior and Lord. In other words, the growing word of the Lord mean growing numbers of believers and growing faith. However, it is crucial to remember that even in the midst of the growing of the word, there are some who may harden their hearts and resist obedience to the word. These are people who may take an aggressive stance against the word, attacking it. In other words, in the face of God's word, there are two types of people: those who hear and believe, obedient to the word, and those who hear but do not believe, disobedient to the word. We must become people who hear God's word and obey it. Therefore, the growing of the word of the Lord needs to manifest in our church.

Second, for the growing of the word of the Lord in our church, the name of Jesus must be exalted.

Look at Acts 19:17 - "When this became known to the Jews and Greeks living in Ephesus, they were all seized with fear, and the name of the Lord Jesus was held in high honor." The background of Acts 19:11-17, informs us of the remarkable miracles of God through Paul's hands. Verse 11 states: "God did extraordinary miracles through Paul." This demonstrates that Paul's ministry involved the ministry of both word and power, much like the ministry of Jesus. The powerful effects of the word, demonstrated through healing and casting out demons, were compelling to many Asians, leading them to bow in awe (Yoo). This signifies the establishment of God's kingdom through the testimony of Paul's words, liberating people from the dominion of Satan and demons. Another incident that occurred in this context is the shameful experience of the seven sons of Sceva (vv. 13-16). Some Jews were traveling around attempting to cast out demons professionally, and among them, the specific ones mentioned are the seven sons of Sceva (Sceva is introduced as a chief priest in the passage). They tried to exorcise demons using the name of Jesus, whom Paul preached (v. 13). However,

the demons confronted them, saying, "Jesus I know, and Paul I know about, but who are you?" (v. 15). The demons genuinely know who believes and who does not. They also know who the true believers are. Therefore, those who do not want to be the object of demonic mockery or attack must be genuine in their faith in Jesus Christ (Park). After the possessed man leaped on the seven sons of Sceva, overpowered them (v. 16), they fled from the house battered and naked. When the Jews and Greeks living in Ephesus learned of this event, they were filled with fear. Of course, this fear was a reverent fear and respect for God. In the end, through this incident, God exalted the name of Jesus before all these people.

What does "the growing of the word of the Lord" mean here? It refers to the manifestation of God's power, resulting in the exaltation of the name of the Lord Jesus. However, through whom did this power manifest? It manifested through Paul, a man of faith and fear whom even the demons acknowledged (vv. 13-16). Seeing that the demons acknowledged Paul's faith as genuine (v. 15), it is evident that they were afraid. Particularly, because the true believer Paul was accompanied by Jesus, the demons had to be afraid. For the prevailing of the word to manifest in our church, the name of our Lord Jesus must be exalted.

Third and last, for the growing of the word of the Lord in our church, all of us must repent.

Look at Acts 19:18: "Many of those who believed now came and openly confessed what they had done." When God exalted the name of the Lord Jesus in this way, remarkable transformations occurred among both believers and unbelievers (vv. 18-19). Those who had already believed came and openly confessed what they had done (v. 18). Here, "what they had done" refers to the magical and sorcerous practices they continued even after believing in Jesus, as a result of Paul's ministry (Yoo). It's similar to some Korean Christians who, even after believing in Jesus, continue practices like consulting fortunetellers, getting face readings, and seeking advice from shamans. This indicates that although outwardly they believed in Jesus, their lives were still repeating the shameful practices of their past (Yoo). The individuals mentioned in verse 19 represent a transformation arising from professional magicians who had not yet believed in the Lord. Many of them brought books related to magic and burned them publicly before everyone. This was an act of openly rejecting and confessing the false content in the books related to magic. The value of the burned books was estimated to be fifty thousand pieces of silver. Considering that one piece of silver was equivalent to a day's wages, similar to a Danish mark, the value of the burned books amounted to an enormous sum of fifty thousand days' wages (Yoo).

What does "the growing of the word of the Lord" mean here? It is when the name of the Lord Jesus is glorified, and believers, acknowledging and abandoning the shameful sins they have not yet let go of, openly confess them. Additionally, the prevailing of the word involves unbelievers repenting and returning to the Lord as a result of the exaltation of the name of the Lord Jesus. May the history of such prevailing of the word take place in our church.

Our church must become a church where the Lord's word grows and prevails. What does this mean?

It means overcoming the battle within ourselves through the Lord's word, abandoning sinful and old habits. Moreover, as a result of the Lord's word, there should be a transformation where people, just like those who did not believe but abandoned their magical professions and returned to the Lord, turn to the Lord. We must listen to the Lord's word so that we can triumph in the struggle against the forces of Satan. We need to experience the power of His word. We should witness the exaltation of the name of the Lord. In the process of repenting for our sins, we must live a victorious life through the word of the Lord.

Desiring to live by the power of His word,

James Kim
(Sola Scriptura!)

Our Plan

[Acts 19:21-41]

The author of the book ‘God's Plan Feeding 10,000 People,’ is Pastor Jong-chun Kim. He graduated from Seoul National University with a degree in liberal arts, and he also earned graduate degrees from Sin Dae-won Seminary and Yonsei University's Graduate School of Education and Graduate School of Business. Pastor Kim worked at the Korea Trade Association for 11 years and is currently the incumbent pastor at Chung-in church. In his book, Pastor Kim discusses the Christian CEO spirit that individuals planning their faith in the secular world should not overlook. He emphasizes that planning exists in various aspects of life, including global planning, national planning, church planning, family planning, self-planning, future planning, knowledge planning, and more. However, Christian planning is unique and distinctive because it always presupposes a relationship with God. True planning, according to him, always starts with a relationship with God, making Christian life synonymous with planning across all areas. He cites the biblical example of Joseph as a model for excellent planning, highlighting Joseph's success in planning seven years of abundance and seven years of famine in Egypt. He can be considered the pioneer of global planning. The three key points of Christian planning are diligence, wisdom and knowledge, and grace. Diligence is the foundation of planning (Prov. 28:19-20). When diligence is combined with wisdom and knowledge, it becomes the epitome of excellence (24:5). Wisdom and knowledge surpass diligence because of their intrinsic value. However, one cannot attain grace through one's own efforts. The proclamation in Proverbs 4:7 that wisdom is supreme remains silent in the presence of God's grace (21:30-22:1). We must not be lazy but diligently strive to do our best, wisely pursuing knowledge, and clothing our lives with God's grace. If there is one final message and prayer topic for Christians, it is essential to continuously examine the framework of self-planning that encompasses perspectives from God's eternal view, post-death perspectives, and imminent death perspectives. As the pace of change accelerates, consistent and agile self-planning is required (Internet).

Proverbs 16:3 advises us in this way: “Commit to the LORD whatever you do, and he will

establish your plans.” It is true. We should entrust all our actions to God. However, even in entrusting everything to God, we still bear our responsibility. That responsibility is none other than 'our management.' Today, focusing on Acts 19:21-41, I want to receive three lessons on how we should plan ourselves under the title “Our plan.”

First, in order to plan, we must have a clear purpose.

Look at Acts 19:21 - " Now after these things were finished, Paul purposed in the Spirit to go to Jerusalem after he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia, saying, "After I have been there, I must also see Rome." After completing his ministry in Ephesus amidst God's amazing grace and works, Paul was planning to go to Jerusalem by way of Macedonia and Achaia (Yoo). Why did he plan to go to Jerusalem? What was his purpose? His purpose was to go to Rome and preach the gospel. Rome was a strategic outpost for reaching the ends of the earth, and Paul, after proclaiming the gospel in Rome, wanted to obey Jesus' command to spread the gospel to the ends of the earth (Yoo). With this clear purpose, he planned to first visit Macedonia and Achaia to comfort and encourage the saints before arriving in Jerusalem. Once there, he intended to stay for a while before heading to his final destination, Rome, to preach the gospel. He desired to fulfill Jesus Christ's command to proclaim the gospel to the ends of the earth.

Here, we need to consider one thing. In the Korean Bible, Acts 19:21 is written as 'Paul planned to go to Jerusalem,' but looking at the English NASB translation, which translates the original Greek more closely, it says, "Paul purposed in the spirit to go to Jerusalem." Translating this into Korean, it would mean, 'Paul decided to go to Jerusalem in the spirit.' The meaning of this statement is that Paul, with a clear purpose and specific plan, followed the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, his purpose and plan were not driven by personal gain or glory but solely to manifest the glory of God. The lesson we need to learn here is to have spiritual sensitivity when setting clear goals and concrete plans. We should pray, expect, and wait for how the Holy Spirit leads us. We need to be cautious about making hasty decisions and taking action too quickly.

Sometimes we hear or say things like, 'Just go ahead with faith unconditionally.' Of course, we should indeed do the Lord's work with faith. However, when it comes to acting in faith, we need to reflect on whether we are truly acting in faith according to what the Lord desires or if we are acting based on our own understanding of 'faith.' Many times, we might rush into action unconditionally, not knowing the Lord's will, and when faced with obstacles, we realize that it might not be the Lord's will, prompting us to seek His will again. We should wait more cautiously, discerning the Lord's will and obediently following it. As an example, we can look at Acts 16:10. When Paul and his companions were striving to preach the gospel in Asia, the Holy Spirit blocked their way, leading them to Macedonia. In the vision, a man from Macedonia stood and pleaded with Paul, saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." Upon hearing this, Paul and his companions 'concluded' or 'made a decision,' as the English versions like NIV or NASB use the term. In other words, the Bible says that Paul and his companions

'concluded' or 'made a decision' that this was the Lord's will for them to go to Macedonia and proclaim the gospel. The word used in the original Greek implies 'making go together,' 'coalescing,' 'coming together as one,' 'uniting,' and 'reaching a conclusion based on mutual agreement' (Word Pictures in the New Testament). In considering the meaning of this word, when Paul and his companions had a vision and prayed with the vision in mind, using the reason God had given each of them, they came to the mutual agreement that it was the Lord's will to go to Macedonia and proclaim the gospel. When Paul and his companions had a vision and prayed with the vision in mind, using the reason God had given each of them, they came to the mutual agreement that it was the Lord's will to go to Macedonia and proclaim the gospel. The persuasion they experienced through the vision was sufficient (being fully persuaded) (Calvin). In setting clear goals and concrete plans to fulfill those goals, we need to cultivate the ability to discern the Lord's will. Only then can our plan be led according to the Lord's will, bringing glory to God. To do this, first, we must not conform to this age but renew our minds and undergo transformation (Rom.12:2). In the midst of spiritual sensitivity, we must discern the doors that the Holy Spirit closes and opens. He is clearly a God who closes one door and opens another. The crucial point is to pray together, discerning whether it is the Lord's will or not, and using the reason God has given us, that is, being filled with the wisdom of God's Word, to understand and fulfill His will. We need to have a clear purpose that aligns with the Lord's will and proceed with specific plans to achieve it.

Second, in order to plan, we need trustworthy helpers.

Look at Acts 19:22 - " And having sent into Macedonia two of those who ministered to him, Timothy and Erastus, he himself stayed in Asia for a while." As Paul made plans to go to Jerusalem and eventually to Rome to proclaim the gospel, he had helpers among whom were Timothy and Erastus. After sending these two to Macedonia, Paul remained in the Asia region for some time. Paul consistently labored to strengthen the churches established through his ministry, sending beloved disciples to shepherd and support these churches. As an example, Paul sent Timothy and Erastus, two helpers, to Macedonia (v. 22). Often, when we think of Paul, we admire him greatly, but we may not pay much attention to his co-laborers or those who supported him. However, if we examine the concluding sections of Paul's letters, we find that he frequently mentions his fellow workers, helpers, and those who assisted him. One such example is found in Philippians 4:7-17, where Paul speaks about his fellow workers. One recurring word that stands out is the term 'faithful,' repeated several times, such as 'faithful servant' (v. 7), 'faithful and beloved brother' (v. 9). In other words, Paul's co-laborers, helpers, were truly faithful servants. Such faithful servants are trustworthy helpers. Another example is found in Philippians 2:25, where Paul describes Epaphroditus, a fellow worker, as "my brother, fellow worker and fellow soldier, who is also your messenger, whom you sent to take care of my needs."

Do you know the motto of the U.S. Marine Corps? It is "A few good men." Translated, it means 'a select few.' While we may not be familiar with their training, one thing we know is that Marines are a 'select few' because they must conduct daring amphibious assaults, and being a large force is impractical. When a small number of soldiers trained for battle stand alongside Jesus' soldiers as helpers,

they become a great strength in carrying out the Lord's work. Faithful, loyal, and trustworthy soldiers—these helpers around Paul allowed him to undertake significant work in proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ and expanding the kingdom of God. Now, consider yourselves. Do you have trustworthy and faithful helpers around you? If so, how many do you have? On the other hand, considering the perspective of being leaders, are we trustworthy helpers for our leaders? In the "7 Laws to Become a True Leader," the sixth law states, 'Deliver the Message of Consistency of Words and Deeds.' This law teaches us that to become trustworthy individuals, we must be people of action, delivering what we promise. In other words, setting an example is crucial in gaining trust. When determining if a leader can be trusted, people first listen to what the person says and then observe their actions. When their words and actions align, the judgment is made that they can be trusted. People decide whether to entrust their lives to you based on observing how you live. We all hope that God will provide us with trustworthy helpers in our management endeavors.

Third and last, in order to plan, we should anticipate considerable challenges.

Look at Acts 19:23 - "About that time there arose a great disturbance concerning the Way." From verse 23 to the last verse, 41, it describes a riot provoked by Demetrius, who could be considered a kind of union leader, during the time when Paul, having sent his faithful helpers Timothy and Erastus to Macedonia, was temporarily staying in Ephesus (Yoo). Why did such a riot occur? This incident is related to a significant transformation initiated by God, stemming from an embarrassing event where seven sons of Sceva, attempting to cast out demons in the name of Jesus, were severely defeated (Yoo). The significance lies in the fact that not only did many believers confess and renounce their magical practices up to that point (v. 18), but also numerous sorcerers who had not believed in the Lord before burned their magic books on a large scale and turned to the Lord (v. 19). As a result of this event, the Ephesians gained a new perspective on idol culture. In other words, they came to realize that the gods they served were man-made idols, not true gods. Consequently, the Ephesians developed a negative attitude toward various idols and objects associated with sorcery, leading them to discard idol-related items and refrain from producing or purchasing such items (Yoo). Professor Sang-seop Yoo remarks, 'Those who led the Ephesian Artemis idol industry and profited greatly from it could not sit idly by in such a situation. Therefore, they formed a group and stirred up the riot' (Yoo). Demetrius, who led this riot, was also a silversmith creating silver shrines of Artemis, and when his profits diminished, he gathered fellow craftsmen to incite the riot (v. 24). In his speech before the crowd, Demetrius asserted, "Not only our trade is in danger of falling into disrepute, but also the temple of the great goddess Artemis may be discredited, and the goddess herself, who is worshiped throughout the province of Asia and the world, may even be deposed from her divine majesty" (v. 27). The crowd's reaction is recorded in verses 28-29: "When they heard this, they were furious and began shouting: 'Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!' Soon the whole city was in an uproar. The people seized Gaius and Aristarchus, Paul's traveling companions from Macedonia, and all of them rushed into the theater together." At that time, Paul, along with his companions (Col. 4:10) Gaius (Acts 20:4) and Aristarchus (20:4, 27:2), who shared in his

hardships, intended to enter the theater to face the tribulation, but the disciples prevented them (19:29-30) (Park). Eventually, the town clerk of Ephesus intervened and calmed the crowd, preventing further chaos for the sake of Ephesus' peace and order (vv. 35-41). In short, the cause of this riot, as mentioned in Acts 19:23, was "the Way," or the gospel. Those opposing the gospel, idol-worshippers threatened by the gospel, and people like Demetrius who made a wealthy living from idol-related business incited this riot in opposition to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

As bearers of the gospel, we should anticipate significant challenges. The reason is that those opposing the gospel will always exist until the Lord returns. Therefore, we do not need to be disheartened or discouraged by adversaries of the gospel. Instead, it could be a testimony that we are indeed proclaiming the gospel. We should not fear anything caused by those who oppose us (Phil. 1:28). The reason is that for the adversaries of the gospel, it is a sign of destruction, but for us, the messengers of the gospel who believe in Jesus, it is a sign of salvation (v. 28). We must take courage in facing tribulations in the world because Jesus has overcome the world (Jn. 16:33).

In our plan, we must have a clear purpose. That purpose is to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ to the ends of the earth. We need trustworthy helpers in our plan. To achieve this, we must seek God's guidance. Additionally, in our plan, we should anticipate significant challenges. We should expect persecution and tribulation from those who oppose the gospel. Anticipate without fear, for just as Jesus has overcome the world, we too can boldly engage in spreading the gospel with the assurance of victory.

With a prayerful heart, trusting in the Lord and committing our plan to Him,

James Kim

(Entrusting our plan to God with faith)

A Great Disturbance

[Acts 19:23]

I read an article in Korean newspaper Donga Ilbo, stating that Europe is shaken by bomb threat prank calls. The article mentions a specific incident involving a Lufthansa passenger plane traveling from Frankfurt to Tel Aviv. During the flight, the airline received a phone call claiming that there was a bomb on board. Lufthansa considered it a hoax and continued the flight, but Israel strongly objected. Israel dispatched two fighter jets, instructing the passenger plane to make an emergency landing in Cyprus. However, no explosives were found during the search. The Cypriot government protested to the Israeli government for guiding the passenger plane into its airspace without prior permission. Similar incidents, six in total, occurred in Europe over the past ten days, causing confusion and losses for European airlines. The cause of these disturbances was prank calls, false information leading to such incidents.

Cause of disturbance

Now, let's turn to the cause of the disturbance mentioned in Acts 19:23-27. What was the cause? It was the proclamation of the gospel by Paul. In verse 23, the Bible says, "About that time there arose a great disturbance about the Way." The interesting point is when this disturbance occurred. The phrase "About that time" refers to the period when the word of the Lord gained power in Ephesus, resulting in significant influence (v. 20). The contrasting reactions to the gospel are evident: (1) The first reaction is the supernatural acts accomplished through the power of the Lord's word and Paul's hands. Believers renounced and abandoned their magical practices, and even those who had not believed in the Lord disposed of their magic-related books (19:8-20). (2) The second reaction is a considerable disturbance caused by the gospel (vv. 23ff). The question to be asked is, "Why did a significant disturbance occur because of the gospel of Jesus Christ?" The answer can be found in verses 25-28, indicating two main causes for the disturbance:

- (1) The first cause of the disturbance was that the industry of those who incited the disturbance was facing a financial crisis.

Look at Acts 19:24-25: "For a man named Demetrius, a silversmith, who made silver shrines of Artemis, brought no little business to the craftsmen. These he gathered together, with the workmen in similar trades, and said, 'Men, you know that from this business we have our wealth.'" Demetrius, the main instigator of the riot, was a silversmith involved in making shrines of Artemis. He made significant profits from this industry and stirred up the craftsmen to protest. The reason behind this was that their industry was facing a financial crisis due to the impact of the gospel proclaimed by Paul. Look at verse 26: "And you see and hear that not only in Ephesus but in almost all of Asia this Paul has persuaded and turned away a great many people, saying that gods made with hands are not gods." Paul's teachings had a profoundly negative impact on the silver shrine-making industry of Demetrius and others (v. 26). This story parallels the incident of the demon-possessed slave girl in Philippi, who brought economic gain to her owners but faced legal action after Paul cast out the spirit (16:19-22). Furthermore, it contrasts with the earlier mention of many sorcerers in Ephesus turning away from their practices and burning expensive books related to sorcery (v. 19).

- (2) The second cause is mentioned in verse 27: "And there is danger not only that this trade of ours may come into disrepute but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis may be counted as nothing, and that she may even be deposed from her magnificence, she whom all Asia and the world worship."

The chief instigator's justification for the disturbance was the perceived threat to the great goddess Artemis and her temple. Here, the name "Artemis" is related to the meaning "healthy" or "responsive to prayer." She was known by various titles such as "Mistress," "Savior," "Heavenly Goddess," and "Queen of the Universe," with adjectives like "Most Great," "Most Holy," and "Most Manifest." In the context of the passage, the words emphasizing Artemis's greatness appear four times (vv. 27-28, 34-35). In Greek mythology, Artemis is the daughter of Zeus and the twin sister of Apollo. The Temple of Artemis, located just outside the Ephesus city gates, was considered the glory of Ephesus and one of the Seven Wonders of the ancient world. This temple served as a focal point in the economic structure of Ephesus and Asia. It not only attracted deposits from Ephesians, Asians, and even foreigners, but the Temple of Artemis also engaged in financial activities, including lending and borrowing. It played a significant role, possibly functioning as the preeminent bank in Asia at that time (Yoo). However, the agitator Demetrius, who caused a major disturbance, appeared to be concerned about preserving the protection and reputation of the goddess Artemis. Still, in reality, he sought substantial economic gains under the guise of religious preservation.

Similar individuals, akin to Demetrius, may exist within the church. Outwardly appearing to

serve the Lord and the church, they might stir considerable unrest when their personal economic interests are compromised. In other words, when faced with potential financial loss, individuals within the church may react in two ways in response to God's Word: (1) Obediently following the Word despite potential economic damage (v. 19) or (2) Opposing the Word like Demetrius, attempting to pursue economic gains (v. 24).

Escalation of the disturbance

In Acts 19:28-34, we witness the escalation of the disturbance. How did the craftsmen and businesspeople who heard Demetrius's speech react? Look at verse 28: "When they heard this, they were furious and began shouting: 'Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!'" Demetrius's provocative and persuasive speech resonated strongly with his colleagues. Filled with anger, they began shouting, "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians," expressing their fervor for the goddess (v. 28). Eventually, their outcry succeeded in conveying to the entire city that a severe religious problem had arisen. Look at verse 29: "The whole city was in an uproar, and the people seized Gaius and Aristarchus, Paul's traveling companions from Macedonia, and all of them rushed into the theater together." In an instant, the entire city descended into chaos. Craftsmen and supportive citizens seized Gaius and Aristarchus, who were traveling with Paul, and dragged them into the theater. At that time, the theater served not only as a venue for the regular meetings of the assembly but also as a gathering place for the general public. The Ephesian theater, in particular, could accommodate around 24,000 people (McRay). Moreover, there were as many as nine places within the theater to erect statues or images of Artemis. The crowd in the theater shouted, "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians," continuously for as long as two hours (v. 34). One interesting aspect is found in verse 32: "The assembly was in confusion: Some were shouting one thing, some another. Most of the people did not even know why they were there." Two points are noteworthy: (1) Each person shouted different things, likely due to the sudden and confusing nature of the assembly. (2) The overwhelming majority of citizens did not even know why they had gathered. These observations suggest that the Ephesian citizens were being manipulated and utilized by Demetrius and his fellow craftsmen, using religion to stir people's emotions, turning them into an enraged mob. Now the entire city was in turmoil (v. 29). This was not from God but from the evil one. God is not a God of confusion (1 Cor. 14:33).

Similarly, within the church, disturbances can escalate significantly. Using God's Word, individuals may gather people around them, stir emotions, and cause issues to spread and intensify. Like the Ephesians who didn't even know why they had gathered, problems in the church can be misunderstood and exacerbated by a lack of proper understanding, potentially leading to greater confusion.

Results of the disturbance

In Acts 19:35-41, we see the outcome of the disturbance. Particularly, verse 41 states, "After

he had said this, he dismissed the assembly." In the end, the tumult stirred up by Demetrius was quelled by the words of one man, the "town clerk" (v. 35). The term "town clerk" or city secretary was a position of high local administration in Ephesus. It held significant influence over the affairs of the city. The town clerk assisted the chief magistrate responsible for the city's security, safeguarding law and order, and played a role in drafting drafts of important documents submitted to the assembly or approving major legislation (Trebilco). Therefore, the town clerk's immediate intervention in a significant event threatening the safety and security of the city at the theater was a judicious act according to his duties (Yoo). The wise speech of this town clerk is elaborated from verse 35 to 40, summarized into four points by Professor Sang-seop Yoo (Yoo):

- (1) He acknowledged the fervor with which the leaders and citizens of the assembly proclaimed the greatness of Artemis.

Look at verse 35: "The city clerk quieted the crowd and said: 'Fellow Ephesians, doesn't all the world know that the city of Ephesus is the guardian of the temple of the great Artemis and of her image, which fell from heaven?'" Here, the town clerk emphasized that it was common knowledge that Ephesus was the guardian city of the great Artemis temple.

- (2) The town clerk spoke on behalf of the innocent followers who were threatened.

In verse 37, he said, "You have brought these men here, though they have neither robbed temples nor blasphemed our goddess." He cautioned against hasty actions toward Gaius and Aristarchus, friends of Paul, who had done nothing wrong.

- (3) He recommended to the instigators, Demetrius and his fellow craftsmen, not to act hastily and to follow legal procedures.

Look at verse 38: "If, then, Demetrius and his fellow craftsmen have a grievance against anybody, the courts are open, and there are proconsuls. They can press charges." By mentioning the existence of legal channels such as the courts and proconsuls, the town clerk advised the craftsmen to follow proper procedures.

- (4) He pointed out that the seriousness of the matter lay not with the Christians but with those who organized an illegal assembly, urging them to disband.

In verse 40, he said, "As it is, we are in danger of being charged with rioting because of what happened today. In that case, we would not be able to account for this commotion, since there is no reason for it." The town clerk argued that if the illegal assembly continued, both Ephesus, under the governance of proconsuls, and the leaders themselves might face severe consequences from the Roman emperor. In the end, his assertions confirmed that there was no legal basis for

the continued uproar, and the assembly dispersed without achieving its original intent.

Who brought about the calmness amid the disturbance? It was God who brought about the calmness. Whom did God use? It was none other than the town clerk. While the proclamation of Paul's gospel had led to conversions, it also stirred up opposition. The opposers caused and further escalated the disturbance. However, the Lord, through the town clerk, a single individual, brought calmness to the tumult. May the Lord, who calms all disturbances within His body, the Church, be our hope.

Looking to the Lord who makes us all peacemakers,

James Kim

(With the hope that the Lord establishes us all as those who bring peace)

The Attitude of a Minister

[Acts 20:1-16]

Indeed, what kind of president do you want? Nowadays, if you watch TV or read newspapers, you will see that the U.S. presidential primaries are heating up. While the Republican party has John McCain as its likely candidate, the Democratic side is witnessing a close contest between Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton. A joint opinion poll conducted by the United Methodist Church and Jogbi Pool reveals that the majority of U.S. voters desire a leader with ideal characteristics from a biblical perspective. The respondents, comprising a diverse racial and age group across the country, included 25% identified as born-again Christians. Most U.S. voters indicated a preference for a president possessing the qualities of "truthfulness" and "faithfulness," with 75% expressing a desire to maintain the tradition of taking the oath of office with a hand on the Bible. On the other hand, 50% of voters stated that they would not vote for a candidate who does not believe in God (Internet). Reflecting on this survey, it becomes apparent once again how crucial a leader's character is. Particularly, our leaders must be truthful and faithful, a reminder that the qualities we should pursue as church members align with "spiritual attitudes." I hope that we, as individuals and members of our church, will remember the "spiritual attitudes" we should strive for, emphasizing the essential principle: "The kind of person you are is far more important than the kind of work you do." Amidst ministry, one of our top priorities is to develop appropriate spiritual attitudes within our hearts, such as obedience, humility, faithfulness, consistency, loyalty, team spirit, and, most importantly, love.

Today, based on Acts 20:1-16, I would like to explore four attitudes that all church ministers should embody. My wish is that, like Paul, we all have a suitable attitude as ministers and, in doing so, bring glory to God.

First, the minister's attitude is comforting and exhorting.

Look at Acts 20:1-2: "When the uproar ceased, Paul sent for the disciples, and after

encouraging them, said farewell and departed for Macedonia. When he had gone through those regions and had given them much encouragement, he came to Greece." After the disturbance in Ephesus had subsided, Paul, before leaving what could be considered the headquarters of Asian missions that had prospered for about three years, namely Ephesus (Yoo), called the disciples and comforted them before bidding farewell (v. 1, Park). Upon arriving in Macedonia, where he had established churches during his second missionary journey, he continued to encourage the disciples in that region (v. 2, Yoo). While the specific details of how he comforted his disciples in Ephesus and Macedonia are not recorded in today's passage, it can be inferred that Paul engaged in a ministry of exhortation, aiming to strengthen and mature the faith of his disciples (Yoo). Especially in the case of the disciples in Ephesus, he likely provided guidance on how they should wisely handle social pressures and threats and maintain a faithful Christian life. Among these, there would be content that recalled the teachings Paul had emphasized over the past three years (Yoo). Paul, through the power of God, had preached until midnight in Troas (v. 7). When a young man named Eutychus fell asleep, tumbled from the third story, and died, Paul, through the grace of God, raised him back to life. Witnessing this miraculous event, the people received comfort and were not disheartened (v. 12). In this way, wherever he went, Paul exhorted the disciples to strengthen their faith (Park).

This is the attitude that all of our ministers should adopt. We must handle the ministry of comforting and exhorting the faith of our brothers and sisters. How should we truly comfort and exhort? Look at Titus 1:9 - "He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it." This means that the words of exhortation must be upheld. In other words, they should be carried out in action for them to be effective. However, exhortation emphasizes that it must be in the form of teaching. It implies doing it not according to one's own thoughts or interests but receiving guidance from the Holy Spirit (Internet). So, what is the purpose of exhortation? In 1 Thessalonians 4:1, Paul says, "Finally then, brothers, we ask and urge you in the Lord Jesus, that as you received from us how you ought to walk and to please God, just as you are doing, that you do so more and more." Paul's ultimate purpose of exhortation is to please God. Our ministry attitude should be to give comfort rather than seek comfort. I hope that both you and I will be those who exhort our brothers and sisters in love.

Second, the minister's attitude is to be determined.

Look at Acts 20:3 - "There he spent three months, and when a plot was made against him by the Jews as he was about to set sail for Syria, he decided to return through Macedonia." In today's passage, the word 'determined' appears twice. The first 'determined' is found in verse 3. Looking at this verse, after bidding farewell to his disciples in Ephesus and spending three months there, Paul intended to travel through Macedonia to encourage his disciples and then sail to Syria (Antioch). However, when Jews conspired to harm him, he decided to change his plan and return through Macedonia. The second 'determined' is found in verse 16 of today's passage. In this verse, Paul, in the midst of his plan to go to Jerusalem, had carefully laid out his travel itinerary, and this detailed plan is elaborated from verse 13

to 16 in today's passage. In verse 16 of today's passage, we see Paul determined to bypass Ephesus to save time in his journey. As we can see in these two verses, Paul's resolution was clear. Amidst his ministry, he made determined plans. He meticulously planned his journey with the goal of preaching the gospel from Jerusalem to Rome. Even when he learned of the plot by the Jews to harm him, he resolved to change his plans if necessary and make efforts to reach his destination.

Another person in the Bible who made a strong resolution is Daniel. Look at Daniel 1:8 - "But Daniel resolved that he would not defile himself with the king's food, or with the wine that he drank. Therefore, he asked the chief of the eunuchs to allow him not to defile himself." Daniel made a resolution. He resolved not to defile himself with the king's food and wine in Babylon. And he acted upon it. As a result, after ten days of eating only vegetables and drinking water, Daniel and his three friends (Dan. 1:12) appeared more beautiful and healthier than the young men who ate the king's food (verse 15).

What about our resolutions? Do we truly have a strong resolution to fulfill the clear purpose of soul salvation through preaching the gospel, making God's plan our plan? Personally, I like the third verse of the hymn "Jesus, My Lord to Thee I Cry": "No preparation can I make, My best resolves I only break, Yet save me for Thine own name's sake, (Chorus) And take me as I am. And take me as I am, And take me as I am, My only plea Christ died for me! Oh, take me as I am." I appreciate the lyrics of this hymn because they express the desire to be accepted as one is. Therefore, it is a prayer to God: 'Lord, accept me as I am.' In ministry, an important spiritual attitude is a strong resolution to carry out God's plan and accomplish the clear purpose of preaching the gospel for the salvation of souls. And it is acting according to that resolution.

Third, the minister's attitude is to cooperate.

Look at Acts 20:4 - "Sopater the Berean, son of Pyrrhus, accompanied him; and of the Thessalonians, Aristarchus and Secundus; and Gaius of Derbe, and Timothy; and the Asians, Tychicus and Trophimus." In this verse, the names of seven people are written. They represent the churches of each region. Sopater, who had fervently memorized the scriptures daily when taught by Paul in Berea (17:11-12), Aristarchus and Secundus represent the Thessalonica church (v. 4), Gaius and Timothy represent the churches in the southern Galatia region (16:1-2), and Tychicus and Trophimus represent the churches in Asia, centered around Ephesus. They were considered representatives of each Gentile church (Yoo). These representatives were appointed to carry the financial gift collected for the saints in Jerusalem (Rom. 15:25-26; 2 Cor. 8:1-2, 9:1-2) (Park). In today's passage, Acts 20:5, Paul mentions that they went ahead to Troas to wait for him, and in verse 6, we see that Paul and his companions also joined them. In other words, these seven representatives of each local church were accompanying Paul, heading toward Jerusalem, and their purpose was to undertake the ministry of delivering the relief funds for the poor saints in the Jerusalem church (Park).

As we have already reflected in Acts 19:22, Paul had trustworthy and faithful helpers. Among them, one person, Timothy, is mentioned again in today's passage, Acts 20:4. Collaborating with reliable and faithful helpers in the Lord's work is indeed a blessing. However, I often hear stories about missionaries not cooperating with each other in many mission fields. Regarding this, Pastor Hoe-Chang Kim stated in his article 'The Necessity and Challenges of Cooperative Missions' the following (Internet): 'If missionaries who preach the gospel to be united for the purpose of oneness compete, guard against, and cause discord due to their backgrounds, affiliations, or ministries, it would be foolish behavior to achieve a good purpose in an unjust manner.' He emphasized, 'For the Korean church to conduct healthy and efficient missions, it should avoid an individualistic missionary attitude and engage in cooperative missions.'

(1) The mission field itself requests cooperative missions through missionaries.

The world that needs to hear the gospel, transformed by the Word of God, is thoroughly divided. There is division between nations, races, classes, the rich and the poor, and regions. Even within the same group or among family members, division exists. All humans are weary of loneliness and individualism. This world is gradually moving towards destruction due to the fever of division. Most importantly, there is severe division between God and humanity. Missionaries seeking to evangelize this world should first possess the spirit of unity and collaboration. If missionaries who are going to reconcile a divided world do not unite and collaborate with each other, their missionary work is likely to return in vain. Cooperative missions are what the artisanal world itself demands for missions.

(2) The very gospel that missionaries carry to preach itself requests cooperative missions.

Cooperative missions are a request of the Bible and the truth of Christianity. The triune God revealed in the Bible is united in essence and work. The triune God existed together before creating this world, worked together when creating this world, and has been united in the history of humanity and the providence of the universe after creation. The essence of the gospel lies in reconciling humanity, which has severed fellowship with God, and bringing them back into communion with the God who exists and works together. Missionaries carrying this gospel need to first be united among themselves.

(3) Cooperative ministry is necessary for the efficiency of gospel preaching.

Senk and Stutzman state in their joint work, 'Creating Communities of the Kingdom,' that when missionaries collaborate in pioneering churches in mission fields, there are many benefits that cannot be obtained when working alone. Among them, the mention that collaborative ministry creates a 'synergistic effect' in missionary activities is noteworthy. Collaborative

ministry among missionaries, mission organizations, or denominations brings about a synergistic effect in terms of effectiveness. When two people work together, they can achieve more effects than the sum of what they could achieve individually. Working together, they can leverage abilities and creativity that they couldn't tap into individually. In collaborative ministry, utilizing each other's spiritual gifts, they can efficiently handle the tasks necessary for missionary work. A missionary may not be able to handle everything individually, and the missionary field is not limitless or insignificant. In collaborative ministry, tasks that cannot be accomplished alone can be efficiently dealt with by leveraging each other's spiritual gifts. Cooperative missions are strongly requested in terms of the efficiency of gospel preaching.

Fourth and last, the attitude of a minister is not delaying.

Look at Acts 20:16 - "Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus to avoid spending time in the province of Asia, for he was in a hurry to reach Jerusalem, if possible, by the day of Pentecost." In Acts 20, the passage records the process of Paul leaving Ephesus, where he had been successful in ministry for the past three years, passing through Macedonia and Achaia, and journeying to Jerusalem. A significant portion of this narrative is dedicated to detailing Paul's specific travel itinerary (Yoo). First, in today's verses 1-2, Paul departs from Ephesus to go to Macedonia and then travels through the region of Achaia. In verse 6, after preaching fervently in Troas and raising Eutychus from the dead through God's power (v. 12), Paul departs from Troas and goes to Assos (v. 13). From there, he and his companions take a ship, arriving at Miletus port, where they stay for one day at each harbor, including Gyreum and Samos (v. 15). Paul's plan is to reach Jerusalem by the day of Pentecost without delaying in Asia but quickly visiting Ephesus (v. 16). The total days from Macedonia to Miletus are about 17 days if we combine the 5 days from Philippi to Troas (v. 6), the 7 days from Troas (v. 6), and the 5 days from Troas to Miletus (vv. 14-15). Adding an additional 3-4 days for Paul's meeting with the elders in Miletus brings the total to approximately 20-21 days. Given the remaining days, which are around 30 days, Paul seems to have less time than needed to reach Jerusalem by Pentecost (Yoo). Therefore, Paul did not delay in Asia but urgently went to Jerusalem without visiting Ephesus. This demonstrates how earnestly he desired to go to Rome to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ. Indeed, he ardently longed to fulfill the command to spread the gospel to the ends of the earth, as Jesus promised that He would come again when the gospel is preached to the ends of the earth. This urgency drove Paul to hasten toward Jerusalem.

During the time of the Exodus, as the Israelites were journeying towards the Promised Land of Canaan, let us hear the challenging words that Joshua spoke to the Israelites: "Joshua said to the Israelites, 'How long will you wait before you begin to take possession of the land that the LORD, the God of your ancestors, has given you?'" (Josh. 18:8). Joshua's admonition, urging them to not delay in taking possession of the land that God had promised, is a voice we also hear from God. Until when will you delay in carrying out the work of God, which He has clearly promised, the salvation of souls, in His plan? In our proclamation of the gospel, we need a sense of urgency, just as Paul demonstrated by not

delaying. In other words, we need a sense of urgency. We need to heed the voice of urgency. Let us pay attention to Jeremiah 48:10 - "Cursed are those who do the LORD's work with slackness."

The attitude of ministry involves comforting and admonishing. The attitude of ministry is about making decisions. Having a commitment to proclaim the gospel and dedicating ourselves to achieving that purpose is precisely the attitude of ministry. Moreover, the attitude of ministry involves collaboration. Also, the attitude of ministry is about not delaying. I hope and pray that such an attitude will be present in both my ministry and yours.

With deepening awareness that actions must emanate from existence,

James Kim

(Emphasizing the importance of the character and attitude of ministers)

A Missionary Burning with a Sense of Mission

[Acts 20:17-27]

Lennard Sweet encourages in his book 'Dance the Breath of Life' to live today as if to die tomorrow. He suggests that just as we learn to face the reality of life, we also need to learn to face the reality of death. According to him, the great gift that death offers is a perspective on what is most important in life and an understanding of our given purpose. In this context, what does the Korean term "사명" mean? It is composed of "사(使)" meaning 'messenger' or 'agent' and "명(命)" meaning 'life' or 'destiny.' Some interpret "사명" as the life or destiny sent by God for a specific mission. An interesting interpretation indeed. Why do you think God sent you into this world? What do you believe is the purpose for which the Lord has sent you into this world?

In today's passage, Acts 20:17-27, we encounter the figure of Paul, a missionary burning with a sense of mission. As he leaves Ephesus, he travels to the port city of Miletus, far from Ephesus, and invites the Ephesian elders to bid them farewell and deliver a parting sermon. Looking at verses 18-21, Paul recounts his actions among the Ephesian believers from the first day he entered Asia until leaving Ephesus, emphasizing that he served the Lord (v. 19). Today, focusing on Acts 20:17-27, I want to meditate on what a missionary burning with a sense of mission should do by considering three aspects and receiving the lessons provided in the text.

First, a missionary burning with a sense of mission serves the Lord.

In fact, the word "사명 (mission)" in Greek is translated as "디아코니아 (diakonia)," which means "service" or 'ministry.' Ultimately, mission is about serving. So, what does it mean to have

served the Lord specifically? It means conveying God's will (v. 27; Ref.: v. 20). In other words, a missionary burning with a sense of mission conveys God's will without hesitation. That divine will is precisely to testify to the good news of God's grace (v. 24). In other words, it is to witness repentance towards God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ (v. 21). Paul, during his three years of ministry in Ephesus, diligently conveyed and taught anything profitable to the Ephesian believers, both publicly and from house to house (v. 20). He fervently proclaimed the kingdom of God, moving among the Ephesian church elders and believers (v. 25). So, how did Paul serve the Lord in Ephesus? Look at verse 19: "I served the Lord with great humility and with tears and in the midst of severe testing by the plots of my Jewish opponents." Paul primarily exerted humility as a servant of the Lord. Moreover, he served the believers with tears as a tangible expression of soulful love. Despite the trials, Paul faced the testing of the Jews' opposition during his ministry in Ephesus. Nevertheless, he well managed his three-year ministry in Ephesus while undergoing these trials.

Second, a missionary burning with a sense of mission participates in the Lord's suffering.

As Paul delivers a farewell sermon before the Ephesian elders, he speaks about the hardships he will face when he goes to Jerusalem in verses 22-23 today. He mentions that he was bound by the Spirit's guidance to go to Jerusalem (v. 22), and when he went with this purpose, the same Spirit testified in every city that "prison and hardships are facing me" (v. 23). Nevertheless, Paul was determined to go to Jerusalem. This demonstrates the unwavering firmness of his commitment. Even though he was aware of the bonds and hardships waiting for him, his spirit remained steadfast and unchanging. He made a resolute determination. We also need such determination. As missionaries burning with a sense of mission, we must decide to obey and act according to the Spirit's guidance, even if we know that various difficulties and hardships await us. We need to have the same determination as Paul, confirming the certainty that going to Jerusalem is the will of the Lord and resolving to act with unwavering determination, regardless of the bonds and hardships that lie ahead. We, too, need this determination. In fulfilling the will of the Lord, a missionary burning with a sense of mission must resolve to obey and act according to the guidance of the Spirit, no matter what bonds and hardships may await. We should rejoice, like the apostles, in suffering for the sake of the Lord and the gospel (Acts 5:41). Like our faith ancestors, such as Moses, we should consider suffering for the Lord more valuable than all the treasures of this world. We should prefer suffering together with our brothers and sisters over enjoying the pleasures of this sinful world. Remember, enduring suffering for the Lord is grace (Phil. 1:29).

Third and last, a missionary burning with a sense of mission considers their life of little value in fulfilling the mission.

Look at Acts 20:24 - "However, I consider my life worth nothing to me; my only aim is to finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me—the task of testifying to the good news of God's grace." The phrase "to finish the race and complete the task" means "to accomplish." In other

words, Paul did not consider his own life precious at all in completing the task of testifying to the good news of God's grace. What does this mean? Paul considered the fulfillment of the mission received from Jesus, specifically, the task of testifying to the gospel, more precious and important than his own life. When we see this, it is clear that a missionary burning with a sense of mission has a distinct and firm set of values. When comparing their life with their mission, they consider their mission more valuable and significant than their own life. How can one have such values? It is because they deeply experience God's eternal love. Look at Psalms 63:3 - "Because your love is better than life, my lips will glorify you." A missionary who deeply experiences God's eternal love, which is more precious than their own life, expresses gratitude and joy for that love. Therefore, they dedicate their lives to God, giving thanks for His glory and seeking to fulfill the Lord's will. Thus, such a missionary, praising, "Whether I live or die, let it be according to the Lord's will," willingly places their life on the line to fulfill the mission entrusted to them. We all need such clear and firm values. That is, we need the values that regard God's eternal love as more precious than our lives and consider the mission received from the Lord as more important and valuable than our own lives. When we have such values, we can continue to run like Paul today, sacrificing our lives to complete the mission given to us by the Lord. May all of us dedicate our lives to fulfill the mission given to us by the Lord, testifying to the good news of God's grace. I hope and pray that, like Paul, we may welcome a beautiful life and a beautiful death that proclaims the gospel of Jesus Christ through our lives and even through our deaths.

With a heart burning with love for one soul in Christ's heart, I wish for the flame to ignite,

James Kim

(With the help and work of the Lord, sincerely praying for the completion of the mission)

‘The Ministry which I Received from the Lord’

[Acts 20:24]

Is Sunday School education in churches really being conducted properly? Under the title 'Sunday School Education in Crisis,' an internet article states the following under the headings of 'Church Indifference' and 'Lack of Educational Philosophy': 'The Sunday School education in Korean churches is increasingly stagnating and falling into a crisis. This is pointed out as a result of church education not keeping up with the general society's school education. Therefore, there is a claim that a new review of Sunday School education, the establishment and implementation of innovative educational programs, and the restoration of a sense of mission among Sunday School teachers are the ways to revive the Sunday School in crisis in Korean churches. Furthermore, while parents' interest in school education is high, there is also criticism that even the parents of believers are indifferent to church education, contributing to the decline in church education. In other words, for school education, parents send their children to various academies in addition to school classes and check attendance, but attendance at Sunday School is often overlooked in the management of believers' children's faith these days' (Internet). What about our sense of mission?

Today, while meditating on Acts 20:24, I desire that our sense of mission be restored and burn again, focusing on Paul's 'mission received from the Lord Jesus.'

The mission received from the Lord Jesus is to fulfill the work of testifying to the gospel of God's grace.

Look at Acts 20:24 – “But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.” What is the mission? The word translated as 'ministry' (diakonian) means 'to serve all.' In

other words, Paul considered testifying to the gospel, the mission he received from the resurrected Jesus, more valuable than his own life. Here, Paul's ministry can be described with six words:

(1) Paul saw himself as an accountant.

After examining his advantages and achievements, Paul decided to prioritize Jesus Christ above all else.

(2) Paul saw himself as a racing athlete finishing the race with joy in the victory.

The three phrases in verse 24 - "my life," "my course," and "ministry" - are key. Paul knew that his life was a gift from God and believed that God had a special plan to accomplish his ministry from within. Motivated by the grand goal of building the church, he dedicated himself to serving the Lord, joyfully completing the race of the ministry assigned to him. Look at 2 Timothy 4:7 - "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith."

(3) Paul considered himself a steward.

The reason is that his ministry was received from the Lord. A steward is nothing; his sole aim is to serve his master and please him. Look at 1 Corinthians 4:2: "Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found faithful." A steward must give an account of his ministry when the time comes, and Paul was prepared for that day.

(4) Paul saw himself as a witness.

Paul bore the responsibility of testifying to the gospel of God's grace as a witness of Jesus Christ. The word "witness" implies solemnly testifying. This underscores the seriousness of the message and ministry. Paul was a faithful witness in his life, and the message he proclaimed was also faithful.

(5) Paul saw himself as an (ambassador) messenger.

Look at Acts 20:25 - "And now, behold, I know that none of you among whom I have gone about proclaiming the kingdom will see my face again." Here, "proclaiming" means 'announcing the message as an ambassador of the king.' While a witness speaks of what happens to him, an (ambassador) messenger proclaims the message that the king has commanded. Paul, as a messenger sent by the King, should not alter the message. Being the King's messenger, people should be cautious in how they respond to him and the message he proclaims.

(6) Paul saw himself as a watchman.

How serious is it to become a watchman? He must always be alert and prepared to sound the trumpet when danger approaches. He should not become a fearful person but a faithful one. The reason is that the safety of many people depends on him. Paul was a faithful watchman. Look at Acts 20:31 - "Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish everyone with tears."

So how did the apostle Paul fulfill this calling?

First, Paul received guidance from the Holy Spirit.

Look at Acts 20:22 - "And now, behold, I am going to Jerusalem, constrained by the Spirit, not knowing what will happen to me there." Paul declared before the elders of the Ephesian church during his farewell sermon that he was constrained by the Spirit, indicating that he was led by the Holy Spirit to go up to Jerusalem (v. 23). What does it mean to be 'constrained by the Spirit'? It means being bound by the inner power and movement of the Holy Spirit (Calvin). Having received assurance that going up to Jerusalem was God's will, Paul humbly followed the direction and instinct of the Holy Spirit, even aligning his own will with it. Here, we can compare this with Acts 9:1-2, before Paul's conversion: "But Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem." Before his conversion, Paul (then Saul) sought to bind believers and bring them to Jerusalem. Now, as a transformed follower of Christ, he was bound by the Holy Spirit to go up to Jerusalem. Did Paul know what would happen when he went up to Jerusalem? The answer is "No" (v. 22).

Second, Paul endured hardships in fulfilling his mission.

Look at Acts 20:23 - "except that the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that imprisonment and afflictions await me." Despite knowing that there would be "imprisonment and afflictions" on the road he was taking, Paul's decision to follow that path was a result of a confident understanding of God's will. Since God had prophesied in advance that such hardships would befall him, when he actually faced such difficulties in his missionary journey, it would not have been surprising, and he would have endured them well, knowing that they were from God (Park).

William Carey sailed from England to India in 1793. He lost his five-year-old son there, and his wife suffered from mental illness. Seven years into his ministry, he made his first convert and lost years of translation work in a fire. However, without taking a single vacation, he steadfastly carried out his ministry for 40 years. Adoniram Judson, the first American foreign missionary, went to Myanmar in 1814. He lost his six-year-old son, was imprisoned in a death cell for a year and a half, and his wife died of a fever. He suffered from mental breakdowns and had to wait for five years to meet his first convert. Yet, he did not stop his ministry because the mission was more precious than life itself. Robert Morrison was the first Protestant missionary sent to China. He lost his wife and worked for seven years to gain his first convert. However, he

continued his ministry without interruption. They pressed forward despite numerous difficulties because they believed that the mission given to them by God was more precious than life itself (Internet).

In order to bear and fulfill the mission given by the Lord, the earnest help of God is necessary,

James Kim

(Accompanied by the power and guidance of the Holy Spirit)

An Elder Exhibiting Exemplary Behavior

[Acts 20:28-38]

I saw an internet article on Newsenjoy titled 'Elder Church Leadership, Let Elders Correct Themselves: A 'Well-Governing Elder' is Not a Ruler but One Who Looks After and Leads' (Internet). The article discusses 1 Timothy 5:17 – “Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching.” Here, the phrase “rule well” in Greek is a compound word of 'pro' meaning 'before' and 'histemi' meaning 'to stand.' In other words, 'rule well' (proistemi) means 'to stand before,' specifically, to lead or take the lead. So, 'rule well' (proistemi) implies leading, guiding, excelling, caring for, and managing. Elders are inherently worthy of respect, but Paul is saying that elders who rule well, especially those who work hard in preaching and teaching, should be honored even more. In this context, 'honor' means value, evaluation, respect, honor, and recognition. In other words, it is a state of having earned a worthy value. Honor emerges from within. It is not merely an outward show. Therefore, elders should live a life that shows a model of earning honor, respect, and recognition from within. Honor is something that springs from within. Otherwise, it is not honor. Therefore, elders must live a life that exemplifies a model worth paying a sufficient price for the respect and recognition that emerges from within (Internet).

In today's passage, Acts 20:28-38, Paul, who served in Ephesus for three years, is leaving Ephesus. Before departing, he invites the elders of the Ephesian church and delivers a farewell sermon. In today's passage, Paul is urging the Ephesian elders to become elders who exhibit exemplary behavior, drawing from his own example. I would like to receive three lessons under the title “An elder exhibiting exemplary behavior” based on today's passage.

First, an elder exhibiting exemplary behavior exercises caution.

Look at Acts 20:28 - "Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood." Paul, in his farewell sermon, reminded the elders of the Ephesian church that the Holy Spirit had made them overseers to shepherd the church purchased with the blood of Jesus. He urged them to exercise caution for themselves and for the entire flock, meaning the believers in the Ephesian church. This counsel is a reminder to stay vigilant and guard against incorrect lifestyles or teachings, both for themselves and for the entire congregation (Yoo). Why did Paul emphasize this caution? The reason is stated in Acts 20:29-30 - "I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them." He anticipated the arrival of false teachers, likened to "fierce wolves," who would not spare the flock, and even some from within the church who would distort the truth to lead disciples astray. Knowing this, Paul cautioned and exhorted the elders of the Ephesian church to be cautious and vigilant (Park). Imagine Paul, having ministered in Ephesus for three years, delivering a farewell sermon to the elders, knowing that false teachers would come after his departure to mislead the flock. What must have been Paul's heart as he left the beloved Ephesian church with this awareness? It brings to mind Deuteronomy 31:27, a passage I meditated on during morning prayer, where Moses speaks to the Israelites, anticipating their rebellion even after his death: "For I know how rebellious and stubborn you are. Behold, even today while I am yet alive with you, you have been rebellious against the Lord. How much more after my death!" After leading the Israelites for 40 years, from Egypt through the wilderness to the promised land of Canaan, Moses, knowing that the Israelites would rebel against God and do evil in His sight before he died, one may wonder about Moses' state of mind.

In today's passage, Paul anticipated that false teachers would emerge in two directions within the Ephesian church: (1) Paul expected false teachers to enter the Ephesian church from outside. Look at verse 29: "I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock." (2) Paul anticipated that there would be false teachers within the church. Look at verse 30: "And from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them." Paul, in his farewell sermon to the Ephesian elders, called them and warned them that false teachers would come into the church from both outside and within. He cautioned them to be vigilant, as internal enemies could be more dangerous than external ones. At this moment, Paul was leaving Ephesus, and he knew that false teachers would infiltrate the church. He urged the elders to be watchful and to protect the flock from false teachings both inside and outside the church.

How can we apply this message to our church? It applies to teaching elders, pastors, and ruling elders. God has appointed elders to oversee the saints entrusted to us. Our responsibility is to guard the flock and ensure that they are not led astray. To do this, we must first be spiritually awake. If we are spiritually sluggish, the flock entrusted to us can become prey to false teachings. We must also guard our own hearts, ensuring that we do not fall into false doctrines and remain firmly rooted in sound doctrine. In other words, elders should have a strong doctrinal foundation. Therefore, they must have a firm understanding of sound doctrine, not only for themselves but also to guide the saints and protect

them from false teachings or heresies. The qualifications of overseers in pastoral ministry should include personal, moral, spiritual, and doctrinal aspects. This way, they can effectively teach the Word and protect the saints from the dangers of false teachings (Yoo).

Second, an elder who sets an example follows God's Word firmly.

Look at Acts 20:31 - "Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish everyone with tears." As Paul left Ephesus, he was aware of the danger posed by false teachings that would arise in the future. In his caution and exhortation to the Ephesian elders, he urged them to remember and emulate his pastoral life, which he demonstrated during his three years with them ("remember" in verse 31). From this verse, we can observe three aspects of Paul's exemplary pastoral life:

(1) Paul's ministry was characterized by alertness.

Paul was diligent in living a life awakened by God's Word, and in the same manner, he diligently awakened the Ephesian saints with God's Word. By doing so, he ensured that both he and the saints remained alert, guarding against being misled by false teachings. In other words, Paul's exemplary pastoral life was about being spiritually vigilant.

(2) Paul's life was marked by diligence.

During his three years in Ephesus, he tirelessly admonished the Ephesian saints day and night. He was watchful and diligent in teaching the Ephesian saints with God's Word.

(3) Paul's pastoral attitude was characterized by 'love.'

He admonished each person with tears during his three years in Ephesus. This reveals the heart of a caring overseer who loves the souls under his charge. While handling the Ephesian pastorate, Paul wanted the elders to adopt his exemplary pastoral life even after his departure. Therefore, he spoke to the Ephesian elders, wishing that they would continue to fulfill the responsibilities of overseers well: "And now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified" (v. 32). Although Paul was leaving Ephesus, he knew that the Lord and His Word would be with the Ephesian saints. Hence, he entrusted the Ephesian elders to God and His Word. The Word is firstly the Word of the Lord's grace, secondly, the Word that can firmly establish us, and thirdly, the Word that grants us an inheritance (rest).

Therefore, we, the ministers and the elders must first stand firmly on God's Word. Likewise, all of you must stand firmly on the Word of God's grace. In order to do this ...

(1) We must diligently listen to God's Word.

Thus, our faith must grow. Look at Romans 10:17 - "So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ."

(2) We need to harmonize God's Word and faith.

By doing so, we can enter into rest (inheritance). Look at Hebrews 4:2-3 - "For good news came to us just as to them, but the message they heard did not benefit them, because they were not united by faith with those who listened ... For we who have believed enter that rest." To benefit from God's Word for you and me, we need to harmonize our current hearing of God's Word with faith. As Paul left Ephesus, he was more concerned about the elders of the church than the saints. The reason is that if leaders within the church, the elders, were led astray internally and started teaching heretical doctrines or teachings to the saints in Ephesus, it would be a significant issue (v. 30). Therefore, Paul entrusted the Ephesian elders to the Lord and His Word.

Our church ministers or elders must pay attention to 2 Timothy 2:15 - "Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth. " We must become people who can rightly handle the word of truth. Such ministers should also become elders. In doing so, the church can stand firmly without being shaken by false teachings.

Third and last, an elder who sets an example helps the weak.

Look at Acts 20:35 - "In all things I have shown you that by working hard in this way we must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'" While addressing the false teachers, the wolves that will infiltrate internally or externally into the Ephesian church, Paul says that they will not spare the flock, the saints of the Ephesian church (v. 29). In verse 35, he contrasts himself with those false teachers, stating that he, unlike them, has shown the Ephesian saints an example of a true shepherd who cares for them. So, how did Paul set an example for the Ephesian saints?

(1) He did not covet greedily.

Look at verse 33: "I coveted no one's silver or gold or apparel." Clearly, the false teachers who did not spare the flock (v. 29) were likely filled with selfish motives and greed. However, the true shepherd, Paul, had a heart of love and care for the Ephesian saints, so he confessed to the elders in Ephesus, "I coveted no one's silver or gold or apparel."

(2) Paul worked hard with his own hands.

Look at verse 34: "You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my necessities and to those who were with me." Perhaps the false teachers, consumed by covetousness, did not spare the Ephesian saints but were more inclined to busy themselves with a life of indulgence, neglecting the hard work that their hands could perform. In the Thessalonian church, there were individuals who behaved in such a way—engaging in idle activities rather than working (2 Thess. 3:11). Therefore, Paul advised, "If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat" (v. 10). It seems that such individuals existed, prompting Paul to work even harder day and night, not being a burden to anyone, and providing for his own needs (v. 8). Consequently, he was able to offer support to others and set an example for everyone to follow (v. 9). During his three years of ministry in the Ephesian church, Paul diligently worked with his own hands, not only providing for himself but also addressing the needs of his fellow laborers (Yoo).

(3) Paul helped the weak.

As we have read in today's passage, Acts 20:35, Paul, during his three years in the Ephesian church, showed special concern for the weak, caring for and assisting them with the love of Christ. He lived a life of obedience to Jesus' words, remembering the saying, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." Paul faithfully worked, earning money to help those in need. This was the life he lived, a life of giving. Paul understood it as his duty.

Whom do you and I have concern for? We should have more concern for the weak than for the strong and powerful. Just like Paul, we should help the weak. This is our duty. We must be cautious of greed and work hard not only for our own needs but also to help the needs of the weak. Therefore, our duty is to be like Jesus, helping the weak through our ministry of assistance.

After the Apostle Paul delivered his farewell sermon to the Ephesian elders, he knelt down and prayed with all of them (v. 36). In response, the elders, deeply distressed by Paul's words predicting that they would not see his face again, wept loudly. They embraced Paul, kissed him, and accompanied him to the ship (v. 37-38). The Ephesian elders were filled with sorrow at the realization that they would no longer see their beloved shepherd and minister, Paul, who had taught them God's word, helped them, and demonstrated the pattern of life for three years. Saying their goodbyes, they grieved, escorting Paul to the ship.

As they parted ways, the Ephesian elders were left with the responsibility of heeding Paul's admonitions, being cautious, standing firm in God's word, and continuing to help the weak, just as Paul had done. Today, God, through Paul's farewell sermon, offers similar words of exhortation to us. We are urged to exercise caution, be vigilant against false teachers and doctrines, and stand firmly on God's word. Remembering the saying, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive,' we are called to live a life

that helps the weak.

Wanting to become a teaching elder who shows a good example,

James Kim

(May we stand firmly on God's word and exercise caution)

Show a Good Example in Everything!

[Acts 20:35]

Aegis Fernando said this about 'Ministry led by Jesus - looking, becoming like, and showing': 'When I started my ministry, I traveled to several villages in Sri Lanka with the elderly evangelist Samuel Mendis. I learned a lot from him about how to preach the gospel to the poor. Once, we spent a night in a school classroom. We put together two or three wooden chairs and slept on them. When I woke up early in the morning, he was already awake, kneeling and praying. That sight was deeply engraved in my heart. Leaders should show a good example in front of people. Even when I was young, I learned from the elders praying. Parents should also show the essence of a life of faith to their children. Only then will the children come to know God and live a life obedient to Him' (Internet). When reflecting on your life of faith, has anyone's exemplary life of faith influenced or is influencing you? What can you tell your children or spiritual successors to learn from you?

In today's passage, Acts 20:35, Paul, during his farewell sermon to the elders of the Ephesian church, admonishes them, saying, "In all things, I have shown you that by working hard in this way we must help the weak." Let's draw a few lessons from Paul's example.

First, we must work hard to help the weak.

Look at Acts 20:35: "In all things I have shown you that by working hard in this way we must help the weak." Elders can commit five sins:

(1) The first sin is indifference.

Look at Acts 20:31: "Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or

day to admonish everyone with tears." Paul's pastoral example is being watchful, protecting the flock from harm. His pastoral example is diligence in staying awake; it is diligence to admonish everyone with tears, a manifestation of true love for the sheep (Park). Paul, not to commit the sin of indifference, exhorts the elders of the Ephesian church to be vigilant, remembering his vigilance in caring for the spiritual well-being of the Ephesian flock and the tears shed by Paul for each person.

(2) The second sin is shallowness.

Look at Acts 20:32 - "And now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified." Paul believed that only God's word of grace could firmly establish God's people. Therefore, during his farewell sermon to the elders, he requested them to be built up in the firmness of God's word of grace (v. 32). However, the problem arises when elders fail to be firmly grounded in God's word of grace, hindering the church from being firmly established. In other words, the church may not be firmly established due to the shallowness of faith. We must remember that God, by establishing us, will firmly establish the church. Especially if elders are not firmly grounded in God's word, the church cannot be firmly established.

(3) The third sin is covetousness.

Look at Acts 20:33 - "I coveted no one's silver or gold or apparel." Covetousness is a desire to possess what others have, driven by an insatiable longing. Paul confessed that he did not covet anything while serving the saints in the Ephesian church. However, he knew that among the elders of the Ephesian church, there would arise those who would speak perverse things (v. 30) and also be covetous of things like silver, gold, and apparel. Therefore, he urged the elders to imitate his example and avoid coveting. The Tenth Commandment says, "You shall not covet your neighbor's house." Violating this commandment leads to breaking the other nine commandments. The covetous person may steal, lie, commit murder, and even dishonor parents to fulfill their covetous desires. Covetousness is idolatry (Eph. 5:5; Col. 3:5).

(4) The fourth sin is laziness.

Look at Acts 20:34 - "You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my necessities and to those who were with me." Although Paul, as an apostle, had the right to receive material support from the church, he worked as a tentmaker to support himself. Moreover, he provided for the needs of his fellow workers with his own hands, diligently working to earn his living.

(5) The fifth and last sin that elders can easily fall into is selfishness.

Look at Acts 20:35 - "In all things, I have shown you that by working hard in this way we must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'" Despite being an obligation for elders to help the weak within the church, Paul warns them not to forget this duty and indulge in selfish desires that only satisfy their own needs.

Paul's example is his labor in helping the weak. He says, "You know the things I have shown you" (v. 34), meaning that the Ephesian elders personally knew that Paul had served his needs and those who were with him. If we rephrase verse 34, it could be translated as, 'You personally know that these hands served my necessities and those who were with me' (Yoo). In other words, Paul had a genuine concern for the Ephesian believers, worked diligently, did not covet anything, and exerted effort not only for his needs but also for the needs of others.

We are called to help the weak. The Bible emphasizes this truth. In 1 Thessalonians 5:14, the Bible says, "... encourage the fainthearted, help the weak" Additionally, Romans 14:1 advises, "As for the one who is weak in faith, welcome him, but not to quarrel over opinions." Paul's example demonstrated tears of compassion (v. 31), grounding in God's word of grace (v. 32), abandoning covetousness (v. 33), diligence (v. 34), and living a sacrificial life (v. 35).

Second, we must remember the words of the Lord.

Look at Acts 20:35: "In all things, I have shown you that by working hard in this way we must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'" The Ephesian church faced two dangers:

(1) The first danger was the "savage wolves."

Look at Acts 20:29: "I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock." This first danger was an external threat approaching the church. When Paul mentions "savage wolves," he does not explicitly identify whom he is referring to, but it could likely imply hostile Jewish leaders and their followers who would harm the church (Yoo). Paul prophesies that after he leaves, meaning after his death, these "savage wolves" would infiltrate from outside the church, disguising themselves as gentle sheep, but ultimately showing indifference to the flock. Furthermore, because they lack the Spirit of Christ, they would oppose and harm the Spirit-filled believers, as Paul warns the Ephesian elders.

(2) The second danger was false teachers or heretics arising from among the flock.

Look at Acts 20:30 - "And from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them." Here, "from among your own selves" refers to those within the

ranks of the Ephesian elders who would teach distorted doctrines (Yoo). Those Ephesian elders who were listening to Paul's farewell sermon would have been shocked. Paul's words indicated that among the established elders, there would be individuals teaching distorted doctrines that deviated from the faith Paul had taught during his three years in Ephesus. The goal of these heretical teachers was to lead believers away from the path of following the Lord. What was Paul's strategy?

(a) The church leaders, the elders, needed to stay vigilant by remembering Paul's teachings.

Look at Acts 20:31: "Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish everyone with tears." Paul's strategy was for the elders to stay vigilant by remembering the teachings he had imparted over the past three years, admonishing everyone with tears. The elders, being leaders of the church, needed to remain alert and remember Paul's teachings, allowing them to be prepared for any issues that might arise due to heretical teachings.

(b) The church leaders, the elders, needed to be established by the grace of God's Word.

Look at Acts 20:32: "And now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified." Here, the word of God's grace refers to the message containing or related to God's grace. This gracious message has the power not only to build up the Ephesian elders sufficiently but also to empower them to participate in the eschatological inheritance alongside the already sanctified saints. Therefore, Paul encouraged the Ephesian elders, stating that if they firmly held onto this message, regardless of their faith level, the risk of leading the flock astray onto a false path would be minimized.

One day, a mother brought her son to visit Gandhi. She said, 'Teacher, my child has eaten too many sweets, and his teeth are all decayed. No matter how much I tell Tyler not to eat sweets, he doesn't listen. My son always listens well to your words, so please say something to him.' Surprisingly, Gandhi said, 'Come back after a month, and I will tell him then.' The mother found it strange but waited for a month before returning to Gandhi. 'Wait for one more month,' Gandhi said. 'Do I have to wait another month?' the mother asked. 'Well, wait for just one more month,' Gandhi replied. The mother couldn't understand, but she patiently waited and returned after a month. 'Young man, from now on, don't eat sweets,' Gandhi said. 'Yes, I will never eat sweets again,' the boy replied. The boy's mother asked Gandhi, 'Teacher, why did it take two months for you to say a word?' Gandhi replied, 'Actually, I also loved sweets too much, and I was eating them. How could I tell the child not to eat sweets when I myself took two months to quit sweets?' The best education is setting an example through sacrifice. Education is an endless process of sacrifice (Internet).

Wishing to become an example in helping the weak,

James Kim shares (Hoping that all of us stand firm in God's gracious words).

How Should We Prepare for Parting from Our Beloved Family?

[Acts 20:36-38]

I remember what sister-in-Christ Ja-ok Kim said before she passed away: ‘Cancer is not a difficult thing, but it is a disease that gives us time to prepare for parting.’ Perhaps it is because we all know that we may not have time to prepare for a farewell with someone we love. So I thought about this: ‘I should be ready for parting from my beloved wife and children.’ The reason I came to think this is because there is no order of death and to leave this world, and I don’t know when God will call me Home. Especially when I think about my loved ones more than myself, I always think that it is good to make some preparations for parting. Then how should we prepare for parting from our loved ones?

In Acts 20:36-38, Apostle Paul gave a farewell preaching (vv. 18-35) to the elders of Ephesus in Miletus (v. 17). And then he knelt down and prayed with them all (v. 36). “And they began to weep aloud and embraced Paul, and repeatedly kissed him: (v. 37). And they accompanied Paul to the ship (v. 38). Based on these words and Paul’s farewell sermon, I thought how we should prepare for parting from our loved ones in seven ways:

First, I always want to show faithfulness to my beloved family.

Look at Acts 20:18 – “And when they had come to him, he said to them, “You yourselves know, from the first day that I set foot in Asia, how I was with you the whole time.” Apostle Paul reminded the elders of the Church of Ephesus how he was with them the whole time from the first day that he set foot in Asia (v. 18) until he stayed there three years (v. 31). How did Paul live with the saints of Ephesus for three years? At least I think Paul lived faithfully among them. In other words, I think Paul showed faithfulness to the church saints during the three years in Ephesus. The reason I think this way is because Paul said to the elders of the Church of Ephesus, “You yourselves know, from the first day that I set foot in Asia, how I was with you the whole time” (v. 18). When I think of the word “the whole time” in this

phrase, I think Paul had been with them for three years consistently, unwavering and faithfully so that the elders of the church of Ephesus knew that well.

I don't know when God will call me to heaven. So I don't know when I have to say goodbye to my beloved family. But I want to be faithful like that of the Apostle Paul until that moment. I want to live faithfully with the power of God's grace, just as the faithful Lord does so to such sinner like me. Thus, after I die, when my family thinks about me, I hope and pray that they can say 'My husband/my father lived in a coherent state faithfully without leaning to the right or to the left.' Isn't that God's grace? Of course, my beloved family will see most of my unfaithfulness. But in the midst of such unfaithfulness, if they can see even little faithfulness in me for the Lord and His church, isn't that God's amazing grace and faithfulness? So I want to show consistent faithfulness to my loved ones today, tomorrow, and until the day of my death. I hope and pray that my loved ones may remember the faithfulness of the Lord which appeared little bit in me to their hearts even after I leave this world and to be with the Lord forever.

Second, I want to show serving the Lord to my beloved family.

Look at Acts 20:19 – “serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials which came upon me through the plots of the Jews.” It was serving the Lord that Apostle Paul did faithfully when he was with the saints of the church of Ephesus for three years. Paul served the Lord faithfully. The Ephesian church elders knew this too (v. 18). So Paul reminded them how he faithfully served the Lord when he was with them and the rest of the Ephesian church saints for three years while he was preaching the farewell sermon. He told the elders of the church in Ephesus that he served the Lord with "all humility and with tears and with trials" (v. 19). Although he had many hardships due to the plots of the Jews, Paul served the Lord faithfully and humbly by not ceasing to admonish each one of the Ephesian church saints with tears night and day for a period of three years (v. 31). Wouldn't the Ephesian church saints have seen his tears? Wouldn't at least the elders of Ephesian church remember the tears that Paul shed for three years? How could they forget the precious tears of Apostle Paul who loved them, served them, admonished them and shed tears for three years? Although they might not remember his teachings and admonitions, the Ephesian church saints would have remembered Paul's tears in their hearts forever. I thought about the Ephesian church elders' heart who were saying goodbye to Paul, who served the Lord and the Ephesian church saints with all humility and with tears and with trials which came upon him through the plots of the Jews (v. 19). In Acts 20:37, the Bible says that “they began to weep aloud and embraced Paul, and repeatedly kissed him.” When they thought about Paul who loved them, served them, admonished them and shed tears night and day for three years and when they thought about not being able to see his face again (v. 38), the Ephesian church elders wept aloud (v. 37). It is beautiful tears of love.

I want to shed these tears too. Especially, I want to shed tears of repentance, tears of gratitude and tears of devotion, three kinds of tears that I shed during the college retreat in Victory Presbyterian

Church in May 1987. Wouldn't it be beautiful if not only my loving Father God sees my tears but also my beloved family see my tears and decides to serve the Lord with tears as the Holy Spirit works in their hearts? I would like to have such a beautiful farewell moment with my beloved family. I want to have beautiful death not only in the sight of God, but also in the sight of my family. When my beloved wife and three children thought of my death, I hope and pray that they may be able to say, 'My husband/my father served the Lord faithfully and humbly until he died. I am sure he had many trials when he used to serve the Lord and His church. But he endured them and patiently served them in tears. I cannot forget his tears. And I want to serve the Lord and His church with humility and tears as well.' Then, isn't this God's great grace and my death is beneficial?

Third, I want to seek the profit of my beloved family.

Look at Acts 20:20-21: "how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you publicly and from house to house, solemnly testifying to both Jews and Greeks of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ." Apostle Paul spent three years in the church of Ephesus, "serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials which came upon me through the plots of the Jews" (v. 19). Especially, he didn't hesitate to preach anything that would be helpful to the Ephesian church saints (v. 20). And he taught them publicly and from house to house (v. 20). And the thing that he didn't hesitate to preach to them was repentance toward God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ (v. 21). He testified solemnly of the gospel of the grace of God (v. 24). In other words, Apostle Paul declared to the Ephesian church saints the whole purpose of God (v. 27). Why did Paul do that to them? Why didn't he hesitate to proclaim to and teach the Ephesian church saints anything that was profitable? The reason was because Paul loved them. I remember the words of 1 Corinthians 13:5 – "it does not seek its own." Since Paul loved the Ephesian church saints, he didn't seek his own but theirs. Therefore, for their profit, Paul preached and taught repentance toward God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ to the Ephesian church saints, bearing witness to the good news of God's grace to them.

Which husband/father would seek his own profit than the profit of his family? Isn't he working hard to support his beloved family? But more important than this, I think, is that husband/father to nurture his wife and his children as the head of the family. So I don't forget Ephesians 5:29 and 6:4 that there is a great responsibility for me to nurture my beloved wife and three children. Then how should I nurture them? I should make my wife and my three children disciples of Jesus Christ (Mt. 28:19). As a spiritual teacher in my family, I must teach my beloved wife (and three children) to obey everything the Lord commanded me (v. 20). The purpose of doing so is to cleanse her (my three children) with the Word of God (of course before that I myself must be cleansed with the Word of the Lord each day) (Eph. 5:26). In doing so, my wife and I will be able to love one another with sincere love from our hearts (1 Pet. 1:22). Also, as spiritual teachers of my three children, I shouldn't exasperate them, but bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord (Eph. 6:4). I must nurture and teach them to obey Father God. And I should raise them as God's children who obey their parents as they obey their heavenly

Father God (v. 1). And I think the children who honor their parents (v. 2) can honor other adults. Why should I do this? It is because I want my wife and my three children to be prosperous and be in good health, just as their souls prosper (3 Jn. 1:2). My purpose is clear. It is to seek the profit of my beloved family. The reason is because I love my wife and my three children with the love of God.

Fourth, I want to show my life that is being led by God's calling and mission to my beloved family.

Look at Acts 20:24 – “But I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself, so that I may finish my course and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify solemnly of the gospel of the grace of God.” Apostle Paul was bounded by the Holy Spirit, and was on the way to Jerusalem, not knowing what would happen to him there (v.22). He knew that the Holy Spirit solemnly testified to him that in every city, that they bonds and afflictions awaited him (v. 23). And Paul would have known that the danger that he would lose his life by the Jews who tried to kill him. But Paul didn't consider his life of any account as dear to himself (v. 24). In other words, he considered the Lord's mission that was given to him more precious than his own life. That was why in order to finish his course and the ministry which he received from the Lord, he didn't consider his life of any account as dear to himself (v. 24). What a wonderful man of God? Shouldn't we have this kind of value too?

I received two promised word of the Lord. The first promise word of the Lord is John 6:1-15, which I received in 1987 May during the Victory Presbyterian Church college retreat through the guest speaker named Pastor Young Ik Kim. The Holy Spirit touched my heart and inspired me to surrender my 'two fish and five loaves of bread' kind of life to the Lord. So now, with the full grace of God, I become a pastor and am serving the Lord's church. The second promise word of the Lord is Matthew 16:18, which the Lord gave me through the guest speaker Pastor Won G. Kim at the Korean Church Renewal Pastoral Council in 2003. After receiving the Lord's word "... I will build my church ... "and when I was praising "I Love Thy Kingdom, Lord", I cried in tears thinking of Victorious Presbyterian Church. I missed the beloved Victorious Presbyterian Church. So I resigned from the Seohyun Church in Korea, which I served until the end of November of 2003, and returned to the United States on December 3. And I took office as a senior pastor of Victory Presbyterian Church on December 21 when my father Pastor Chang Kim retired. And so far I have been serving the Lord's church with my beloved wife and three children. When I think of these two promise words of the Lord, I think my mission is to share the Word of God (Jn. 6:1-15) and to build the Lord's church (Mt. 16:18). And to expand the kingdom of God by building the body church of the Lord. My vision is to raise the Christ-centered visionary leaders and to send them into this world to expand the kingdom of God. In fulfilling this mission, I must build my wife and my children as a leader of my household, and build His church members as a leader of the church. I pray and hope that I will be able to faithfully complete this mission by the grace of God. So when I leave this world, I hope and pray that my beloved wife and three children have this memory of me.'

Fifth, I want to commend my beloved family to God and to the Word of His grace.

Look at Acts 20:32 – “And now I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified.” Apostle Paul said to the Ephesian church elders, “Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood” (v. 28). The reason he spoke to them was because Paul knew that after his departure externally “savage wolves” would come in among the Ephesian church saints, not sparing the church members (v. 29). He also knew that internally from among the Ephesian church saints men would arise, speaking perverse things in order to draw away the disciples after them (v. 30). That was why when Paul was giving his farewell sermon to the Ephesian church elders he said “be on the alert, remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one with tears” (v. 31). And then Paul commended them to God and to the word of His grace (v. 32). The reason he did so was because he was convinced that God and the word of His grace “is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified” (v. 32). Can you imagine that the church elders (both the teaching elders and the ruling elders) are not standing firm in the word of God’s grace? Then, what will happen to the church saints? What will happen to the church saints from the extreme temptations of not only externally, but also internally? Won’t they leave faith and lean to the right or to the left? Isn’t it terrible to think?

I often think of myself leaving this world, leaving behind my beloved wife and three children. The reason why I think this often is because I have gotten more and more of the viewpoint of death through the death of the senior members of Victory Presbyterian Church whom I had privilege to serve until their deaths and even their funeral services. When I look back on my own life from the death perspective and deeply think about what kind of death I would like to have in the future, I would like to think how good it would be if I would be led by the Lord's calling and being used by Him as His instrument in fulfilling His mission and go to Him peacefully. But at the same time, I cannot help but think about my beloved family. I often think about what life would be like for my beloved wife and three children when I leave this world. Of course, I think about their life of faith. I hope and pray that they continue to live for the glory of God. It seems like there isn’t much that I can do for them. So what I can do for them is to entrust them to God and the word of His grace. Thus, I pray to God for them. It entrust everything to God in prayer. As the Bible 1 Peter 5:7 says, “Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you”, I am casing all my anxiety on the Lord my God. The reason is because God loves my family more than anyone else in this world. I am taught to entrust my family to God, especially to the word of God’s grace (Acts 20:32). My responsibility for that is to convey the words of God’s grace to my family, "the gospel of the grace of God" (v. 24), and to teach them to dwell in the grace of God's salvation. Then when I leave this world, my family will be firmly stand on the words of God’s grace and will be able to receive the inheritance among all those who are sanctified (v. 32).

Sixth, I want to show my beloved family that I am working hard without covetousness.

Look at Acts 20:33-34: "I have coveted no one's silver or gold or clothes. You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my own needs and to the men who were with me." Why did Apostle Paul say this to the Ephesian church saints as he was preaching his farewell sermon to them? Wasn't it because there were so many temptations that were tempting the Ephesian church elders? Maybe it was because a man named Demetrius, a silversmith, who made silver shrines of Artemis (19:24) would tempt the Ephesian church elders with money. Maybe that was one of the "trials" (20:19) that Paul went through when he was in Ephesus for three years. If such temptation was with the Ephesian church elders, Paul would entrust them to God and the words of God's grace, so that they might not be tempted by such temptation of covetousness and commit the sin of idolatry (Col. 3:5). Then the Ephesian church saints who see their elders overcoming the temptation of covetousness would be able to overcome the same temptation as well. And maybe the good way to overcome that temptations was to work hard with their own hands as Paul did (Acts 20:34). Above all, if the Ephesian church elders truly loved their brothers and sisters in Christ of the Ephesian church, then they would have obeyed the Moses' Ten Commandments "You shall not covet your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor" (Exod. 20:17). And they would have worked diligently like Paul, earning their own money. If I as a church leader be without covetousness and be cleaned, what precious life of faith will that be?

I still remembered what my father said when I asked him for an advice regarding my own struggle. At that time when my wife and mother-in-law were preparing for our marriage, buying some furnitures, I kind of stuck between both women and I didn't know what to do. So I asked my father what I should do. And he said to 'go beyond material'. In my mother-in-law's position, she wanted to do lot for us, buying some good and expensive furnitures for us but my wife didn't want to because they were too expensive. So I didn't know what to do between two women. That was why I asked my father what to do. I still remembered that my mother-in-law won and she bought us undeserved furnitures for us. Another thing I still remember is when we got married my wife told me 'How the evangelist could eat the Korean BBQ.' Haha. Perhaps my wife thought that the evangelist shouldn't eat expensive ribs. Haha. But eventually I ate the ribs. As I think about living a life of thrifty, going beyond material, being free from all the material temptations, not covetousness but being satisfied by Jesus alone, I want to learn to be content whatever the circumstances (Phil. 4:11-12). So I want to show my beloved family that I am satisfied with the Lord alone. And I want to show my family that I am doing my ministry diligently, without greed. So when I leave this world, I hope and pray that my beloved wife and three children will think 'My husband/my father was without greed but was satisfied with the Lord only and worked hard for the Lord, His church and His Kingdom and passed away peacefully.'

The seventh and the last, I want to be an example to my beloved family.

Look at Acts 20:35 – “In everything I showed you that by working hard in this manner you must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He Himself said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’” Apostle Paul showed an example to the elders of the Ephesian church. The reason why he couldn’t covet was because he remembered that the Lord Jesus said, “It is more blessed to give than to receive” (v. 35). That was why Paul didn’t fall into the temptation of covetousness, but was able to work hard with his own hands to his own needs and to the men who were with him (v. 34). Not only that, but Paul by working hard he helped the weak (v. 35). Paul, who showed this example, preached the farewell sermon to the Ephesian church elders and told them that they too should follow his example and work hard to help the weak (v. 35). The reason is because it is blessed life (v. 35).

I want to show what a blessed life is to my beloved family. I would like to show my beloved three children how living in action rather than mere talk is a blessed life in the sight of God. I want to show them how I have enjoyed God’s gracious blessings in my life through my appearance from behind. If I could show them an example of the truth that it is more blessed to give than to receive, then I think even if I close my eyes, my beloved children will be able to open their spiritual eyes and follow my footsteps (1 Pet. 2:21). Especially, I want to leave a beautiful footprint to my beloved family by living and working hard until the day when I cannot work and helping the weak people, those who are in need. Therefore, even if I leave this world, I hope and pray that they can follow my footsteps that are written on the tablets of their hearts.

I have come across one of the TV news that touched my heart. It is the news about Josephine Smith who became a New York city firefighter like her father. Her father was a firefighter in the 9/11 incident but passed away. But thirteen years after her father’s death, she became the firefighter after completing all tests and all tough training. When I was watching that news, I couldn’t forget two scenes. The first scene was that firefighter Josephine Smith was smiling brightly on a building ladder, wearing her firefighter uniform and hat. Another scene was a picture of her father who passed away. Her father’s impression looked good. At the age of 47, he was killed by the 9/11 incident. So I guess that his daughter Josephine Smith was in a high school. I thought about her heart when she lost her beloved father in her adolescent year. I thought about how much she loves her father that she also became a firefighter after her father. When I think of Josephine Smith who is a firefighter and serving a New York City like her beloved father, I also think that I should become an example to my three beloved children as well. I want to pursue the change of my character by shifting that thought into practice and becoming habitual. I would like to show my beloved family that I keep on getting rid of all my covetousness and working hard for the Lord and His church. Also, I want to be profitable to my family by showing them through my appearance from behind that I am serving the Lord humbly and faithfully with passion and patience as I am led by the Lord’s calling and mission. As I entrust my beloved family to God and to the word of God’s grace, I want to imitate Jesus Christ until I die so that I may be able to leave Christ-likeness footsteps on the tablets of their hearts.

Thinking of my beloved wife and three children, Dillon, Yeri, and Karis,

James Kim

(Wishing to follow in the footsteps of my both exemplary parents)

“The will of the Lord be done!”

[Acts 21:1-14]

We may think it is very difficult to seek God's will, but the biblical perspective is very different. To those who willingly obey Him, God reveals His will. Through this truth, we can draw a final conclusion. God does not reveal His will to those who merely consider it, saying, "Well, I could do it or not. Can't you show me a different plan, Lord?" In other words, it means that He will never show it when you come out with an attitude like, "What else can I do, or maybe not? Can't you show me a different plan, Lord?" If you want to know God's will, you must first decide whether you will obey that will or not (Internet).

In today's passage, Acts 21:14, the Bible says, "And since he would not be persuaded, we fell silent, remarking, 'The will of the Lord be done!'" Today, under the title "The will of the Lord be done!" I want to meditate on three things about the Lord's will and seek the grace that God gives.

First, what is the Lord's will?

In today's passage, the Lord's will for Paul was to go to Jerusalem and preach the gospel. That was Paul's purpose, and it was also God's purpose. So, in Acts 20:22-23, Paul says, "And now, compelled by the Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there. I only know that in every city the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships are facing me." How did Paul know that going to Jerusalem and preaching the gospel was the Lord's will? He knew it because he received the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Even though the Holy Spirit testified to him that in every city, prison and hardships awaited him (v. 23), he still wanted to go to Jerusalem because he was confident that it was the Lord's will. Even though there might be bonds and hardships, he wanted to fulfill the Lord's will. However, unlike the Apostle Paul, how can we know the Lord's will? The key is to discern the Lord's will through the guidance of the Holy Spirit. If you want to know God's will, you must first decide whether you will obey that will or not (Internet).

However, for some reason, it seems that we encounter much difficulty in discerning the Lord's will, unlike the Apostle Paul. Many times, we find ourselves in confusion, not knowing what God's will is and pondering what to do. Especially when it is challenging to discern whether what we are thinking is the Lord's will or just our own, we face difficulty. So, how does the Bible teach us to discern the Lord's will? Look at Romans 12:2: "Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing, and perfect will." In this passage, the Bible provides some guidance on how to discern the Lord's will:

(1) To discern the Lord's will, we must not conform to the pattern of this generation.

What kind of generation is this? Jesus, in Luke 11:29, said, "This is an evil generation." This era is extremely corrupt, much like the time of Noah in the Old Testament—a time marked by pervasive wickedness (Gen. 6:5-6). Living in such a corrupt age, as believers in Jesus, we should not emulate the evil patterns of this generation. Instead, we should discern the Lord's will and live a life that accomplishes His purpose.

(2) To discern the Lord's will, we must be transformed by the renewing of our minds.

How can we renew our minds? First and foremost, we need to pray to God. We should pray as David did in Psalms 51:10 - "Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me." When we pray in this manner, God will create a pure heart within us. Additionally, to renew our minds, we should heed the words in Romans 12:3 - "For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you." When we think wisely in accordance with the faith God has given us, our corrupted minds will be transformed. In the pursuit of such ongoing transformation, we will be able to discern God's good, pleasing, and perfect will.

Second, what are the difficulties in fulfilling the Lord's will?

Certainly, there will be various challenges, and one of them is the human compassion of loving people (Park). Look at Acts 21:4 - "Finding the disciples there, we stayed with them seven days. Through the Spirit, they urged Paul not to go on to Jerusalem." This passage indicates that the disciples in Tyre, a region near there, were aware, through the prompting of the Holy Spirit, that there would be trouble, including hardship and imprisonment, for Paul if he continued his journey to Jerusalem. During the seven days Paul spent with them, these disciples consistently discouraged him from going to Jerusalem (Yoo). Refusing such pleas would not have been easy for the apostle Paul. While being led by the conviction of the Lord's will and the guidance of the Holy Spirit, Paul was heading to Jerusalem. Yet, amid this journey, disciples from the region of Tyre, prompted "by the Spirit," advised Paul not to go to Jerusalem. How do we interpret the statement that they "urged him not to go" (v. 4)? It means that they knew, through the Holy Spirit, that there

would be danger for Paul if he went to Jerusalem, not that the Holy Spirit directly communicated to them to tell Paul not to go (Park). Their dissuasion stemmed from their human compassion. Today's passage, in Acts 21:13, expresses how this human compassion affected Paul's heart: "Then Paul answered, 'Why are you weeping and breaking my heart?'" Paul, while staying at the house of Philip, one of the seven deacons and an evangelist, in Caesarea, received a visit from Agabus, a prophet who had previously predicted a famine (11:28). Agabus prophesied that if Paul went to Jerusalem, he would face trouble (vv. 10-11). Upon hearing this prophecy, Paul's companions, along with the saints in Caesarea, implored him not to go up to Jerusalem, weeping and fervently pleading with him (v. 12). At this point, Paul sighed and said, "Why are you weeping and breaking my heart?" (v. 13). Here, the expression "breaking my heart" means 'breaking my spirit' or 'making my heart weak.' In other words, it implies 'weakening the heart' (Park). Consider this: even though the apostle Paul, enlightened by the Holy Spirit, was aware of the prophecy that trouble awaited him in Jerusalem, his beloved brothers and sisters, motivated by human compassion, continuously and lovingly urged him not to go to Jerusalem. What would have happened to Paul's spirit if he kept hearing these pleas from those around him? The heart can easily become fragile in such situations.

What weakens our hearts in fulfilling the Lord's will? Who or what makes your heart frail in pursuing the fulfillment of the Lord's will? Personally, I believe it is our beloved family members. In other words, if there is a path that you and I want to walk, bearing the burden and fulfilling the mission, similar to Paul, knowing that there are hardships and adversities on that path, and our loving family members, aware of the difficulties and tribulations on that path, tearfully plead with us not to take that path, what would be the condition of our hearts? When Jesus taught his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem, suffer many things from the elders, chief priests, and scribes, be killed, and be raised on the third day (Mt. 16:21), Peter took Jesus aside and said, "Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you" (v. 22). What did Jesus say to Peter at that time? Look at Matthew 16:23: "But he turned and said to Peter, 'Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.'" Peter, driven by human compassion, did not wish for the death of Jesus on the cross. When he said, "This shall never happen to you," he meant that the crucifixion of Jesus would never happen to him. However, Jesus referred to Peter's thoughts as human thinking. In other words, Satan, through human compassion, tends to make people think about human desires rather than the will of God, diverting them from fulfilling God's will to fulfilling human desires. In pursuing the fulfillment of the Lord's will, no matter what difficulties arise, we should not think about human desires but focus on the things of God. We especially need to be cautious about human compassion.

Third and last, what is necessary in fulfilling the Lord's will?

It is the readiness to die. Look at verse 13: "Then Paul answered, 'What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be imprisoned but even to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.'" Even amid the tearful pleas of his companions and the disciples in Caesarea, expressing their concern and urging him not to go up to Jerusalem, Paul, although his heart was saddened, demonstrated a firm determination to fulfill his mission with the resolve, "I am ready not only to be imprisoned but even to

die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus." This resolute determination is something we have already seen in Acts 20:24 - "But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God." Moving according to his calling, Paul did not consider his own life precious in fulfilling the Lord's will. Therefore, he had no reason to be concerned about the fate awaiting him in Jerusalem. Just as the apostles in Jerusalem rejoiced when they were persecuted and reviled for the name of Jesus (5:41), Paul was no less prepared, with a resolved willingness to do whatever it takes for the name of the Lord, even if it meant death (Park).

I revisited a book called "Through Gates of Splendor." This book was written by Elisabeth Elliot, the wife of Jim Elliot, one of the five North American missionaries who were martyred while trying to bring the gospel to the Auca tribe in Ecuador. In the final part of the book, it introduces the diary of Barbara Youderian, the wife of one of the five martyrs, Roger Youderian: "Tonight the Major told us that he had found your bodies by the river. One of you had been wearing a T-shirt and jeans. The only one who dressed that way was Roger. ... Two days ago, God gave me Psalms 48:14. 'For this God is our God forever and ever. He will be our guide even to death.' Upon hearing the news of Roger's death, my heart was filled with praise. He was a fitting candidate to go to his homeland. Lord, help me fulfill both the role of a mother and a father well. Make known Your discipline and instruction (Eph. 6:4) to me.... Tonight, Bess asked me while praying for her daddy in heaven if she could write him a letter and if Daddy could come down from heaven to take the letter. I said, 'That cannot be. Daddy is with Jesus.' But Bess said, 'But Jesus can help Daddy come down. God will hold Daddy's hand so he won't slip.'" How would the mother have felt when she heard such words from her children? When Barbara Youderian heard her children say such things, her heart was deeply moved. She wanted to break free from human compassion, which she considered a tool of Satan that eats away at life. She was convinced that this was the perfect will of God. Many people might say, 'What on earth led Roger, who was in charge of the Huaruro ministry, to get involved in this?' The reason is that Roger had been faithful to the will of the One who sent him. The Lord filled our hearts with His perfect peace, closing us off from sorrow and frenzy" (Elliot).

Wishing to be done only according to the Lord's will,

James Kim

(Praying to rely solely on the Lord even in difficult times)

Preparedness to Die

[Acts 21:13]

A person who is prepared to die when fighting is truly frightening. The reason is that such a person is willing to stake their life in the battle. If someone charges fearlessly, ready to die in the fight, who would dare to stop them?

In today's passage from Acts 21:13, we encounter Paul, who is determined to go up to Jerusalem, prepared to face death. Despite the Holy Spirit testifying to him about the bonds and afflictions that await him in Jerusalem (20:23), Paul's resolve to go up to Jerusalem remains unshaken. Among the various prophecies, a prophet named Agabus comes down from Judea, takes Paul's belt, binds his own hands and feet, and declares that the Jews in Jerusalem will do the same to the owner of the belt and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles (11:16). Upon hearing this, Paul's companions and those present strongly urge him not to go up to Jerusalem (12:13). At that moment, Paul responds by asking them, "What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be bound but even to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus" (13:13). Paul is a person who has prepared himself to die for the cause. He is willing to be bound and even die for the sake of Jesus Christ. In this context, he represents one who has staked his life for the Gospel of Jesus Christ. He is someone who, for the sake of the Kingdom of God and the body of Christ, is prepared to face death. As Acts 20:24 states, "But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God."

Paul considered the mission he received from the Lord Jesus more valuable than his own life. In other words, he regarded completing the task of testifying to the grace of God's gospel as more precious than his life. How remarkable is this perspective? How did Paul come to value the mission he received from the Lord more than his own life? I believe the reason lies in Psalms 63:3: "Because your steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise you." Paul could consider the mission he received from the Lord more precious than his own life because of God's eternal love. Recognizing, feeling, and experiencing God's eternal love,

Paul was thankful and moved, and in completing the mission of testifying to the gospel that the Lord had given him, he did not consider his own life as precious at all. Inflamed with the love of Christ that he had received from the Lord, Paul, who was willing to be bound and even ready to die for the sake of the gospel, saw the fulfillment of his mission as more important than his life. Witnessing Paul's fervor for the mission received from Jesus, those who had advised him not to go up to Jerusalem, despite the bonds and the prospect of death, conceded, saying, "The Lord's will be done" (21:14), and they ceased their persuasions. Afterward, Paul and his companions made preparations and went up to Jerusalem after many days (21:15). In Paul's journey to Jerusalem, we see a resemblance to the image of Jesus, who, like a lamb led to the slaughter (Isa. 53:7), went willingly to Bethlehem's stable, and ultimately to the cross on Golgotha, sacrificing His life for our salvation. Like Jesus, who obeyed the will of God the Father even unto death (Phil. 2:8), Paul, as an apostle of Jesus, also moved toward death. Reflecting on how Paul did not regard the one life lived in this world as so valuable, we are challenged to once again acknowledge the importance of the mission received from the Lord and the necessity of fulfilling that mission.

With a fervent desire to be a burning evangelist of God's love and a source of comfort,

James Kim

(Gratefully appreciating God's eternal love, which is more precious than our seventy or eighty years of life)

“After we arrived in Jerusalem”

[Acts 21:15-26]

Do you all like to travel? If you do, how do you usually go about it? Perhaps, after choosing a place you want to visit, you'll need to consider dates, plan your schedule, decide whether to go by car or plane, and so on. There are various thoughts and preparations you'll have to make. However, these preparations, rather than being burdensome, are likely to be enjoyable for those who wish to embark on a journey. After joyfully preparing for the trip and heading towards the destination, it will also be delightful. There will be a sense of anticipation. Upon reaching the destination and thinking about the things you want to do and the plans you've made, you will eagerly await reaching your destination. When you arrive at your travel destination, how will you react? If you leave behind your home and workplace to take a rest and enjoy your time at the travel destination, it's likely that you'll feel happy. You might also be able to release the tension that accumulated in various aspects of your life, such as at home and work. However, if you arrive at the destination not to travel but for work, how would you react?

In today's main text, Acts 21:17, the Bible records the arrival of Paul and his companions in Jerusalem. When imagining Paul's feelings at that moment, I had a couple of thoughts:

- (1) Paul would have been thankful and joyful.

It is likely that Paul would have been thankful for God's guidance and protection, allowing him and his companions to reach Jerusalem to fulfill the Lord's will and preach the gospel. Having arrived in Jerusalem, he might have been joyful to be in a position where he could now fulfill the Lord's purpose.

- (2) Paul could not ignore the hardships that awaited him in Jerusalem, as the Holy Spirit had already revealed.

While Paul had prepared himself, even to the point of being ready to die for the mission, he might have still felt a mix of anticipation and concern upon arriving in Jerusalem. Although he wasn't necessarily consumed by fear, there could have been a blend of expectation and apprehension as he reached his destination.

Today, centered around the passage, "After we arrived in Jerusalem," I contemplate what might have occurred when Paul and his companions arrived in Jerusalem in three ways. Through this reflection, I seek to receive the grace and teachings that God provides to both me and you.

First, Paul and his companions were warmly received by the brothers in Jerusalem.

Look at Acts 21:17 - "When we had come to Jerusalem, the brothers received us gladly." Paul and his companions had completed their journey from Caesarea to Jerusalem (v. 15). Some disciples from Caesarea joined Paul's group and played the role of guiding them to Jerusalem (v. 16). The place where they were guided, and where they would stay, was the home of an early disciple named Mnason from Cyprus (Yoo). This Mnason, a faithful disciple of the Lord, willingly welcomed and hosted Paul and the representatives of the Gentile churches traveling with him, along with the believing brothers in Jerusalem (Yoo). This reminds me of the passage in John 12:12-16. When Jesus entered Jerusalem to fulfill His purpose of crucifixion, a large crowd, holding palm branches, came out to meet Him, shouting, "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!" What a grand welcome it was! However, they did not welcome and receive Jesus as their Savior. Instead, they welcomed Him as the victorious King of Israel, expecting political liberation from Rome, economic prosperity, and social justice. Apostle John expressed this in John 1:11-12, stating, "He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God." When Jesus came to His people, they did not receive Him as their Savior, but to those who did receive Him and believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God.

Have you received Jesus as your Savior? Do you believe in the truth that Jesus died on the cross to forgive your sins, was declared righteous, and rose from the dead on the third day (Rom. 4:25)? We should not just consider Jesus as our king, like the Israelites did, expecting political liberation, economic prosperity, and social justice. We must receive Jesus as our Savior. Jesus is our Savior who delivers us from all sin and declares us righteous, giving us eternal life. I hope and pray that you receive Jesus as your Savior. When you do so, you can hold onto the promise He gave us: "In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also" (Jn. 14:2-3). If you receive Jesus as your Savior, He will gladly welcome you, and He will ensure that you are with Him forever. By receiving Jesus as your Savior, you will enter the heavenly Jerusalem.

Second, Paul and his companions, along with the brothers in Jerusalem,

including James and the elders, glorified God together.

Look at Acts 21:20 - "And when they heard it, they glorified God" Paul and his companions arrived in Jerusalem and the next day went to meet James, the leader of the Jerusalem church (v. 18). Coincidentally, all the elders of the Jerusalem church were gathered there (v. 18). After greeting them all, Paul spoke about the work God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry (v. 19). When they heard this, they glorified God together (v. 20). What a beautiful scene! Brothers and sisters in the Lord, gathered together in the Lord, hearing about the work God had done among the Gentiles through Paul, and glorifying God together. This was Paul's prayer. Look at Romans 15:5-6: "May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." Paul prayed that brothers and sisters, following the example of Jesus Christ, would be of one mind and one voice to glorify God the Father. We should also offer such prayers to our Heavenly Father. Therefore, the children of our God, having received Jesus Christ as their Savior, should gather together with one mind, one purpose, and one voice to glorify God the Father.

This is how the church of the Lord should be. In other words, the community of Jesus, the children of God who have received Jesus Christ as their Savior, gathered together with one mind, one purpose, and one voice to glorify God. Imagine, as we receive one another in Christ's love (Rom. 15:7), sharing with each other the things that God is doing in our lives, glorifying God together. This is the true image of the church and genuine fellowship within the Lord. Visualize saints welcoming each other as they truly are, while observing the work of God in each other's lives and growing more like Jesus. This is the true picture of the church. Let us all dream of such a church. Let us pray together for God's glory to be revealed through our church and that it becomes a place where God's glory shines.

Third and last, Paul received the advice of James and the elders in Jerusalem.

After glorifying God together, Paul, his companions, and the Jerusalem church leaders, including James and all the elders, changed the direction of their conversation (v. 20). The focal point of this conversation was Paul's safety. As we have already contemplated, the Holy Spirit had informed many, besides Paul, that if he were to go to Jerusalem, he would face bonds and afflictions. When Paul actually arrived in Jerusalem, the atmosphere was uneasy, as communicated to him by James and the elders of the Jerusalem church. They conveyed to Paul that in Jerusalem, there were thousands of Jewish Christians who were zealous for the law (v. 20b). These individuals had a significant and deep misunderstanding about Paul. The substantial misunderstanding revolved around Paul's teachings. Look at verse 21: "And they have been told about you that you teach all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children or walk according to our customs." The zealous Jewish Christians in Jerusalem had heard that Paul was instructing scattered Jewish communities among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, not to circumcise their children, and not to observe the customs (v. 21, Yoo). They had heard two things:

- (1) What Paul taught to the Jews in the Gentile regions was concerning forsaking the customs derived from Moses.

This alone was enough to provoke anger among Jews who were zealous for the Mosaic law. The reason was that forsaking the customs derived from Moses was considered a serious sin in their eyes.

- (2) The specific evidence that Paul taught a serious departure from the Law of Moses was his instruction not to circumcise children and not to follow the Jewish customs (Yoo).

However, this was a misunderstanding despite being unfounded rumors. Paul had never taught such a departure from the Law of Moses in the course of his missionary activities. Knowing this, James and the elders of the Jerusalem church requested Paul to quell these baseless rumors through his actions. They suggested a specific solution, namely, to accompany four men under a Nazirite vow to the temple, participate in a purification rite, and cover the expenses for their head shaving (Acts 21:23-24). By doing so, they believed that zealous Jewish Christians would realize that the rumors about Paul were false and that he himself lived in observance of the law. The four individuals under the Nazirite vow were identified as poor members of the Jerusalem church voluntarily consecrating themselves, practicing abstinence, and bearing the cost of their vow. The elders proposed this solution, convinced that it would demonstrate Paul's commitment to the law and dispel any false impressions about his teachings among zealous Jewish Christians. In summary, Paul accepted their counsel to exhibit a devout appearance according to the Law of Moses, not only to confirm that the rumors were baseless but also to show that he lived in accordance with the law. The four individuals under the Nazirite vow were identified as poor members of the Jerusalem church who were voluntarily consecrating themselves and bearing the cost of their vow.

The Nazirite vow was a voluntary dedication and a devout pledge. The person making this vow was required to abstain from wine for at least 30 days, avoid contact with dead bodies, refrain from cutting their hair, and live a consecrated life (Num. 6:4-8) (Yoo). Upon successfully completing the vow, the individual had to follow the regulations specified in the Mosaic law, including shaving their head and offering various sacrifices to God along with their hair (vv. 10-18). However, for the individuals from Naisl who took the Nazirite vow, the cost of providing the sacrificial offerings could have been burdensome [‘The cost for each person: two male lambs, one ewe lamb, and the offering and drink offerings’ (Yoo)]. As a result, James and the elders of the Jerusalem church advised Paul to bear the expenses. The reason for this suggestion can be found in Acts 21:24 - "...then everyone will know there is no truth in these reports about you, but that you yourself are living in obedience to the law." In the eyes of the Jews, contributing to cover the costs for the Nazirite vow of poor Naisl individuals was considered an extremely devout act (Yoo). Paul ultimately accepted James and the elders' counsel (Acts 21:26). Consequently, the next day, he took the four individuals under the Nazirite vow, participated in a purification rite, and notified the

temple authorities of the completion of the vow and the date they would present their sacrifices (v. 26). Paul, for the sake of saving everyone, became a servant to all, making himself a slave to all people (1 Cor. 9:19). In order to save even one Jew, he became like a Jew to the Jews (v. 20). Certainly, in the context of today's passage, he accepted the counsel of James and the elders, ensuring that he would not be a stumbling block to even a Jewish brother (8:9).

The wise person heeds counsel. Proverbs 12:15 states, "The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but a wise man listens to advice." The foolish person does not listen to advice and despises it (1:7), but the wise person listens to counsel. Reflecting on the counsel given to Paul by James and the elders of the Jerusalem church in today's passage, I am reminded of the words in 1 Corinthians 8:9 - "Be careful, however, that the exercise of your rights does not become a stumbling block to the weak." Paul desired not to be a stumbling block to his brothers in Christ in Jerusalem. Certainly, he aimed not to be a stumbling block to those Jewish Christians who were zealous for the law, but he also did not want to be a stumbling block to the Jerusalem church. Therefore, he heeded the counsel of the Jerusalem church leaders. Upon arriving in Jerusalem, Paul did not want to be a stumbling block to both the Jewish Christians zealous for the law and the Jerusalem church. He desired to avoid causing offense in his ministry (2 Cor. 6:3). We must not be stumbling blocks that obscure the glory of God. Furthermore, we should not be stumbling blocks to the church. We should not be stumbling blocks to our fellow brothers and sisters who have become one in the Lord. Instead, we should be stepping stones. Additionally, we should be peacemakers. To achieve this, we must be willing to listen to the counsel of church leaders, just as Paul did, and strive to uphold the peace of the church community by following their counsel.

Paul's mission, which was the will of the Lord, led him to Jerusalem to undertake the ministry of proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ. Upon reaching Jerusalem, Paul and his companions were welcomed by the brethren in faith. Together with James and the elders of the Jerusalem church, they glorified God. Paul, in his commitment to the zealous Jewish Christians adhering to the Mosaic Law, accepted the counsel of the Jerusalem church leaders, striving to dispel any misunderstandings among his Jewish brothers while ensuring that the Jerusalem church would not suffer harm.

- (1) Reflecting on this passage, firstly, we must accept Jesus as our Savior, and when we receive Jesus as our Savior, we are promised that He will come again to receive us and make a dwelling place for us where He is.
- (2) We witness the true nature of the church community.

When the Apostle Paul shared the work of God through his ministry in the Gentile regions with the leaders of the Jerusalem church, they glorified God together. Thus, we learn that the true nature of the church involves believers coming together to share in the work of God and glorify Him.

- (3) We receive the lesson that a wise person listens to counsel and does not become a

stumbling block to brothers and sisters.

We should strive to be stepping stones and peacemakers among our fellow believers.

Don't want to be a stumbling block to brothers and sisters in the Lord,

James Kim

(Dreaming of a Christ-centered community)

Misunderstanding

[Acts 21:20b-24]

Have you ever experienced being misunderstood? Have you gone through the pain of being misunderstood by someone even when you haven't done anything wrong? Today, I want to reflect on Acts 21:20-24 and consider a couple of reasons why misunderstandings occur and how we should deal with them.

The first reason for misunderstandings is negative thinking.

Look at Acts 21:20 - "... Brother, you see how many thousands of Jews there are who have believed, and they are all zealous for the law." Do you have negative thoughts about someone? If you answered "yes," why did you form those thoughts? One reason could be that the person is not adhering to something you strongly believe in and uphold. For example, if I strongly believe in keeping the Fourth Commandment of the Sabbath holy and refraining from watching movies or spending money on Sundays, I might develop negative thoughts if I see someone doing otherwise. In today's passage Acts 21:20b-24, we see that the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem had negative thoughts about Paul. What was the cause of this negativity? We can find the reason in the latter part of verse 20: "... Brother, you see how many thousands of Jews there are who have believed, and they are all zealous for the law." In other words, the numerous Jewish Christians in Jerusalem believed that they were all zealous followers of the law, and they thought that Paul lacked zeal for the law. For example, they might have been saying, 'We are diligently keeping the Fourth Commandment, so why isn't Paul doing the same?' With the perspective of legalists, Paul appeared to be lacking zeal for the law, leading them to form these negative thoughts about him.

The lesson we learn here is that our strengths can become our weaknesses. In other words, what I am doing well and diligently can also become a disadvantage. Being zealous for the law is good, but the issue with many Jewish Christians in this context was that they were zealous for the law even more than Jesus within their faith. In other words, their problem was forgetting that the law pointed to Jesus and seeking righteousness through law observance rather than faith. Look at Galatians 3:24 – "So the law was put in

charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith.” We need to discard negative thoughts.

Another reason for misunderstanding is baseless rumors.

Look at Acts 21:21 – “They have been informed that you teach all the Jews who live among the Gentiles to turn away from Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children or live according to our customs.” Many Jewish Christians in Jerusalem heard a teaching that Paul was instructing Jews living among the Gentiles not to circumcise their children or follow customs. However, there is no evidence anywhere in the Book of Acts that Paul said anything like this about Jews (Yoo). On the contrary, the author of Acts clearly pointed out three instances where Paul respected Jewish customs: (1) Circumcising Timothy, born to a Gentile father and a Jewish mother, during his second missionary journey (Acts 16:2-3); (2) Shaving his head in accordance with his Nazirite vow at the end of his second missionary journey (18:18); (3) Observing the Feast of Unleavened Bread carefully during his last journey to Jerusalem, as shown by his plan to arrive before Pentecost (20:6, 16). These facts clearly demonstrate that Paul, as a devout Jew, continued to observe customs related to Moses' law. This refutes the baseless rumor that many Jewish Christians, who had negative thoughts about Paul, heard—that Paul was teaching a departure from Moses' law, which had no factual basis (Yoo).

How common is it to be misunderstood due to unfounded rumors? An article titled ‘My Name is Rumor’ in the Atlanta Journal (May 1995) sheds light on this issue: ‘I am 'Rumor. I absolutely hate the truth. I can ruin people without laying a hand on them, deteriorate relationships effortlessly, tear hearts apart, and destroy lives. I am cunning and evil, growing stronger with time. The more I am on people's lips, the more they believe in me. Those ensnared by me are desperate; once caught in my web, there is no escaping. Tracking me down? Impossible. The more I'm pursued, the more crafty I become. I am nobody's friend. My mission is simply to blemish someone. Once targeted by me, a person can never be the same. I bring down governments and shatter once-happy marriages. I turn long-established careers and trust into nothing. I make people lose sleep and suffer headaches. Making good people cry into their pillows is what I do! I don't need to speak loudly; I spread quietly, like a whisper. That's why my name is Rumor’ (Atlanta Journal).

So, how should we deal with misunderstandings?

Look at Acts 21:23-24: "So do what we tell you. There are four men with us who have made a vow. Take these men, join in their purification rites and pay their expenses so that they can have their heads shaved. Then everyone will know there is no truth in these reports about you, but that you yourself are living in obedience to the law." How did James and the elders of the Jerusalem church propose to resolve the misunderstanding? They urged Paul to participate in a purification ritual with four men who had taken a vow, paying for their expenses and allowing them to shave their heads (vv. 23-24). In the eyes of the Jews, covering the expenses for poor Nazirites was seen as a highly pious act. Paul accepted the suggestion from James and the Jerusalem elders and put it into practice. Why did he do so? Look at 1 Corinthians 9:19-20: "Though I am free and belong to no one, I have made myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. To the

Jews, I became like a Jew, to win the Jews." Paul, though free, became like a Jew to win more of them for Christ. But was this approach effective? Did it resolve the misunderstanding between Paul and the Jews? The answer is "No." On the contrary, the whole city was aroused, and the people came running from all directions. Seizing Paul, they dragged him from the temple, and immediately the gates were shut (v. 30). So, how should we handle misunderstandings? Rather than saying that Paul tried to resolve the misunderstanding, it would be more appropriate to say that he sought to lead even one more Jew to salvation despite the misunderstanding. While he may not have cleared up the misunderstanding, he seized the opportunity to testify to the Gospel amid persecution (Acts 22). This implies that we may experience sufficient misunderstanding, and despite our efforts to resolve it, it may persist. Nevertheless, in such situations, we should follow Paul's example and turn them into opportunities to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

The renowned philosopher Plato once experienced a serious misunderstanding from those around him. Despite facing widespread criticism, he chose not to defend his position. When a disciple asked him, 'Teacher, why don't you justify yourself?' Plato responded, 'The only way to put an end to their criticism is not through my defense. The only way to silence their criticism is through my consistently righteous conduct.' As we navigate through life, there are occasions where we may face condemnation due to misunderstandings. Despite various attempts to resolve such misunderstandings, they may persist or even deepen like a twisted thread. In such moments, we, as believers, should know how to wait quietly for God's guidance and timing. It is unwise to try to resolve problems beyond our reach before God. Jesus Christ Himself faced numerous misunderstandings and criticisms during His time on earth. However, He patiently endured everything, waiting for the Father's timing. This serves as a beautiful example of complete obedience to God's will. Seeking understanding rather than misunderstanding and patiently awaiting God's timing are crucial aspects of a life beautifully surrendered to God's plan (Internet).

Pursuing understanding, not misunderstanding,

James Kim

(Guarding against negative thoughts and baseless rumors)

Satan's Strategy

[Acts 21:27-36]

Pastor Joel Park's book, 'Critique of the Korean Church Written with the Preparedness to Be Hit and Die', is a clear and sharp criticism of the problems of the Korean Church. For example, it deals with denomination supremacy, offerings, church building issues, and false sermons and prayers and etc. Pastor Park said, 'The Korean church does not unite the two, but divides one into two or hundreds, and the barrier between church and denomination is higher and stronger than the barrier between the old Pharisees and Sadducees.' He said that true Jesus Christ broke down the wall, but the Korean church built a wall stronger than the Tower of Babel.' According to the publisher, after the publication of this book last year, some 3,200 members of the mega-church returned to the local church. They are said to continue to spread the movement to restore local churches by forming an organization called 'Handongye', such as the title of the book, 'Jesus Weeping for the Korean Church.' This book is considered very unusual for a Protestant pastor to directly criticize the Korean church, which is now being criticized by the public. However, it clearly presents the mistakes of the Korean church and solutions that must be reformed. And it is highly regarded as a book written with a penitent heart about the situation of the Korean church that even the antis, who are opposed to Christianity, could not mention (Internet).

What do you think of these criticisms of the church? What kind of criticism can we make when we and ourselves look back at the church and ourselves as Christians? Of course I'm talking constructive criticism. I do not believe that criticism for the sake of criticism or non-constructive criticism is beneficial to the church. Therefore, I think we need to criticize the Korean church constructively, and also need to listen humbly to those criticisms. One of my personal criticisms of the church is that I think the church is not becoming a militant church. We must not forget that the church is fighting a spiritual battle until the day of the second coming of Jesus. Therefore, the church must be the militant church. Therefore, we must fight the good fight of faith while running the race of our faith (1 Tim. 6:12; 2 Tim. 4:7). We must all be militant Christians who fight the spiritual battle with assurance of victory. In order to do that, we need to know a little bit about our enemy, Satan and his strategy.

In Acts 21:33, we see the Apostle Paul going up to Jerusalem and being bound according to the prophecy of the Holy Spirit. In this way, I would like to meditate on how the unbelieving Jews from Asia (v. 27), who were the persecutors who oppose Paul in Jerusalem and oppose the gospel, even bound Paul, in four ways. In the meantime, I want to think about the strategies of Satan and his servants who oppose Jesus, oppose the His gospel, and oppose us. When we know the pattern, we will know the temptation of Satan and will be able to fight that temptation and win.

First, Satan's strategy (temptation) is stirring up.

Look at Acts 21:27 – “When the seven days were nearly over, some Jews from the province of Asia saw Paul at the temple. They stirred up the whole crowd and seized him.” Apostle Paul accepted the counsel of James, the leader of the church in Jerusalem, and all the elders, entered the temple with the four Nazarites who took vows, paid various sacrifices for them, and participated in their sacrifices, showing how thorough and pious he was. When the very day that definitively shows the truth was right before our eyes, the Jews from Asia for the Feast of Pentecost saw Paul in the temple and urged all the crowd to arrest Paul (Sang-seop Yoo). How, then, did these Jews from Asia provoke the whole crowd in the temple? They did not hesitate to make false claims about the Apostle Paul. Those false claims can be summarized in two parts (Yoo):

(1) The first false claim was that Paul was teaching everywhere against the Jews, the Law, and the Temple.

Look at Acts 21:28a – “shouting, "Men of Israel, help us! This is the man who teaches all men everywhere against our people and our law and this place.” This argument was enough to stir up the Jews. The reason is because it was the claim related to Jewish identity. In other words, since the Law and the Temple (Jerusalem Temple) were fundamental factors in determining their identity for the Jews, claiming that the Apostle Paul was a teacher against the Law and the Temple (Jerusalem Temple) was a worthy argument enough to provoke the hearts of all Jews and anger them.

(2) The second false claim was that Paul had brought even Greeks into the temple area and defiled the holy place.

Look at Acts 21:28b-29: “And besides, he has brought Greeks into the temple area and defiled this holy place. (They had previously seen Trophimus the Ephesian in the city with Paul and assumed that Paul had brought him into the temple area.)” At that time, the temple had a court of Levites, a court of Israelite men, a court of women, and a court of the Gentiles. But they claim that the Gentiles crossed the boundary wall and entered through the women's courts and the Israelite men's courts, saying that Paul had committed this great sin. At that time, according to the historian Josephus, there was a warning on the wall of the border, which warned that if strangers crossed the border, they would be killed. Dr. Sang-seop Yoo says: ‘It was a serious crime to be executed immediately for a foreigner to enter a woman's yard. And if you went beyond this and even enter the yard of an

Israeli man, then you could easily guess how serious the situation was' (Yoo). However, this was not an argument based on the fact. But the Jews who were Paul's opponents from Asia speculated on it (v. 29) (Yoo). They must first confirm whether it was true or not, and then said it. But they just stirred up all the Jewish men who were in the courtyard of the Israeli men in the temple to arrest Paul. The Apostle Paul had this experience already at Iconium (Ch. 14). When he and Barnabas went to Iconium and went into the Jewish synagogue as usual and preached the gospel, not only he experienced that a great number of Jews and Gentiles believed (v. 1), but also disobedient Jews, who refused to believe stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brothers (v. 2). So they mistreated Paul and Barnabas and tried to stone them (v. 5).

How pathetic and frustrating is this? However, I think this is also happening in the church of this age in which we live. In other words, I think there are people in the church who, like the Jews from Asia, make false claims to stir up the members of the church. It's not based on facts, but just speculation and making claims about people they hate and dislike. Thus, they eventually inspire the people around them to form their own side and form a group. So the Bible Proverbs 16:28 says this: "A perverse man stirs up dissension, and a gossip separates close friends." Considering the Bible verse "When words are many, sin is not absent" (10:19), there may be many instances in the church where babblers in the church keep making statements that are not based on facts and provoke other members into quarrels in the church. It is because the church listens to the lies of the devil. This is because the devil keeps emphasizing that they have different thoughts and stir them up to fight. Satan keeps stirring us up to do evil. How does he do this? In Genesis 3, just as the crafty serpent provoked Adam by repeatedly saying, 'If you eat this fruit, you will become like God,' Satan keeps urging us to exercise our will to assert it. That is why Satan makes us to be the center of our lives, and keeps urging us to live our own life, pursuing our own interests, and to achieve our own life and our happiness by relying on our own strength and ingenuity, that is, our own resources' (Internet). We must not succumb to Satan's temptations due to the quality of this conflict and break the peace and order of the church by constantly making claims in the church. Rather, we must diligently build up the church, the body of the Lord, as the Spirit stirs up our hearts as in Haggai 1:15, not Satan's stirring up.

Second, Satan's strategy (temptation) is provocation.

Look at Acts 21:30 – "Then all the city was provoked, and the people rushed together, and taking hold of Paul they dragged him out of the temple, and immediately the doors were shut." In the end, the Jews from Asia seized Paul in unsubstantiated speculation and eschewed his assertions, which in turn provoked all the Israeli men in the temple. Therefore, the whole city of Jerusalem was in a commotion, and the people ran and gathered Paul, captured Paul, and dragged him out of the temple. And in verse 31, Paul was brought out from the courts of Israel, through the courts of women, and into the courts of the Gentiles, and was on the brink of death. The people were beating Paul with the intent to kill him until the commander of the Roman cohort came with the centurions and the soldiers (v. 32) (Yoo). As a result of the urge of the Jews from Asia, the entire city of Jerusalem was in confusion (v. 31). I think it's still the same. We see and hear things that stir people up in the church and cause the whole church to make confusion and commotion even now, here

and there in the church. But the people who make the church loud and noisy by that stir up don't seem to know that they are the cause of the problem. Rather, they undermine the peace of the church by making assumptions that they are right and the other person is wrong. At the same time, they accuse the other party, not themselves, who are responsible for breaking the church's peace and making noise. The Apostle Paul also had this experience. In Acts 16, when the Apostle Paul was going to a place of prayer in Philippi, he met a female servant possessed by a fortune-telling demon (v. 16). When he brought out a demon in the name of Jesus Christ (v. 18), the slave girl's owner realized that their hope of making money was gone (v. 19). So they brought them before the magistrates and said, "These men are Jews, and are throwing our city into an uproar" (v. 20). In the end, the owners of this demon-possessed girl seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to face the authorities (v. 19) and claimed that Paul and Silas were making a lot of commotion and provocation in the city. There are, like these owners, people in the church who are stir up, uproar, and provoke because of financial problems. We must be on guard against the commotion or provocation, which is this second Satan's temptation. And we must do our best to keep order in the church. Our God is not a God of disorder. The Bible 1 Corinthians 14:33 says, "... God is not a God of confusion but of peace" Therefore, we must carry out the work of peacemaking in the church.

Third, Satan's strategy (temptation) is rumor.

Look at Acts 21:31 – "While they were seeking to kill him, a report came up to the commander of the Roman cohort that all Jerusalem was in confusion." Here, the word "a report" is translated as 'a rumor' in the Korean Bible. When the Jews from Asia stirred up all the Jewish men in the temple and caused a commotion and provocation in the city of Jerusalem, and eventually dragged Paul out of the temple and tried to kill him, the report (rumor) came up to the commander of the Roman cohort that all Jerusalem was in confusion (v. 31). So, the commander hurriedly went with soldiers and centurions (v. 32), and ordered that Paul be arrested and bound with two chains (v. 33). After that, when the commander asked who he was and what he had done (v. 33). "But among the crowd some were shouting one thing and some another" (v. 34). When he could not find out the facts because of the uproar, he ordered him to be brought into the barracks (v. 34).

Do you know how fast the rumors spread? I found this interesting article to share: 'There are people who have analyzed the speed at which rumors spread through mathematical calculations. The speed at which rumors spread is beyond our imagination. Suppose a man shows up at 8 in the morning in a small town of 30,000 people with startling rumors. He tells the news to just three people. Let's say it takes about 15 minutes to spread this rumor. Then, at 8:15 in the morning, the four people in the city know about this rumor. The three people who hear the rumors each tell the story to the other three friends. Again, it takes 15 minutes here.

Number of people who know the rumor by 8:30: $4+(3 \times 3) = 13$ people

Number of people who know the rumor by 8:45: $13+(3 \times 9) = 40$ people

Number of people who know the rumor by 9:00 : $40+(3 \times 27) = 121$ people

Number of people who know the rumors by 9:15: $121+(3 \times 81) = 364$ people

Number of people who know the rumors by 9:30 : $343+(3 \times 243) = 1,093$ people

Number of people who know the rumor by 9:45: $1,093+(3 \times 729) = 3,280$ people

Number of people who know the rumors by 10:00: $3,280+(3 \times 2,187) = 9,841$ people

Number of people who know the rumors by 10:15: $9,841+(3 \times 6,561) = 29,524$ people

After all, people in small towns will know this rumor before two and a half hours. ... It could be faster than this in Korea. The speed of the Internet spread is probably beyond imagination. So maybe in two hours it can reach a few million people. Also, the speed of the rumors is amazing. It seems to be true that silent words go a thousand miles (Internet).

We must not spread malicious rumors in the church. When I looked on the Internet, I saw an article under the title of 'A letter of advice and warning against illegal groups who call themselves 'Queen Samo' for the establishment of a healthy and upright church,' dated December 9, 2007 by a session of a Korean American immigrant church in the United States. Looking at the contents of the article, there is an article under the sub-topic 'Background of counsel and warnings against self-proclaimed Queen-samo,' and it is divided: 'The session of this church has been formed by a small group of self-proclaimed Queen-samo' that has been around for the past 1 year and 6 months. We have evidence for all the facts about spreading malicious rumors and sending discordant documents to common members, and as a result of directly asking the members who are judged to be related, not a single member of the 'Queen Samo' member admitted to being a member. They have spread malicious rumors in the church and framed certain members or ministers without any basis. But it is true that they have been waiting for the conversion of the minority group for the sake of the exhortation of love and the oneness of the church. As a result of the investigation, their words and actions were only malicious and baseless plotting to the extent that they could not even be called saints' (Internet). Rather, like the church in Antioch (Acts 11:22), our church should be a well-known church. I earnestly hope and pray that the church will become a church where many people can believe in Jesus and come back to Him because the power of God is with them (v. 21). Also, I hope and pray that our church will become a church where the word of our faith spreads everywhere, just like the church in Thessalonica.

Fourth and last, Satan's strategy (temptation) is violence.

Look at Acts 21:35 – “When he got to the stairs, he was carried by the soldiers because of the violence of the mob.” When Paul was being arrested and beaten by the people after hearing the rumors of commotion and confusion, the commander of the Roman cohort arrived with the centurions and soldiers (v. 32) and asked, ‘Who was Paul and what he had done?’ (v. 33) Then he ordered that Paul be brought into the barracks first because the truth of the incident could not be grasped due to the commotion (v. 34). So, when Paul got to the stairs, he was carried by the soldiers because of the violence of the mob (v. 35). The soldiers recognized this unusual sign because a crowd of people followed them and cried out for Paul to be removed [It is not “Away with him!” but ‘You commander, get rid of him!’] (Yoo). This call was to pressure the commander to remove Paul. Considering that the Jews in Jesus' day cried out to the governor Pilate, ‘Get rid of this man and set Barabbas free’ (Lk. 23:18), we see the Apostle Paul suffering like Jesus. The ultimate

purpose of this Satanic temptation, “violence,” is to get rid of people. Until this goal is achieved, Satan and his servants are constantly tempting and committing evil.

Can church members fight and quarrel with each other and become violent? It seems like saying bad words is nothing. It's really frustrating when I hear church officials blaspheme without hesitation in the church or especially outside the church. At one church, even at the church board meeting, I heard that the elder was angry and cursed and quarreled. However, if we go further and use violence outside the church like the bloody people of the world, how can we explain such violent behavior as a believer in Jesus? Last week, when I saw the news on Yahoo's Internet version of Korea, I remember reading an article about three pastors who were drinking at a drinking party and assaulted a man, who seemed like a non-believer, who asked them how the pastors could drink. I was speechless. We Christians must not use verbal abuse and violence. We should never be the aggressors. Rather, we should remember that even if we are assaulted and suffer, our mission is to suffer for the Lord in addition to the mission of preaching the gospel in fulfilling the Lord's will.

Satan is attacking the church. Satan is trying to stir up commotion within the church and provoke the church. He is trying to destroy the peace and order of the church by spreading even malicious rumors. Furthermore, Satan even forsake (remove) the children of God from the community by verbal abuse and violent behavior. What should we do? We must resist this satanic attack. In other words, we must counter his tactics: stirring up, provocation, rumor and violence. I hope and pray that the church that is the body of our Lord will be a church with order, a church with peace, a church with the word of faith, and a church with love.

With the hope of becoming a church that triumphs over adversity,

James Kim

(While being cautious of rumors and disturbances)

The Testimony of Paul

[Acts 21:37–22:21]

Have you ever heard the testimony of Elder President Myung-bak Lee? ‘TV Testimony: Elder Myung-bak Lee's Perspective’ (Internet): ‘I have come here today in the capacity of a church elder. I would like to confess something before you. In truth, there is much lacking in my ability to testify about my faith. I want to say that I am here because of our mother. ...’ As he begins to speak, sharing his testimony, he says, ‘Our mother used to kneel down with all six brothers every morning at 4 a.m. and pray. When it was 4 a.m., she would pray, and then she would go out again for morning prayer. She would come back and go out for her daily routines. Even though it was tough, she never missed a day. Our mother's prayers were always the same. She thanked God and prayed for the stability of the country. When I was young, I didn't understand my mother's prayers. She prayed for those who did not believe in Jesus, and then she prayed for the brothers.’ I think our mother's prayers were great. We need to pray for those who do not believe in Jesus.

We have already meditated on how Satan, using Jews from Asia, manipulated the situation to bind Paul in ‘Paul's Bond in Asia.’ After a brief review, (1) they incited people by making baseless false accusations against Paul, causing a ‘commotion’ among the men in the courtyard of the temple. (2) The Jews from Asia, together with agitated Jewish men, eventually caused ‘uproar’ within the Jerusalem temple, creating a disturbance. (3) We learned that Satan's strategy involved spreading malicious rumors. (4) The crowds ‘persecuted’ Paul. Eventually, following the commander's orders, Paul attempted to enter the Roman garrison camp. At that moment, while Paul was conversing with the commander (v. 37), he was about to be killed (v. 32) by the Jewish mob seeking his death (v. 36). He requested permission to speak to the Jewish crowd so that he could explain himself (v. 39). The commander granted Paul's request, and as a result, Paul spoke to the crowd in Hebrew, directly addressing them (v. 40). Paul's speech was, in essence, his testimony.

Therefore, today, I want to meditate on Paul's testimony based on Acts 21:37-22:29, divided into three parts under the title "The Testimony of Paul." I hope and pray that by listening to Paul's testimony today, you and I will have the opportunity to accept Jesus as our Savior, receive forgiveness of sins, and obtain eternal life.

First, the first part of Paul's testimony is 'Before Meeting Jesus' (Acts 22:3-5).

In the first part of Paul's testimony, he explained to the Jewish crowd who he used to be in the past in four ways.

(1) Paul revealed that he was a Jew and a citizen of Tarsus in Cilicia (v. 3).

Emphasizing that he was a Jew like the gathered crowd, he mentioned that he was not from a small town but was born in Tarsus in Cilicia. At that time, Tarsus was a significant city, and during the Roman Empire, it served as the political capital of the region of Cilicia and Asia Minor. Tarsus was also a city at the center of scholarship and culture in the Hellenistic and Roman periods, alongside Athens and Alexandria. Paul had reasons to take pride in this background.

(2) Paul stated that he grew up in Jerusalem (v. 3).

Although Paul was born in Tarsus, he highlighted that he received his education in Jerusalem, emphasizing his identity as a zealous Jew (one who served God through the Law). Jerusalem was important for Jews then and now, and by saying he grew up there, Paul emphasized his significance as someone who valued Jerusalem just like the Jewish crowd listening to him.

(3) Paul said that he was thoroughly educated in the strict manner of the Law of his ancestors according to the school of Gamaliel (v. 3).

At that time, Gamaliel was a respected figure representing the Hillel school, one of the two major schools of thought in Judaism (Yoo). In the culture of Gamaliel, Paul stated that he received a rigorous education in the Law according to the tradition of the Pharisees. Paul identified himself as a Pharisee concerning the Law (Phil. 3:5).

(4) Paul stated that, like the zealous Jews devoted to the collected laws of Moses, he was also "a person zealous for God" (Acts 22:3).

To what extent he was zealous, Paul (Saul) mentioned that he persecuted Christians, going

so far as to kill them, and had both men and women believers arrested and thrown into prison (v. 4). Paul, who was fervent for the laws of Moses, went to Damascus, bound the Christians there, and brought them to Jerusalem with the intention of punishing them. He was someone who was fervent for the laws of Moses, as demonstrated by his actions. He described himself as "advancing in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people, so extremely zealous was I for the traditions of my fathers" (Phil. 3:6). He declared, "And the chief priests and the whole council of elders can bear me witness" (Acts 22:5).

Paul's confession about his past, before meeting Jesus, can be summarized in one sentence: he acknowledges that, just like the zealous Jews devoted to the collected laws of Moses who sought to kill him, he also used to be like that in the past. The narrative of his past includes a passionate dedication to the laws of Moses, even to the extent of opposing the gospel of Jesus Christ and persecuting those who believed in Jesus, going so far as to "even put them to death" (v. 4). Reflecting on how his past story would have sounded to the enraged Jews, who were eager to kill him, one can only imagine. Paul was well aware that the zealousness of the Jews listening to him was not a genuinely righteous zeal, but rather a distorted one. In essence, Paul confessed the narrative of his life before meeting Jesus in 1 Timothy 1:13, saying, "formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent. But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief." In unbelief and ignorance, Paul was a blasphemer, persecutor, and an insolent opponent in his past.

Second, the second part of Paul's testimony is 'The Moment I Met Jesus' (Acts 22:6-16).

The place where Paul encountered Jesus was right near Damascus, where he almost arrived, and there he encountered the resurrected and ascended Jesus on the Damascus road (21:6). Saul, who had been threatening and breathing murder against the followers of the Way (9:1), was on his way to Damascus to arrest both men and women, binding them and bringing them to Jerusalem, when suddenly "a great light from heaven shone around me" (22:6-7), and he heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" At that moment, Saul asked, "Who are you, Lord?" and Jesus replied, "I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting" (v. 8). The voice of the Lord was heard by Saul alone among the people traveling with him (v. 9). At the moment of hearing this voice, all of Saul's theology collapsed completely. This moment marked the dramatic turning point where Saul, the persecutor, became a proclaimer willing to risk his life for Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Saul proclaimed, "I received salvation by the glorious Lord on the Damascus road and was called to carry the gospel of Jesus Christ to the ends of the earth" (Yoo). In other words, Saul's conversion and calling took place right here on the Damascus road. Having experienced repentance (conversion) and receiving his mission (commission) from the glorious Lord on the Damascus road, Paul, as he was later known, obeyed the Lord's command with the help of his companions, entering Damascus (vv. 9-11). There, he met a man named Ananias, "a devout man according to the law, well spoken of by all the Jews who lived there" (v. 12). This fact, revealed in Paul's testimony, served as a statement that could give credibility to Paul in

the eyes of zealous Jews devoted to the law. The reason is that after meeting Jesus on the Damascus road, Paul encountered Ananias, who was well-spoken-of by all the Jews in Damascus as a devout man according to the law (Park). Ultimately, Paul's eyes, which had been closed, were immediately opened through Ananias (9:18), and through Ananias, he learned that God had chosen him and intended to fulfill His will through him (v. 14). In other words, God intended to make Paul a witness for Jesus Christ before all people (v. 15). After that, Ananias urged Paul not to hesitate any longer, to get up, be baptized, and call on the name of the Lord to wash away his sins (v. 16). In the end, Paul received forgiveness of sins through faith in Jesus Christ and obtained eternal life.

Paul meeting Jesus was entirely by the grace of God. In other words, Paul was someone who had absolutely no qualifications to meet Jesus, but the Lord, in His love, chose him before the foundation of the world and appeared to him on the Damascus road to use him greatly. It was an amazing act of God's grace to appear to Paul, who was a persecutor, blasphemer, and an insolent opponent, opposing Jesus and His gospel, and persecuting Christians. The transformation that Jesus brought to Paul is a testament to the incredible grace of God. Paul, who experienced this grace, confessed in 1 Timothy 1:14, "And the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus." Also, consider Paul's confession in 1 Corinthians 15:10 - "...I am what I am by the grace of God." I hope and pray that this grace upon you, your family, and all your relatives.

Third and last, the third part of Paul's testimony is 'After Meeting Jesus' (Acts 22:17-21).

After meeting the resurrected Jesus on the Damascus road through the grace of God and having his eyes opened by Ananias, Paul's first action was to return to Jerusalem and pray at the temple (v. 17). This fact contrasts with what the Jews who were now plotting to kill Paul might have been thinking. The Jews who were planning to kill Paul likely believed the false accusations made by Jews from Asia, claiming that Paul was defiling the holy temple (21:28). However, Paul was not someone who defiled or despised the temple. Instead, after encountering Jesus on the Damascus road, he underwent a transformation and went into the temple to pray to God (22:17). While Paul was praying in the Jerusalem temple, he heard the Lord's voice during a trance. In essence, the Lord's message was a brief directive for Paul to quickly leave Jerusalem and go to the Gentiles as a missionary (vv. 18-21) (Park). Knowing that the Jews in Jerusalem would not listen to Paul's testimony (v. 18), the Lord intended to send him far away to the Gentiles to testify to the gospel (v. 21). Interestingly, in today's passage (vv. 19-20), we see Paul's reaction to hearing the Lord's voice. In other words, Paul recounted to the Lord the things he had done in the past in Jerusalem, such as imprisoning and beating those who believed in the Lord, even approving of and participating in Stephen's death. From one perspective, Paul seemed to believe that, just as he knew the Jews in Jerusalem well, if he testified about the gospel to them, they would listen. Therefore, Paul told the Lord that he would proclaim the gospel to the Jews. However, the Lord twice commanded Paul to go to the Gentiles (vv. 18, 21). The reason was that the Lord knew the Jews would not listen to Paul's gospel testimony (v. 18).

At times, theories that humans consider right may not align with the will of the Lord. According to the words of the Lord, the Jews would not respond to Paul's preaching of the gospel (v. 18). Following such a divine decree, Paul began to minister as an apostle to the Gentiles. Here, we find a fundamental principle: the preacher, in choosing where to proclaim the gospel, must forsake personal judgment and proceed solely in accordance with the guidance of the Lord (Park). It is a truly reasonable statement. To forsake personal judgment and advance according to the guidance of the Lord is necessary. We might think like Paul: "I know that person very well and am close to them. If I introduce Jesus to them and preach the gospel, they will surely listen." Such thoughts can lead to self-satisfaction and pride if the person responds to the gospel and leaves the church according to our expectations. In other words, it is easy to fall into the trap of pride, thinking that we have achieved something. However, reality often does not align with our expectations. The gospel testimony and fruitfulness do not easily come about as we think. We come to realize that people's hearts do not move as easily as we imagine. That is, we recognize that without God's help, without the work of the Lord, those born of the flesh cannot receive Jesus as their Savior through the gospel we proclaim. We need to obediently follow the Lord's words, pray in faith, and exert our efforts in witnessing to the gospel.

I personally have a book that I still cannot forget. The book is 'My Cup Overflows' by Yeon-hee Jung, a novel about a fellow believer named Ui-soon Maeng who died during the Korean War on June 25. The book deals with the suffering of a young man who lived through the tragic era of the Japanese colonial period, a time of hardship and tragedy for our nation. Born in the late stages of the Japanese colonial era in a relatively prosperous and well-off family in Pyongyang, Ui-soon Maeng was a young man who grew up without much difficulty, except for the pain of national colonization. Just as he graduated from middle school, his beloved sister's death, news of his brother's sacrifice as a soldier shortly thereafter, and the family's move southward after being duped of all their possessions due to the Communist regime established in the North after liberation, brought about a sudden collapse of their once flourishing life. Subsequent events, including the sudden death of his mother due to a stroke, the death of his sister for no apparent reason, and the inexplicable journey of his life, continue. During the Korean War, as he traveled southward, he was misunderstood as a communist spy and imprisoned in a POW camp, adding to the tragic aspects of his life. Despite having the opportunity to be released after the efforts of some friends following the war, he refused it, considering the place a mission field given by God. While ministering forcefully in the worst communist POW camp, he collapsed in his late twenties, reciting Psalms 23, "My cup overflows," concluding his life.

Wishing that through my testimony and yours, the gospel of Jesus Christ will be proclaimed, and His name will be exalted.

James Kim

(Not forgetting that I am not only a convert but also commissioned)

The Reactions of Those who Hear the Testimony

[Acts 22:22-29]

Have you ever heard a testimony? I cannot forget the movie 'Atom of Love' that I watched in elementary school in Korea. Directed by Dae-jin Kang in 1977, the movie portrayed the life and faith of Pastor Yang-won Son. After watching the movie, not only I but also many people in the theater were deeply moved, and I still remember the collective sobbing. Reflecting on why we cried so much, it was because I was impressed by Pastor Son's life as he opposed ancestral worship, endured imprisonment, and faced hardships. Particularly, I was moved by the life of Pastor Son, who, amid the ideological confrontation in the prison, considered the young man who lost his sons and even killed his children. I was deeply touched by Pastor Son's life, where he loved and forgave the communist adversary, who was the 'enemy' responsible for the death of his own children, with Christ's love. I aspire to live such a life and face such a death. A life and death that reveal the love and forgiveness of Jesus ... a life and death that truly testify to Jesus.

We have already heard "The testimony of Paul" (Acts 21:37-22:21). We have meditated on his life before meeting Jesus, the moment he encountered Jesus on the road to Damascus, and what happened afterward, focusing on Acts 21:37 to 22:21. Today, we want to consider the reactions of the people who heard Paul's testimony in Acts 22:22-29 and receive the lessons that God provides. I hope and pray that we all may receive the lessons and live lives worthy of being witnesses to Jesus.

First, the reaction of the Jews who heard Paul's testimony.

Look at today's passage in Acts 22:22-23: 'Up to this word they listened to him. Then they raised their voices and said, 'Away with such a fellow from the earth! For he should not be allowed to live.' And as they were shouting and throwing off their cloaks and flinging dust into the air.' Even

before Paul could finish his testimony, the Jews who were listening tried to interrupt him. They shouted, 'Away with such a fellow from the earth! For he should not be allowed to live.' In other words, the Jews threw off their cloaks and threw dust into the air, indicating their intention to stone Paul to death. Why did the Jews want to kill Paul? The reason is that Paul equated Gentiles with Jews. In other words, the Jews wanted to kill Paul because he declared that Gentiles could also partake in the blessings of Messiah's salvation (Park). The Jews, who boasted in the law and despised Gentiles without the law, could not tolerate Paul's statement that even Gentiles could participate in the blessings of salvation. In their eyes, only they, the chosen people, could partake in the blessings of God and the salvation of the Messiah. Paul's words, asserting that even Gentiles could partake in these blessings, angered the Jews, leading them to attempt to stone him to death.

When thinking about the reckless actions of these Jews, one wonders why they committed such reckless acts. I believe the answer lies in ignorance. The Jews who wanted to kill Paul were ignorant of God's plan of salvation. Although God had sent His Son Jesus to this earth to save the people He loved and chose from all nations (whether Jews or Gentiles), the Jews not only rejected Jesus but also persecuted and even killed those who followed Him. Ignorance led them to such reckless actions. We need to pay attention to the words in Hosea 4:6 – “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge; because you have rejected knowledge, I reject you from being a priest to me. And since you have forgotten the law of your God, I also will forget your children.” Ignorance results in reckless actions. The Jews who wanted to kill Paul did not know God's plan of salvation. Therefore, in their ignorance, they committed reckless actions, ultimately committing a sin that covered the glory of God. Today, we are facing a time when people are like 'a famine of hearing the words of the Lord (Amos 8:11). People hear God's words, but they do not listen. No, people reject sound teaching and, with itching ears, accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions (2 Tim. 4:3-4). Our world is filled with people who, despite hearing God's words, do not truly listen. People are turning their ears away from the truth to follow empty talk. We must not turn away from the truth; instead, we must quickly listen to God's voice. We should not be like those Jews who, though having ears, cannot hear the voice of God, becoming spiritually deaf. We must hear the voice of God. We should listen with an attitude (heart) that desires to obey. We must listen to God's voice conveyed through the Holy Spirit. Never should we become spiritually deaf like those who, even with ears, cannot hear God's voice. We must hear the voice of God. We should listen with an attitude (heart) that desires to obey. We should not approach hearing the word thinking we will decide whether to obey or not.

Second and last, the reaction of the Roman soldiers to Paul's testimony.

When the Jews, upon hearing Paul's testimony, began shouting and throwing off their cloaks, attempting to kill Paul, the commander of the Roman cohort ordered the soldiers to take Paul into the barracks first (v. 24). Subsequently, the commander instructed the soldiers to flog and interrogate Paul, seeking to understand why the Jews were vehemently opposing and shouting against him (v. 24). Therefore, the commander, along with the soldiers below him, attempted to interrogate Paul by binding

him with leather straps and preparing to flog him (v. 25). At that moment, Paul addressed the commander standing nearby, asking, 'Is it lawful for you to flog a man who is a Roman citizen and uncondemned?' (v. 25). At that time, it was permissible to use harsh interrogation methods on slaves or non-Roman citizens (Yoo). However, subjecting a Roman citizen to cruel torture before trial violated Roman law. Upon hearing Paul's words, the commander went to the centurion and learned that Paul was indeed a Roman citizen (v. 26). The commander then approached Paul and asked, 'Tell me, are you a Roman citizen?' (v. 27). When Paul affirmed, 'Yes,' the commander revealed that he had acquired Roman citizenship at a great price (v. 28). Paul then declared, 'But I am a citizen by birth' (v. 28). Upon learning that Paul was a Roman citizen, the soldiers who were about to interrogate him immediately withdrew (v. 29). The commander, realizing that he had bound a Roman citizen, became fearful due to the potential severe consequences of detaining and interrogating Paul without a formal trial (Yoo). Reflecting on the reaction of these Roman soldiers, they, too, acted out of ignorance. While they may have sought to understand why the Jews were shouting and attempting to kill Paul, they prematurely bound him and prepared to interrogate him without a clear understanding of whether he was a Roman or a Jew. Their reckless actions stemmed from their ignorance, not having a proper grasp of who Paul was.

When we hear the testimonies of fellow believers in the church, we must listen to the message that God intends to communicate to us through their testimonies. However, this message needs verification. In other words, the testimony of a fellow believer should be validated through observing their life. If, after graciously giving testimony, a brother conveys a different message to others in the church through their life, the credibility of their testimony is inevitably compromised. Like Paul, we should share our testimony with those who do not know Jesus, and the truth of our testimony should be evident in our lives. In essence, we are called to live a life that testifies and bears witness.

Both you and I are witnesses to Jesus. Through our testimonies, we are called to testify to Jesus and live a life as witnesses. Look at Acts 1:8 – “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” It is my hope and pray that we, holding onto the promise in Acts 1:8, come together in unity, fervently pray, and, filled with the Holy Spirit, live out a life of witness.

Praying that, while holding onto God's promises and coming together in unity for prayer,

James Kim

(Wishing to hear and obey God's voice through the testimonies of beloved fellow believers)

A Righteous Life of Faith

[Acts 22:30–23:5]

The world we live in is a distorted world. It deviates from the straight and righteous path that God has commanded. Despite deviating, it thinks that this twisted path is the right one. This world denies God's absolute truth and considers falsehood as the truth. Hearts are also crooked. Because the heart is crooked, words and actions are also crooked. In such a distorted world, how should we, as Christians, live? Paul admonishes, "so that you may become blameless and pure, 'children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation.' Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky" (Phil. 2:15). In this crooked and warped world, we need to live as blameless children of God, shining the light of Jesus. To do this, we must have a correct understanding of the Bible and live a righteous life of faith.

In today's passage, we see the commander wanting to know why the Jews were accusing the Apostle Paul. To find out, he ordered the release of Paul, summoned the priests and the entire council, and brought Paul before them (Acts 22:30). When Paul, standing before the council, looks intently at them, the dispute begins (23:1). Today, I want to focus on Acts 23:1-5 and draw three lessons on what a righteous life of faith is. I hope and pray that we can learn from the exemplary and righteous life of Paul, living uprightly in this distorted world in a way that is pleasing to God.

First, a righteous life of faith involves serving God with a clear conscience in all things.

Look at Acts 23:1 - "Paul looked straight at the Sanhedrin and said, 'My brothers, I have fulfilled my duty to God in all good conscience to this day.'" Boldly, Paul confessed before the assembled priests and council members that he had served God with a clear conscience in all things. In other words, he openly declared that he had served God honestly and truthfully without any reservation of conscience before God and people. Through Paul's exemplary life of serving God with an unburdened conscience, we are prompted

to ask ourselves a crucial question: 'Am I truly serving God with a clear conscience?' We need to regularly examine our consciences, and neglecting or discontinuing this practice would lead to our downfall. Once our conscience begins to be contaminated by worldly influences, distinguishing between truth and falsehood becomes difficult. A person can have a deceitful heart yet convincingly act as if it were truthful. However, the sincerity of the heart cannot be masked by falsehood; the truthfulness of the heart cannot be feigned.

We must discard hidden shameful deeds (2 Cor. 4:2). We should not conduct ourselves with cunning. No longer should we obscure the truth but exclusively present it, allowing each person's conscience to judge us in the sight of God. Can we truly recommend ourselves to the consciences of those around us by living a life that transparently reveals the truth? Paul encourages us to live such a life. He advises, "Hold on to faith and a good conscience" (1 Tim. 1:19). If there is any hidden shame in our consciences, we must confess and repent before God. In other words, we need to confess sins that have received the condemnation of our consciences immediately and repent, cleansing ourselves through the atoning blood, leaving no trace behind. Like Paul, we should strive to possess a clear conscience every day. Look at Acts 24:16 - "So I strive always to keep my conscience clear before God and man."

Second, a righteous life of faith despises hypocrisy.

Look at Acts 23:3 – “Then Paul said to him, ‘God will strike you, you whitewashed wall! You sit there to judge me according to the law, yet you yourself violate the law by commanding that I be struck!’” In this context, the expression "whitewashed wall" is explained as outwardly beautiful but filled with all sorts of dirty things (mud) (Yoo). In other words, it refers to a disparity between the outward appearance and the inner reality—an accusation of hypocrisy. When Paul claimed before the assembled council that he had served God with a good conscience (v. 1), Ananias, the high priest, ordered those standing near Paul to strike him on the mouth. Paul's response to Ananias is a rebuke, declaring him a hypocrite and warning of God's judgment. Ananias' outwardly beautiful appearance as a judge in adherence to the law contrasts with his inward violation of the law through the command to strike Paul (Yoo). Paul's words echo Jesus' rebukes against the religious leaders of his time, specifically the Pharisees. In Luke 11:39 and 11:44, Jesus criticizes the Pharisees, stating, "Now then, you Pharisees clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside you are full of greed and wickedness ... Woe to you, because you are like unmarked graves, which people walk over without knowing it." Jesus uses similar language to highlight the Pharisees' hypocrisy, describing them as appearing beautiful on the outside but filled with impurity within. He criticizes their outwardly impressive religious practices, revealing that God perceives the greed and wickedness hidden within their hearts. Augustine, addressing the Pharisees, referred to them as whitewashed tombs, emphasizing that their external righteousness was a facade hiding the corruption within. In conclusion, the Bible consistently condemns hypocrisy, emphasizing the importance of genuine, transparent devotion to God over outward displays of religiosity. We must heed the words of Jesus: “Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy” (Mt. 12:1). We should not strive excessively to appear righteous outwardly to people (23:28). Instead, we need to clean the inside first so that the outside will also be clean (v. 26). We must purify our souls through obedience to the truth (1 Pet. 1:22).

Third and last, a righteous life of faith involves being led by God's Word.

Look at Acts 23:5 - "Paul replied, 'Brothers, I did not realize that he was the high priest; for it is written: Do not speak evil about the ruler of your people.'" When Paul confessed before the council that he served God with a clear conscience, the person who had ordered him to be struck was rebuked with the words, "God will strike you, you whitewashed wall" (v. 4). The people standing by questioned Paul, saying, "Would you revile God's high priest?" (v. 4). Calvin suggests that when Paul claimed not to know Ananias was the high priest, it was a form of sarcasm. In other words, because of Ananias' abusive behavior, Paul could not recognize him as a high priest (Park). Ananias would have been wearing the high priest's robe and seated in the chair of the council president, making it unlikely that Paul, even with poor eyesight, would not have recognized the person giving the order as the high priest (Yoo). Rather, Paul's words indicate that he did not acknowledge Ananias as the high priest because of his unbecoming behavior (Yoo). Therefore, Paul's rebuke, in line with the command in Exodus 22:28, not to revile the ruler of your people, was not disobedient. His rebuke pricked the conscience of the hypocritical high priest Ananias, who, although appearing outwardly as a holy and devout figure in the high priest's attire, was inwardly filled with all kinds of greed and wickedness (Lk. 11:39).

To live a righteous life of faith, we need to be pierced by God's Word. For example, just as the people in Acts 2 were cut to the heart when the Spirit-filled apostle Peter proclaimed God's Word, asking, "What shall we do?" (Acts 2:37), we, too, need to listen to God's Word and allow it to pierce our hearts. Why is this piercing necessary? It is so that we may recognize the evil in our conscience (Heb. 10:22), confess and repent of our sins before the holy God. What kind of evil resides in our conscience? Those whose hearts and consciences are defiled (Titus 1:15) acknowledge God with their lips but deny him by their actions (v. 16). Such individuals are described as detestable, disobedient, and unfit for any good work (v. 16). Do these words pierce our hearts and consciences? To live a genuine faith life, we not only need the piercing of God's Word but also the obedience (submission) to it. We must strive to serve God in all things with a clear conscience, keeping hypocrisy, pretense, and external show far from us. We must also heed the guidance of God's Word.

In this twisted and rebellious world, you and I must live a righteous life of faith. Like Paul, we should serve God with a clear conscience in all things. Moreover, we must disdain hypocrisy and let ourselves be led by God's Word.

Sound doctrine, a righteous life of faith!

James Kim

(Living a truthful life while despising hypocrisy)

“Take courage!”

[Acts 23:6-35]

We have already reflected on how to live in this twisted world. In a nutshell, we have learned that we should lead a righteous life of faith (Acts 22:30-23:5). God has provided us with three teachings: (1) We should serve God in all things with a clear conscience; (2) We must disdain hypocrisy; and (3) We must be led by God's Word. Thus, through living a genuine faith life, we are to shine as blameless and pure children of God in the midst of a twisted and rebellious generation, revealing ourselves as lights in the world (Phil. 2:15).

Indeed, what is needed for us to manifest a righteous life of faith as lights in this dark and twisted world? We can consider seven essential elements:

- (1) **Calling:** There must be a sense of calling from God, knowing that He has called you and me.
- (2) **Conviction:** A foundational and fundamental assurance of salvation is necessary, and we should be confident in both our calling and God's will.
- (3) **Commitment:** Those obedient to the Lord's calling must dedicate themselves completely to the Lord, surrendering everything.
- (4) **Confidence:** Rather than having confidence in something within ourselves, we need confidence based on the fact that God is our God.
- (5) **Courage:** Obedience to the Lord's calling and fulfilling His will requires courage. We need to be bold, especially in the midst of challenges.
- (6) **Consistency:** Those who live fittingly according to the Lord's calling are faithful before God, consistently handling the Lord's work.
- (7) **Completion:** The one who receives the Lord's calling is the one who completes the work of the Lord.

Today, let's contemplate the fifth element, "Courage," from the seven necessary elements discussed in Acts 23:6-35, with a focus on verse 11 where the Lord stood by Paul and said, "Take courage!" In particular, we will reflect on two aspects: firstly, the situations where Paul couldn't muster courage, and secondly, why Paul had no choice but to be courageous, seeking lessons from God in the process.

First, what were the situations where Paul couldn't muster courage?

We can consider two situations:

- (1) The first situation Paul encountered was a great dissension between the Pharisees and the Sadducees within the council (vv. 6-10).

The cause of the intense conflict between these two groups was Paul's proclamation of the core gospel doctrine, the resurrection of the dead. In verse 7, when Paul cried out that he was on trial for his belief in the resurrection of the dead, a dispute arose between the Pharisees and the Sadducees, causing the assembly to be divided. The reason for the division was that while the Pharisees acknowledged doctrines such as the resurrection and the existence of spiritual beings (angels or spirits), the Sadducees rejected these beliefs, asserting that there is neither resurrection nor angel nor spirit (v. 8). Therefore, when the Pharisees claimed, "We find nothing wrong with this man. What if a spirit or an angel spoke to him?" (v. 9), they were expressing their support for Paul's position. The disagreement over doctrine escalated, leading to a great uproar (v. 9) and a great dissension (v. 10). Ultimately, with this doctrinal dispute causing significant turmoil between the Pharisees and Sadducees, the chief captain ordered Paul to be taken into custody, fearing that he might be torn apart by the crowd (v. 10). Isn't it intriguing? While the Pharisees and Sadducees had initially united against Paul and his proclamation of the gospel, they ended up in a major dispute over the resurrection doctrine, resulting in a perilous situation for Paul. Considering these circumstances, it becomes evident that, from a human perspective, it was not easy for Paul to summon courage in such a precarious situation.

- (2) The second situation Paul faced was the threat of death from more than forty Jews who had bound themselves by an oath not to eat or drink until they had killed him (vv. 12-24).

Considering the intense hatred these forty individuals must have harbored towards Paul, organizing a fast and conspiring to kill him, it seems that Paul gradually faced greater distress and danger. It's somewhat perplexing, from a common-sense perspective, to understand how, after receiving the comforting and admonishing words "Take courage!" (v. 11) from God, Paul encountered even greater peril, specifically a threat to his life. These more than forty individuals who formed the fasting conspiracy were not merely driven by simple emotions to kill Paul but engaged in an extreme expression of devotion stemming from their religious beliefs, making the situation severe (Yoo).

Consider the following analogy: women strapping bombs to themselves to commit suicide and kill U.S. soldiers. This illustrates an extreme expression of devotion arising from religious beliefs, not merely an emotional dislike for U.S. soldiers. How terrifying are these individuals? It cannot be anything other than a weapon of murder. The members of the fasting conspiracy, aiming to kill Paul, sought cooperation from the chief priests and elders (vv. 14-15). Informing them of their sworn alliance and request for cooperation, they stated, "The council is going to investigate Paul, so have him brought down to you under the pretext of further examination. We are ready to kill him on the way (Yoo). These individuals, members of the fasting conspiracy, even sought the assistance of the chief priests and elders, leaders in the Jewish religious hierarchy, to kill Paul. In a situation where his life was threatened in this manner, it is indeed reasonable to assume that, from a human perspective, Paul would have found it challenging to be courageous.

Now, consider situations that may be deemed as ones where we cannot muster courage. What circumstances evoke fear in your hearts? There could be various situations, but one example might be the fear one experiences when going to the hospital for tests. Particularly, the fear and anxiety about the possibility of having cancer when undergoing examinations like an MRI can be overwhelming. Everyone, at some point, experiences fear about death. Although one may have faith in resurrection, the fear of death, even if momentary, is likely to arise. In situations of such fearful nature, how can we muster courage?

Second, what was the reason Paul could be courageous?

The reason was because he received the word of God's promise. This promise is recorded in verse 11: "... just as you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome." In other words, the Lord promised Paul that, just as he bore witness to the gospel in Jerusalem, he would also bear witness in Rome. Ultimately, this promise enabled Paul to face the second situation, where he felt a greater threat to his life, without fear, but with courage. What we need to pay attention to here is how, in the two situations where the apostle Paul felt threatened, God remained faithful to His promise. In other words, how did the Lord fulfill His promise to Paul that he would testify to the gospel not only in Jerusalem but also in Rome? The answer to this question lies in the fact that the Lord protected and delivered Paul from danger. In the first situation, as we have already considered, when there was a great dissension between the Pharisees and the Sadducees due to a doctrinal difference, God used the Roman military tribune to rescue Paul from the precarious situation, transferring him to the barracks (Park). In the second situation, when more than forty individuals bound by an oath sought to kill Paul, God, through Paul's nephew (vv. 16-17), made their conspiracy known, and ultimately, having heard of the plot, the military tribune decided to safely escort Paul to Caesarea and prepared a large force (200 soldiers, 70 horsemen, and 200 spearmen) on an urgent basis (v. 23). He also instructed that a mount be provided for Paul to ride (v. 24). Furthermore, he ordered a letter to be written to Governor Felix (vv. 26-30), and under the command of two centurions, a force of 470 Roman soldiers accompanied Paul safely to Caesarea (Yoo). The centurion or military tribune spared no effort to protect Paul (vv. 17-19, 22), and all these arrangements were made possible by God's special intervention (Park). As you can see, the Lord faithfully kept His promise to Paul by intervening in these situations.

We must be courageous. Regardless of the difficult situations we may face, we must be courageous. The reason is that we have received the promises of the Lord. Our God is a faithful God. He is the God who faithfully fulfills the promises He has given us. His protection, guidance, and deliverance in every trial are the acts of a God who rescues us. Even though there are times when the Lord tells us to be courageous and gives us promises, we may encounter greater difficulties and painful situations than before. Even if we cannot fully understand why the Lord allows us to face more significant challenges after encouraging us to be courageous and giving us promises, we must believe with faith that we are always in the Lord's will. "In this world, you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world" (Jn. 16:33).

‘This I have told you, so that in me you may have peace. In this world, you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world. This I have told you, so that in me you may have peace. In this world, you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world. This I have told you, so that in me you may have peace. In this world, you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.’

[David and Jonathan's ‘Take Courage!’]

Wishing for strength and courage,

James Kim

(Praying to look to the Lord in all situations)

Paul Being Sued

[Acts 24:1-9]

These days, I often hear the word "sue" a lot. Of course, I hear it countless times through the news, but I also come across cases where lawsuits are filed within the church. When I hear news of lawsuits within the church, I sometimes think of the words in 1 Corinthians 6:5-6: "I say this to shame you. Is it possible that there is nobody among you wise enough to judge a dispute between believers? But instead, one brother takes another to court—and this in front of unbelievers!" As a member of the body of Christ, it reminds me that we should feel ashamed and embarrassed. It's disheartening to witness cases where there is no one with enough wisdom to settle disputes among believers, and the issues have to be taken to secular courts. Satan not only tempts unbelievers to sue the church, but he also tempts believers to sue the church. In doing so, Satan causes division within the church and seeks to destroy it.

In today's passage, Acts 24:1-9, we see Satan using the Jewish religious leaders, the high priest Ananias, some elders, and a certain attorney named Tertullus to bring charges against the apostle Paul. Today, I would like to reflect on this passage under the title "Paul Being Sued" and draw a few insights from the text.

First, who were the people suing Paul?

They were the high priest Ananias, some elders, and the lawyer Tertullus. Look at Acts 24:1 - "Five days later, the high priest Ananias went down to Caesarea with some elders and a lawyer named Tertullus, and they brought their charges against Paul." God had protected Paul in perilous situations by using the Roman military commander and even Paul's nephew. He had rescued Paul from danger. When Paul faced charges due to doctrinal differences among the Pharisees and Sadducees, God used the Roman military commander to intervene and transfer Paul to a safer place (23:10). Now, in the second situation where Paul faced a greater threat, the more than forty Jews who had vowed not to eat or drink until they had killed Paul were used by Satan (vv. 12-24). In this dangerous situation, Paul's nephew revealed the conspiracy to the Roman tribune, who took immediate action to protect Paul (vv. 16-32). God, in His special intervention,

protected Paul, fulfilling the promise given to him.

When thinking about lawyers like Tertullus, who try to achieve favorable outcomes through flattery and lies, I personally feel that human tongues can be truly cunning. In Psalms 52:2-4, David speaks about a deceitful tongue, saying, "Your tongue plots destruction, like a sharp razor, you worker of deceit. You love evil rather than good, falsehood rather than speaking the truth. You love every harmful word, you deceitful tongue." Reflecting on a tongue as sharp as a razor, loving evil over good, and preferring falsehood over truth, I can't help but think about how prevalent such deceitful acts are in today's legal system. However, Paul confesses in 1 Thessalonians 2:5, "You know we never used flattery nor did we put on a mask to cover up greed—God is our witness." Like Paul, we should not use flattery or deceitful tactics. Our goal is to proclaim the gospel, not to manipulate or deceive.

Second, what were the charges against Paul in the lawsuit?

The charges against Paul were brought by the high priest Ananias, some elders, and the lawyer Tertullus. Acts 24:5-6 states, "We have found this man to be a troublemaker, stirring up riots among the Jews all over the world. He is a ringleader of the Nazarene sect and even tried to desecrate the temple; so we seized him." The accusations were serious, including causing trouble, stirring up riots, being a ringleader of the Nazarene sect, and attempting to desecrate the temple. These charges aimed to portray Paul as a threat to both Jewish and Roman authorities.

In today's passage, Acts 24:5-6, we can see that the lawyer Tertullus accuses Paul before Governor Felix with four charges (Park):

(1) Paul is accused of being a "pestilent fellow."

Look at verse 5: "We have found this man to be a pestilent fellow." Here, "pestilent" means an extremely harmful presence that, like a contagious disease or plague, harms the peace of innocent people, akin to killing innocent lives. Tertullus' accusation suggests that due to Paul's presence, the peace enjoyed by the Jews under the governorship of Felix is jeopardized. Therefore, the implication is that as long as such a person exists, peace and stability in this land cannot be maintained, and it is appropriate to remove him (Yoo).

(2) Paul is accused of being a "mover of sedition."

Look at verse 5: "...a mover of sedition among all the Jews." Here, 'mover of sedition' or 'ringleader of a sect' is a term used when violent groups or factions cause unrest. Tertullus accuses Paul of being such a person (Yoo).

(3) Paul is accused of being "a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes."

Look at verse 5: "...a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes." This statement means that Paul is considered a leader of a group that follows Jesus of Nazareth. Tertullus refers to this group as a sect (Yoo).

(4) Paul is accused of "profaning the temple."

Look at verse 6: "He even tried to profane the temple." This was a serious offense among Jews. Tertullus accuses Paul of defiling their central place of worship, and this accusation is used to further condemn him (Yoo).

Ultimately, looking at the four accusations Tertullus brought against Paul before Governor Felix, we can see that the charges against Paul are fundamentally political and, secondarily, religious crimes. Tertullus argues that Paul is a serious criminal and should be punished accordingly (Yoo). However, as we know, Tertullus' accusations are false. They are merely the result of the malicious intentions of Jewish religious leaders who sought to eliminate Paul. After making these false accusations against Paul, Tertullus tells Governor Felix, "By examining him yourself you will be able to find out from him about everything of which we accuse him" (vv. 7-8). At that time, "the Jews also joined in the charge, affirming that all these things were so" (v. 9). In the end, not only the Jewish religious leaders, including the high priest Ananias and the elders, and the lawyer Tertullus but also the gathered Jews sided with them to remove Paul. Without presenting concrete evidence, Tertullus accused Paul with political and personal attacks, labeling him as a "pestilent fellow," a "mover of sedition," a "ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes," and one who "profanes the temple." In other words, Tertullus launched a personal attack on Paul. Without clear evidence, he attacked Paul personally, using insults (v. 5). When facing such personal attacks, what should we do?

These days, we often see indiscriminate personal attacks against specific individuals on the internet. Seeing various posts filled with insults, one might wonder what basis these individuals have for such words. Rather than engaging in objective debates, it seems like they pour out words fueled by emotions. I came across a post on a website that mentioned how Koreans are relatively weak in scientificity, rationality, accuracy, and rigor but have a strong inclination to be emotional, emotional, psychological, and popular. It seems like a reasonable observation. We should never engage in personal attacks like Tertullus. We should refrain from pouring out insults based on emotions without any evidence.

As I reflected on Paul, unjustly accused today, I thought about Jesus. Before Paul, Jesus faced trial on religious charges before the Sanhedrin court (Lk. 22:66-71). Moreover, a similar council unjustly accused Him of political charges before Pilate, leading to His crucifixion (23:1-5, 13-16) (Yoo). Reflecting on the experiences of both Jesus and Paul, it strikes me that the path we, as Christians, walk is a narrow and cruciform one. Let us journey on this road with faith, looking to our Lord, who is our joy, life, and hope. In the face of falsehood and flattery, let us strive to hate lies, love the truth, and live authentically. Stand firmly on the Word of God, unwavering, and walk faithfully in the path our Lord has trodden.

Even in the face of injustice, let us fix our gaze on Jesus and press on.

James Kim

(Walking faithfully upon the Word)

Paul's Defense

[Acts 24:10-23]

Last Sunday, we focused on Acts 24:1-9 under the title "Paul Being Sued." In this passage, Jewish religious leaders, including the high priest Ananias and elders, accused Paul before Governor Felix through their lawyer, Tertullus. They charged Paul with four accusations: (1) being a pestilent fellow (a troublemaker), (2) stirring up riots, (3) being a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes, and (4) attempting to profane the temple. Today, we will meditate on Acts 24:10-23, focusing on how Paul defended himself against these four charges before Governor Felix. In the course of Paul's defense, we have a valuable opportunity to learn about true faith and a life of faith.

First, Paul's defense asserted, 'I am not a troublemaker or a rioter.'

When given the chance to defend himself before Governor Felix, Paul did not resort to flattery but, unlike Tertullus, straightforwardly presented his case joyfully to the governor, the judge of the Jewish nation (v. 10). The content of his first defense addressed the first and second charges brought by Tertullus. Paul defended himself, stating that he was neither a pestilent fellow nor a rioter (vv. 11-13). Consider this: Paul had only been in Jerusalem for 12 days for the purpose of "worshipping" (v. 11). How could he disrupt the peace of Jerusalem in such a short time? It was practically impossible (Yoo). Paul informed Governor Felix that during his stay in Jerusalem, neither the Jewish leaders who accused him nor the Jews who agreed with him had witnessed him causing trouble in the temple, the synagogue, or anywhere in the city (v. 12). In other words, he confidently told Governor Felix that the Jewish leaders accusing him, including the high priest Ananias and the elders, as well as Tertullus and the Jews who supported their accusations, had no credible evidence or witnesses to substantiate their charges against him (v. 13). In reality, those who accused Paul and their representative Tertullus failed to present any evidence or witnesses to support their accusations against Paul (Yoo).

Paul, like a peaceful presence, did not disturb the tranquility of the Jewish temple, synagogue, or the city (the inner city). On the contrary, he was a bearer of the gospel of peace. In other words, Paul was a contagious Christian, spreading the message of peace. Ephesians 2:14 states that Jesus is the "Prince of Peace." He came to this earth and, through His death on the cross, reconciled us with God and with each other (v. 16). He brought peace to us (v. 17). Paul, as an apostle called and commissioned by Jesus, took on the ministry of spreading this peace. He proclaimed the gospel of peace, and this is what true faith looks like. Our faith life should involve embracing the ministry of spreading the gospel of peace as contagious Christians. Those who spread the peace of Jesus Christ can truly be called genuine believers.

Second, Paul's defense was, 'I am not a menace of heresy.'

This defense addressed the third charge brought by Tertullus, accusing Paul of being a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes. Paul stated to Governor Felix: "... I worship the God of my ancestors, believing everything laid down according to the law or written in the prophets. I have a hope in God—a hope that they themselves also accept—that there will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the unrighteous" (vv. 14-15). Here, Paul clarified that what the Jewish religious leaders and Tertullus called "heresy" was, in fact, not heresy but "the Way," meaning the true path of Christianity following Jesus Christ. Paul confessed that he served the God of his ancestors in accordance with the law and the prophets. He believed in everything laid down in the Jewish scriptures. He shared the hope, accepted by many Jews, in the resurrection of both the righteous and the unrighteous. This hope was none other than the hope of resurrection based on God's word—the hope of the resurrection of the righteous granted to him and us through the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. Because of this hope in resurrection, Paul confessed to Governor Felix that he always strove to maintain a clear conscience before God and people (v. 16).

Paul was not a menace of the sect of the Nazarenes. Christians who believe in Nazarene Jesus are by no means heretics. Rather, heresy pertains to groups teaching false doctrines that deny the divinity and humanity of Jesus. As a follower who believed in Jesus as the truth, the way, and the life, Paul exemplified true faith in three ways: (1) Paul's genuine faith involved serving the God of his ancestors. (2) Paul's true faith involved believing in the law and the writings of the prophets. Paul lived within the faith of trusting in God's word. In particular, he lived in faith, believing in the death and resurrection of Jesus. He had genuine hope in the true resurrection. Similarly, we must live in faith, believing in the death and resurrection of Jesus, just like Paul. This is what true faith looks like.

Third and last, Paul's defense was, 'I did not defile the temple.'

In today's passage, Acts 24:17-20, Paul defends himself against Tertullus's fourth charge that he intended to defile the temple. In his defense, Paul confesses to Governor Felix that he came to Jerusalem to bring alms and offerings for his nation, intending to offer peace offerings. He vehemently

denies Tertullus's claim that he stirred up riots or defiled the temple. As evidence, Paul points out that during his time in the temple, there was no crowd, no disturbance, and no evidence of any provocative actions on his part. He asserts that the Jews from Asia who accused him should have been present if his actions were as they claimed, but they were not, indicating the lack of credibility in their accusations. Furthermore, Paul challenges them to bring forth any evidence of wrongdoing on his part, confidently asserting his innocence before Governor Felix. Paul skillfully refutes Tertullus's false claims, showing his wisdom in defending himself against baseless accusations. Moreover, Paul urges Governor Felix to let any witnesses from Asia testify if they indeed have evidence that he defiled the temple. In doing so, Paul confidently asserts his innocence before Governor Felix, firmly convinced that he did not defile the temple.

Paul never defiled the Jerusalem temple. He made every effort to have a clear conscience before God and his own spirit. He possessed a pure conscience and lived a clean life. This is what true faith looks like. We should strive to have a pure conscience and lead a clean life.

Through Paul's defense, we have reflected on true faith life. True faith life involves spreading the peace of Jesus Christ, serving God, living by faith in God's word (especially faith in the resurrection), having a pure conscience, and leading a clean life. I hope and pray that you and I can live such a life.

Desiring to live with a pure conscience and a clean life,

James Kim

(Emphasizing the importance of wise argumentation)

The Moral Life of the Christians

[Acts 24:24-27]

I read an internet article that says, 'How to raise my child's morality index: Not only IQ (Intelligence Quotient) should be good. A child with a high MQ (Moral Quotient) will succeed.' Professor Robert Coles of Harvard University in the United States claims that people who know how to be good and considerate are successful. In today's and upcoming future society, the claim is that children with high MQ (Moral Quotient) are more successful than children with high IQ (Intelligent Quotient). Since the dawn of the information age the rapidly changing world requires lifelong education and self-development for all members of society. If this trend continues, after 10 years, we will not be able to have differentiated competitiveness from others with only our expertise. Although we are trying to improve our children's competitiveness by making them to do musical instruments, sports and other things so hard, but when we look around, there are quite many children who are doing all those things very well. In this time, it is the moral intelligence that exemplifies oneself and draws devotion and participation from others. The people with high moral intelligence know how to serve others and know how to succeed together. It is because morality is nothing more than learning the principles, norms, and values of seeing the world. Tracking people who have graduated from Harvard University in the past 60 years and the findings that school performance and success have nothing to do with it supports this. Looking at the faces of socially successful people, they were people of high morality, such as humorous people, considerate people, kind people, and people who judge right and wrong well (Internet).

The noticeable crisis in our days is the loss of morality. Morality is the exercise of the will to do what is right and not to do what is wrong. Even if we have to do what is wrong, feeling remorse in our conscience is proof that we still have moral roots. But we can't but be surprised to see that some people are doing wrongs without any hesitation. The New Testament states that such a case their consciences were seared with a branding iron (1 Tim. 4:2). Ethical theologian R. Niver said: 'The identity of the Christian is exposed by the morality of that life' (Internet). How is the morality of us, the Christians? How do the people

in this world look at us? We Christians must have a higher moral level than the people of this world. Otherwise, if we lower our moral level, then our Christian identity will eventually collapse.

When we look at Acts 24:24-27, we see Apostle Paul not only spoke about faith in Christ Jesus to the governor Felix (v. 24) but also spoke about the morality of those who believe in Jesus and His gospel. That morality is righteousness and self-control (v. 25). Here “righteousness” refers to the moral act of a person who believes the gospel rather than the justification of God who hears the gospel and believes Jesus Christ (Yoo Sang-sup). The moral conduct is that Governor Felix, as the governor of the Jews, must deal with everything fairly and correctly according to Roman law and Jewish customs (Yoo). So the Paul's exhortation would have stricken Governor Felix's conscience. The reason is because Felix was a person who had consistently run a far-reaching unjust reign (Yoo). I think that the Paul's exhortation applies to our Christian politicians as well. As Christian politicians who believe in Jesus, their moral behavior must be right and honest. They must never come near corruption. This Tuesday at 6:30 pm, I watched some news about Iraq on Channel 7. The news was about the best hospital in Iraq. But a doctor said that the hospital didn't have any basic medical equipment or drugs. Why was the hospital like this? The cause is because of corruption. Although the amount of oil in Iraq is extracted to some extent and earned by the oil every day, but because of the corrupt people among politicians, there is no supply of the most basic things to the Iraq's famous hospital. The corrupt politicians are stealing the money. Therefore, in Iraq, many people are not well treated in the hospital. Like this, corruption involves such corrupt political funds, or money. So Paul told Governor Felix about “self-control.” Here, “self-control” refers to the control and suppression of desires (Yoo).

Benjamin Franklin was born in a poor Puritan family and had only been in school for a year. But he was greatly influenced by his mother's education and another pastor's Puritan education. From an early age, he learned to work hard and read. He was the founder of the American Philosophy, the inventor of the lightning rod, and the first French ambassador. He left a saying, ‘Do not sell virtue to get property or sell freedom to gain power.’ In addition, he has defined 13 virtues since his childhood and has lived his life according to those virtues. The first of the virtues is ‘self-control’. Apostle Paul said that “All things are lawful, but not all things edify” (1 Cor. 10:23). The Bible considers “self-control” as the virtue's first priority. A person with self-control edifies and a person who edifies has self-control. S/he is neither tempted nor tempts others. Virtue in Greek has a ‘building a house’ meaning. Virtue has the power to build up. Americans have a proverb that says, ‘Although beauty is destroyed, virtue is not destroyed’ (Internet).

Why did Apostle Paul exhort Governor Felix on the matter of “self-control” in Acts 24:24-27? One of the reasons is that Governor Felix had a greed for material things. Governor Felix was hoping that Paul would offer him a bribe, so he sent for him frequently and talked with him (v. 26). Perhaps Governor Felix knew of the news that Paul had received an offering from the Gentile churches and had come to Jerusalem to help the Jerusalem church. I think that was why Felix approached Paul for the money. Indeed, if we as Christians want to live a moral life worthy of the gospel, we must abandon our love for money. As Paul said in 1 Timothy 6:10, we should not love money because the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. The

reason is because those who love money have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs (v. 10). Therefore, we should not love money. In order to live worthy of the gospel, we must throw away greed and be clean with money. Especially when it comes to the Christian politicians and the church leaders, they have to clean with money. Another reason why Apostle Paul exhorted Governor Felix on self-control was because of Felix's desire. According to Jewish historian Josephus, the corrupt, deputy governor Felix could not restrain his desires, but fell in love with the outstanding beauty of the Jewish woman, Drusilla (v. 24). So in order to marry her, Felix persuaded her through the Jewish magician Atmos from Gubro so that she could get rid of her husband and marry Felix (Drusilla was a Felix's third wife). In other words, Governor Felix was a man who had not been in control of sexual desire. Not only did he love money, he was a man who could not restrain his sexual desire. So Apostle Paul preached the gospel of Jesus Christ to Governor Felix, and said to him that in order to live worthy of His gospel, he had to have self-control. As Christians, we must listen to Apostle Paul's exhortation in order to have a right moral life. We must control our sexual desires. We must control our desires for money. We must be clean regarding money as well as sexually clean. In particular, we pastors should promote sexual purity. You may be familiar with many news as to how many pastors have not overcome sexual desires, and because of the scandals in the church that are covering the glory of God and hurting the hearts of the church members. As this world become more and more evil, it seems like we are losing self-control. Everyone, not just pastors, is losing self-control. As a result, we are losing our ability to restrain our desire to sin. Therefore, there are countless Christians who commit themselves to sin that they do not want.

If we, like Governor Felix, have lost our self-control and are doing injustice, we should also listen to the coming judgment that Paul preached to Felix. In Acts 24:25, the Bible tells us that Apostle Paul addressed Governor Felix not only righteousness and self-control but also "the judgment to come." Perhaps when he referred to future judgments, he spoke not only of the judgments that unbelievers will receive, but also of those who had done injustice and iniquity on earth. Also, he would have revealed that in the last days it would be Jesus Christ who would judge the whole world in righteousness (17:30-31). At that time, Governor Felix was afraid. Why was he afraid? It was because his sins had been exposed. The exhortation of Apostle Paul had no choice but to give fear to Felix, who didn't live up to the gospel, did injustice, and was living in sexual desire and was sinning against God. So Governor Felix stopped Paul's words and told him, "You may leave. When I find it convenient, I will send for you" (vv. 24:25). Here, the important question is: 'Did Governor Felix hear the exhortations of Paul's gospel, the counsel of the proper life of the gospel that is morally righteous and self-control and have changed? (vv. 24-25) As we can see in verse 26, after Governor Felix received the moral lesson about the gospel and the worthy life of the gospel from Paul, he was hoping that Paul would offer him the bribe under shock and fear. This shows that Felix refused to be changed. Also in verse 27, Governor Felix left Paul in prison, "wishing to do the Jews a favor." This shows that Felix didn't accept Paul's counsel. The corrupt politician who doesn't know God doesn't make it a problem to do unjust to others to solidify his position (Park).

How is our moral life as Christians? We as believers in the gospel must live our lives worthy of His gospel. We must do righteousness. We who are justified must live righteous lives. We must be right and

honest. Also, in this age of losing self-control, we must exercise self-control, one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:23). Whether it is greed or sexual desire, we must be self-control. We Christians must raise the Moral Quotient (MQ). Therefore, the gospel of Jesus Christ must be preached through our lips and through our lives.

Striving to elevate the level of ethical living,

James Kim

(While seeking the empowering of the Holy Spirit to restrain all kinds of desires)

The Christians who can Claim Innocence

[Acts 25:1-22]

There is a proverb that says, 'When we dust off, there is no one without dust.' This proverb means, if you want to catch a flaw, there is no person without the flaw. There is no one who will be flawless to those who are heartless and harsh in their attempts to find others' flaw. But how precious is it if there is nothing for them to catch your flaw? Those who live such a life are called innocent people. And the innocent people are those who are clear and clean and without greed (Internet).

In Acts 25:1-22 we see a man named Paul who is truly innocent, who is clear, clean and without greed. As Acts 24 tells us, the high priest Ananias with some of the elders and a lawyer named Tertullus, who were against the gospel and Paul, brought their charges against Paul before the governor (v. 1). They claimed that Paul was a real pest, a fellow who stirred up dissension among the Jews throughout the world, a ringleader of the Nazarene sect, and even tried to desecrate the temple (vv. 5-6). But Paul was innocent. He was not guilty of the charges of the Jewish religious leaders who had sought. Eventually, the Jewish religious leaders falsely claimed to remove Paul without any witnesses or evidence, so the trial was delayed, and the corrupt governor Felix was trying to get Paul to gain the hearts of the Jews rather than free Paul. So Paul was detained in a prison for about two years (v. 27). Paul, who exhorted corrupt governor Felix to the gospel and the moral life worthy of the gospel, was an innocent man without sins. Nevertheless, he was imprisoned in Caesarea for two years (v. 27). Then two years later in Acts 25, when Festus, the successor of governor Felix, went up to Jerusalem from Caesarea (v. 1), Paul was charged again by the chief priests and the leading men of the Jews (v. 2). The Jewish religious leaders accused Paul to the new governor, Festus, to find fault with Paul again with the intention of removing him. They tried endlessly to find fault with Paul and accused him in order to kill him. How scary were these people? They asked the new governor Festus to move Paul from Caesarea

to Jerusalem because they set an ambush to kill Paul on the way to Jerusalem (v. 3).

Two years ago, in Acts 23:12-13, more than 40 people formed a conspiracy and the plot of killing Paul. But even after two years, in Acts 25:3, it was surprising and sad that they were Jews who wanted to ambush to kill Paul on the way to Jerusalem. Indeed, the persistent efforts of the Jewish religious leaders and Jews to kill Paul are incredible. These were people who would not give up until they killed Paul. However, the new governor Festus didn't listen to the demands of the chief priests and the leading men of the Jews. Instead, he answered, "let the influential men among you go there with me, and if there is anything wrong about the man, let them prosecute him" (v. 5). Eventually, the Jewish religious leaders who tried to kill Paul went down from Jerusalem to Caesarea where Paul was and tried to bring many and serious charges against Paul which they couldn't prove (v. 7). In other words, the Jewish religious leaders accused Paul of many serious charges, but the accusations were unprovable (Yoo Sang-sup). Then Paul said in his own defense: "I have committed no offense either against the Law of the Jews or against the temple or against Caesar. . . . I have done no wrong to the Jews, as you also very well know" (vv. 8, 10). Paul insisted on his innocence before governor Festus and before the Jewish religious leaders, telling them he had committed no sin, religiously or politically. And Paul confidently said that even the governor Festus knew that he had done nothing wrong to the Jews and had not done any injustice to them. In fact, governor Festus knew Paul's innocence too. Several days later, when King Agrippa and Bernice came to Caesarea and paid their respect to Festus (v. 13), this was what Festus said to King Agrippa, revealing that he knew Paul was innocent: "When the accusers stood up, they began bringing charges against him not of such crimes as I was expecting, but they simply had some points of disagreement with him about their own religion and about a dead man, Jesus, whom Paul asserted to be alive" (vv. 18-19). The governor Festus knew that Paul had not committed any wrongdoing. He knew that the Jewish religious leaders brought accusation against Paul because of Paul's message of the death and resurrection of Jesus, the gospel of Paul. So Apostle Paul boldly said that if he was wrongdoer and had committed anything worthy of death, he didn't refuse to die (v. 11). He boldly claimed his innocence over his life.

Like Apostle Paul, we must be Christians who can risk our lives and boldly claim our innocence. We should not have anything to blame for those who are watching us and seeking our faults. Even if they want to dust off of us and try to find any dust from us, we should try our best to live an innocent life so that they cannot see any single dust in our lives. Is this possible? Doesn't it really sound impossible in our ears? As I asked this question, I thought about vacuum cleaners. As I thought the vacuum cleaner that absorbs and removes dust, I tried to apply it to my life of faith. I thought about how I can be like Paul who boldly asserted his innocence since I have unaccountable dusts in my life even if some people try to dust me off. Then the Spirit, I believe, reminded me of a spiritual vacuum cleaner that God already gave to me. That spiritual vacuum is the gospel of Jesus Christ. Just as the better the filter in the vacuum cleaner, the better it absorbs all the dust, the best filter of the spiritual vacuum cleaner that God already gave me is the blood that Jesus that was shed on the cross. Therefore, when I violate the Word of God and sin, and when the indwelling Spirit enables me to confess and repent

my sins, I experience the power of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the precious blood that He shed on the cross that removes (forgives) the sinful dusts in me and renews me. In that power of the gospel and of the precious blood of Jesus Christ, we must continue to be transformed and established as unblemished, pure, honest, innocent Christians. May such powerful work of the Lord and His gospel be full in us and in our church.

Relying on the blood of Jesus,

James Kim

(Hoping to be established as an honest Christian who can claim innocence)

‘He Ought Not to Live any Longer’

[Acts 25:23-27]

If you were a university professor, how would you deliver your 'last lecture'? I became interested when I read an article last Friday (July 25, 2008) on the front page of CNN.com titled "'Last lecture' professor taught others how to live." In the article, it discussed Randy Pausch, a 47-year-old professor at Carnegie Mellon University who, as a husband and father of three, was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer and given only 3 to 6 months to live. About a month later, in September 2007, he delivered his last lecture at Carnegie Mellon University, sharing not only the content of his final lecture but also the news of his impending death. Curious about the lecture, I went to YouTube.com and listened to the summarized content. The lecture was titled "Really Achieving Your Childhood Dreams," and he began by posing the question, 'If you were to give your last lecture, how would you do it?' One part of the lecture that resonated with me was when he talked about applying for a job at Disney, recalling his childhood dreams. After being rejected and emphasizing the importance of persistence, he stated: "The brick walls are there for a reason ... to show us how badly we want something, ... because the brick walls are there to stop the people who don't want it badly enough. They're there to stop the other people. Professor Pausch, despite facing rejection when attempting to fulfill his childhood dream of working at Disney, was an unstoppable individual. Ironically, he became even more famous while living with terminal cancer, inspiring many through interviews and, especially, his last lecture (which received 3.2 million views on YouTube after being uploaded last December). Upon learning last Friday that he had ultimately succumbed to pancreatic cancer, I couldn't help but think, 'Oh, that person should have lived longer.' However, individuals like Randy Pausch, who make us think, 'Oh, he should have lived longer,' are not the only ones we encounter in life. There are also those who make us think, 'Oh, that person probably shouldn't have lived longer.' For instance, if you read the news in Korea online these days, you may occasionally come across reports of gruesome murder cases. While reading such news, seeing the police searching for various parts of a mutilated corpse, you can't help but wonder how someone could kill another person in such a manner. Thoughts might even drift towards the idea that the person

who committed such a heinous act may not be someone worth keeping alive. Of course, life and death are under God's control. I believe that God has a purpose for everyone born on this earth. Yet, even with this understanding, when reading news about someone taking another person's life in such a brutal way, thoughts may lean towards, 'This person may not be someone worth sparing.'

Looking at today's passage, Acts 25:23-27, we see a loud cry from all the Jewish people declaring that there is a person who must not be allowed to live. That person is none other than Paul, who preaches the gospel of the living Jesus Christ. As we have already meditated, Paul was a blameless person. He strongly asserted his innocence, even to the point of risking his life (v. 11). He declared, "I have committed no offense, either against the law of the Jews or against the temple or against Caesar" (v. 8). He had not done any wrong to the Jewish people (v. 10). Despite this, Paul was marked as a person who must not be allowed to live by all the Jewish people. In today's terms, from the perspective of all the Jews at that time, Paul was like a condemned criminal. All the Jews wanted Paul to be sentenced to death. Therefore, they tried to bring Paul to trial by appealing to Governor Felix, then two years later to Governor Festus, and even organized a conspiracy to kill Paul without proper legal proceedings (Yoo). However, contrary to the viewpoint of these Jews, Governors Felix and Festus did not find any evidence of crime deserving death (24:22, 25:25). In particular, Governor Festus testified to King Agrippa, saying, "I found he had done nothing worthy of death" (v. 25). Governor Festus, having examined Paul in a trial initiated by the Jewish religious leaders, concluded that Paul had not committed any crime deserving death. However, since Paul had appealed to Caesar, making it impossible to send him to Caesar without a charge under Roman law, Governor Festus presented Paul before King Agrippa and the prominent officials of Caesarea today (25:27). Interesting, isn't it? On the one hand, people are shouting that Paul must not be allowed to live, while on the other hand, Governor Festus states that Paul has committed no crime deserving death. Which side is right? Of course, we know that Governor Festus is correct. We know that Paul did not commit any crime deserving the death penalty. Nevertheless, despite this fact, Paul was labeled by all the Jews as a person who must not be allowed to live.

It is reported that South Korea has essentially become a country that has abolished the death penalty since no executions have been carried out in the last ten years, as of December 30, 2007. However, about two months ago, there was renewed attention on the death penalty system when Suwon District Court sentenced Sung-hyun Jung (39 years old), accused of murdering three individuals, including An Yang-chodong elementary school students Hye-jin Lee and Ye-seul Woo, to death (Internet). Particularly, Governor Moon-soo Kim of Gyeonggi Province sparked a public debate on the death penalty system, stating, 'Our country, which does not execute those like Young-chul Yoo, who killed 21 people, is a country without human rights,' and emphasizing the need to execute the death penalty quickly (currently, there are about 60 death row inmates in Korea). According to a survey conducted by the opinion research institution 'Real Meter' on March 21, 2008, as reported on SBS's 'Eo-jun Kim's News and Joy,' the opinion that 'the death penalty should be abolished' was at 22.2%, while 'it should be maintained' was at 57.0%. The survey results indicated a surge in the opinion that the death

penalty should be maintained, following the An Yang elementary school abduction and murder case (Internet). However, among those campaigning for the abolition of the death penalty, a letter sent by former President Dae-jung Kim to the International Amnesty Commission (Amnesty) in June 2006 reveals that he supported the abolition of the death penalty for reasons such as the irreversible nature of executions, stating, 'There is no way to correct the wrong after the execution. ... We cannot completely exclude the possibility of prosecutors or judges making wrong judgments.' Former President Kim cited past cases of judicial murder in South Korea, such as the wrongful execution of individuals associated with the In-hyeok-dang incident. He argued, 'There are many cases in which dictators wrongly used the death penalty as a means to suppress and expel advocates of democracy and political opponents. ... In Korea, those involved with In-hyeok-dang were wrongly prosecuted and executed, and even I narrowly escaped the death penalty (Internet).

I am not attempting to engage in a debate for or against the death penalty here. However, I do believe that in this world, there are people who unjustly await the day to be put to death even though they are innocent. In Acts 25:23-27, all the Jews cried out that Paul was a person who ought not to live any longer (v. 24). Was Paul, who proclaimed the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ as he went about, truly a person not to be kept alive? Was he someone who deserved to be put to death? Reflecting on the Apostle Paul, who, as a prisoner condemned by all Jews, bears the stigma of being a condemned man, I thought of Jesus. When Jesus was accused, Pilate, unable to find any fault in Him, declared, "I find no guilt in this man" (Lk. 23:14). Pilate knew that there was no reason to put Jesus to death (v. 15). Yet, despite finding no guilt in Him (v. 22), Pilate yielded to the clamor of the crowd, allowing Jesus to be crucified on the accursed cross, demanded by the people in the tumult arising from the release of Barabbas (vv. 18-19), urging, "Crucify him! Crucify him!" (vv. 21, 23). How unjust was this death in the eyes of us humans? Jesus, who was entirely innocent, was nailed to the cross, the cursed tree, from the Jewish perspective. Shouldn't Barabbas, who incited riot and committed murder, have been put to death instead? Why did Jesus, who was innocent and the eternal Son of God, have to come into this world in human form and die on the cross at Golgotha after 33 years? The reason is to give us the gift of eternal life, a gift that the world cannot offer but only God can. Look at Romans 6:23 - "... the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." Don't you want to receive this gift of eternal life? This gift of eternal life is only possible through saving faith: "... Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household" (Acts 16:31).

A sinner who cannot be kept alive forever,

James Kim

(Reflecting on Jesus, who was nailed to the cross and died for sinners like me)

Let us Testify with the Help of God.

[Acts 26:1-23]

There was a theologian and hymn writer in Germany named Bonhoeffer who devoted his entire life to the struggle to overthrow Hitler's dictatorship. He boldly preached the following: 'A madman is driving a car. If you were at the scene, as a Christian, would you just follow and care for the injured people caused by the car, providing healing and prayers? Or would you pull the mad driver out?' Eventually, Bonhoeffer was executed. However, a story he reportedly saw during a vision just before his death has been passed down. In the story, God acted as the judge, and Hitler stood at the judgment seat. God said, 'You, Hitler, have caused much suffering to many people and shed much innocent blood, so you must go to hell and suffer.' At that moment, Hitler cried out, 'God, I didn't know there was such a world after death. If I had known, I would not have committed such sins. But no one told me about this.' At that moment, Bonhoeffer, striking his chest, repented, saying, 'Lord, I only tried to pull him out, but I failed to pity his soul and consider preaching to him' (Internet). Through this story, I have come to agree with and derive an important lesson: that we should have compassion and preach to one soul. So, what is preaching? According to one internet website, 'Preaching is sharing the message of salvation with Christ's love, holy, and inevitable compassion for our neighbors who are spiritually thirsty and struggling.' Furthermore, the author of the article states that preaching is the most precious act that testifies to the love of souls (Internet).

In today's passage, Acts 26:1-23, we see the apostle Paul, a gospel preacher who loves souls, standing before King Agrippa II, his sister Bernice, and high officials. He confesses, "I stand here and testify to small and great alike, saying nothing but what the prophets and Moses said would come to pass: that the Christ must suffer and that, by being the first to rise from the dead, he would proclaim light both to our people and to the Gentiles" (vv. 22-23). Here, when Paul mentions receiving God's help to testify among both the high and lowly, he is referring to testifying about Jesus Christ. More specifically, Paul's testimony, aided by God's help, is about the suffering, death, and resurrection (the core of the Gospel) of Jesus Christ (v. 23). In other words, with God's help, Paul testified to people of all ranks about the gospel of Jesus Christ. The central

message of this Gospel is the hope of resurrection. Before King Agrippa II, his sister Bernice, and the high officials, Paul states that he is now being judged because of the hope of the resurrection of the dead, a hope promised by God to the Jewish ancestors (v. 6). He expresses the fervent desire of the twelve tribes of Israel to serve God day and night, hoping to obtain the fulfillment of the promise (v. 7). Essentially, Paul is asserting that he is undergoing the current trial due to the promise God made to the Jewish people about the resurrection of the dead, as mentioned in the Old Testament (Yoo).

Do you believe in the resurrection of the dead? Do you truly believe in the fact that the dead can live again? In the Corinthian church that we know, it was mentioned, 'Some among you say there is no resurrection of the dead' (1 Cor. 15:12). In other words, there were people in the Corinthian church who did not believe in the resurrection of the dead. Therefore, Paul wrote a letter to the saints of the Corinthian church. In particular, in the chapter known as the resurrection chapter (1 Cor. 15), the apostle Paul speaks about what conclusion we would reach if there is indeed no resurrection of the dead. The conclusion is that if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ Himself did not rise again (v. 13). And Paul says that if Jesus Christ did not rise again, then the conclusion is that our preaching is in vain, our faith is also in vain (v. 14), we are found to be false witnesses (v. 15), we are still in our sins (v. 17), those who have fallen asleep (died) in Christ have perished (v. 18). Furthermore, if our hope in Christ is only for this life, then we are of all people most to be pitied (v. 19). Those who do not believe in the resurrection of the dead ultimately do not believe in the truth that Jesus Christ, after dying on the cross, rose again on the third day. Therefore, Paul, while testifying before King Agrippa and his sister Bernice and the high officials who were listening to his testimony in Acts 26:8, said, "Why is it considered incredible among you people if God does raise the dead?" As he asked this question, Paul confessed that before encountering the risen Jesus in the Damascus road, he had lived according to the strictest sect of the Jewish religion, being a Pharisee (v. 5), and he had persecuted the Christians who had hope in the resurrection (vv. 9-12). In fact, Saul (Paul) considered opposing the followers of the Nazarene Jesus, who claimed that the dead had risen, as a sacred duty given to him by God (v. 9). So, he actively opposed those who believed in Jesus, arresting and imprisoning them (v. 10), forcing them to renounce their faith in Jesus (v. 11), and even participating in violent actions that led to their execution (v. 10) (Yoo). However, while on his way to Damascus to persecute the Christians, Paul encountered the risen Jesus. At that moment, Paul underwent a transformation, received a new life, and received a calling from the Lord to be a witness of Jesus Christ (vv. 13-18). The risen Lord appointed Paul as a 'servant and witness' (v. 16). The Lord sent Paul to Israel and the Gentiles (v. 17), opening their eyes from darkness to light, turning them from the power of Satan to God, granting forgiveness of sins, and sanctifying them through faith in Jesus, making them a holy people (v. 18). Therefore, Paul, as a servant and witness of the Lord, received this mission from the Lord, first going to Damascus, then to Jerusalem, and to all the people in Judea and the Gentiles, calling them to repent, turn to God, and perform deeds appropriate to repentance (v. 20).

Among the verses we read today, an interesting one is in the second half of verse 14. It is the statement that the risen Jesus spoke to Paul on the Damascus road: "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads." This statement, "It is hard for you to kick against the goads," is a well-known proverb among Romans and Greeks. It is an expression that reminds individuals that resisting

the fate determined by the gods is a foolish act with no benefit to oneself. Just as kicking against a goad only results in wounds, obeying the will predetermined by the gods is the proper conduct for humans (Yoo). How did these words of the risen Jesus resonate with Saul (Paul), who was persecuting those who believed in Jesus? Even before hearing these words, Saul (Paul) was actively opposing the followers of Jesus, going against the divine will and persecuting those who believed in Jesus, similar to kicking against a goad. The risen Jesus spoke to Saul (Paul), saying, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads." Saul, who considered opposing the name of Jesus of Nazareth as a divine duty (v. 9), realized the error of his divine calling when he heard the voice of the risen Jesus in the Damascus road. He came to understand that the true divine calling is not to oppose Jesus and the gospel but to love Jesus and proclaim His gospel.

So, what is the divine calling given to you and me? What is the mission that the Lord has given us? It is none other than to testify to Jesus. We are witnesses of Jesus (1:8). What should witnesses of Jesus do? We must proclaim Jesus with our mouths. We must proclaim the gospel of Jesus. With the help of God, we must testify to the death and resurrection of Jesus on the cross. This is the divine calling given to us. Wherever we go, whatever we do, we have the responsibility to fulfill this divine calling. And to fulfill this responsibility, we absolutely need the help of God. I hope and pray that we may receive God's help not only to testify to Jesus with our lips but also to live a life that witnesses to Jesus through our actions.

Feeling the urgent need for God's help,

James Kim

(Wishing for the proclamation of Christ's gospel through lips and life)

“I would wish to God”

[Acts 26:24-32]

Did you look in the mirror before coming to church for Sunday morning worship today? Due to customer complaints about the slow speed of elevators, a department store in Germany was considering replacing them with the latest models. However, budget constraints posed a significant challenge. Upon hearing the news, a female janitor suggested that installing a large and nice mirror inside the elevator would eliminate the complaints. The department store promptly installed a large mirror in the elevator, and surprisingly, the customer complaints disappeared. People, being interested in their appearance, forgot about the fact that the elevator was slow while looking at themselves in the mirror (Internet). What are you interested in? I don't think it's bad to have various interests and try different things. However, it feels like time is passing quickly, and in this swiftly flowing time, we believe that we should focus on one thing, strive for it, and put effort into achieving it. I am reminded of the Korean singer Yong-pil Cho's song 'One Piece of Single-minded Dandelion.' Do you know why the term 'single-minded' is attached to the dandelion? The reason is the root rather than the color. It is because the root goes straight down. The horizontally spreading fine roots may be weak and meaningless, but the central root is thick and straight. Therefore, it is called a 'single-minded dandelion' because it does not sway in other matters and is dedicated to one thing (Internet). Growing like a weed, blooming like a flower, the dandelion is dedicated to one thing, guarding its single-minded integrity. Isn't it a much better example than us humans, who easily change according to our own interests? (Internet). At least, a single-minded dandelion, dedicated to its integrity, steadfast in one thing without being swayed by others, seems to be a better example. Yet somehow, it seems that we, as humans, easily change according to our own interests. We need to dig one well. We need to have one wish. As Psalmist David says in Psalms 27:4, "One thing I ask from the Lord," what is the one thing that you and I should ask God for?"

In today's passage from Acts 26:24-32, particularly in verse 29, Paul expresses to those who heard his defense (v. 24) that he has a desire before God. What he desired from God was that everyone who heard his words today, including Agrippa, would become like him, a "Christian," except for being in chains. Look

at verse 29: "And Paul said, 'Whether short or long, I would to God that not only you but also all who hear me this day might become such as I am—except for these chains.'" Paul earnestly desired that both Governor Festus, his sister Bernice, and King Agrippa, along with the high officials, would receive Jesus as their Savior and become born-again Christians. The reason he expressed this heartfelt desire for everyone to become believers is likely because Governor Festus and King Agrippa did not respond with faith to Paul's gospel. For example, observe Governor Festus's reaction: "And as he was saying these things in his defense, Festus said with a loud voice, 'Paul, you are out of your mind; your great learning is driving you out of your mind'" (v. 24). Governor Festus's reaction was to shout that Paul was insane, considering Paul's defense of the doctrine of the resurrection of Jesus Christ (faith) as crazy (Park). Festus, based on the rational thinking of Romans and Greeks, likely dismissed Paul's discussion of the resurrection of Christ as nonsensical when he spoke about it. It's evident that Jews would have considered the story unbelievable—the idea that Jesus, executed on the cross, had come back to life and appeared to Paul in a vision on the Damascus road. At that moment, Paul replied to Governor Festus, saying, "I am not out of my mind, most excellent Festus, but I am speaking true and rational words" (v. 25). To Governor Festus, who treated him as if he were insane, Paul responded that he was not crazy but was speaking "true and rational words," meaning words of truth and soundness. Therefore, Paul urged Governor Festus not to reject his defense but to accept it with thoughtful consideration (Yoo). After that, Paul turns his gaze to King Agrippa, boldly stating that the king is well-acquainted with the events surrounding Jesus Christ. He acknowledges that Agrippa knows about the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ as fulfilled prophecies, dating back to the time of King Herod, Agrippa's grandfather. This is because the events concerning Jesus Christ, from the crucifixion to the resurrection, had been a prominent and widely discussed topic even before Agrippa was born (Park). Therefore, Paul says to King Agrippa, "King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know that you believe" (verse 27). In this instance, King Agrippa's response is, "In a short time would you persuade me to be a Christian?" (v. 28) Like Governor Festus, King Agrippa also reacted coldly to Paul's gospel testimony. Neither of them responded with faith, viewing becoming Christians as something to be regarded with indifference (Park).

People in this current era, just like in the early days of the church, often regard becoming Christians with indifference. Even in the early church, unbelievers mockingly labeled the saints in the Antioch church as "Christians" (11:26). In our present time, however, the term "Christian" has become more of a scorned label than an esteemed one. As an example, the once honorable name of "Christian," which was a glorious identifier, has now become associated with mockery, often referred to disdainfully as "Protestant." This shift in perception is highlighted in the modern Christian image evaluation report titled "UnChristian." The book evaluates the reasons behind Christians not being recognized positively and contributing to a negative image of Christianity in society. It presents a contentious research report titled "Image of Christians in the Eyes of Non-Christian Americans." In the early days of the church, the term "Christian" was created by non-Christians observing the lives of saints who believed in Jesus, and it was a term that elevated Christians to a supreme level. However, the meaning of this supreme term has now diminished, and in this book, the author argues that a stumbling block lies in the way modern Christians live, unable to embody the title of "Christian" as the early church saints did. The individuals who have created this stumbling block are described as

lukewarm pessimists rather than faithful and genuine Christians. They are criticized for being hypocritical, indifferent, overly focused on evangelism as a goal, excessively disdainful of homosexuality, politically inclined, and judgmental, neglecting self-examination while navigating through the church. Even genuine Christians are finding it challenging to receive the title of "Christian" due to the influence of these individuals. 'Natural people perceive Christians as inconsistent in their words and actions, pretending to be morally superior. They also feel that Christians overly focus on converting people rather than treating them as individuals. ... (Furthermore, free individuals believe) Christians easily judge others and are not honest about their attitudes and perspectives toward non-Christians' (Internet). While the church's external growth and increased number of believers have granted external influence, the decline in the internal impact suggests a failure in the Christians' attitudes and image, which now portray them more as hypocrites, judges, and quarrelsome individuals than trustworthy, likable, and inspiring figures.

We must restore the honorable title of "Christian." In this regard, just like Paul, we should earnestly desire that everyone becomes a Christian. Why should we earnestly desire that everyone becomes a Christian? Paul articulates the reason as follows: "God desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim. 2:4). The reason we should fervently pray for everyone to become Christians, just as Paul did, is because it aligns with God's desire. In other words, what God desires is for everyone to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth. His desire should become our desire. Everyone should become a Christian through us, hearing the gospel of Jesus Christ, accepting Jesus as their Savior, and becoming followers of Christ. Thus, everyone, like us, should live in this world with the hope of salvation, the blessings of eternal life, and the anticipation of an everlasting kingdom. With the hope of resurrection, we should boldly face and overcome the fear of death, living by faith. Furthermore, receiving God's protection, guidance, and grace, we should navigate through life, relying on His help when needed.

Praying to understand and obey what God desires for me,

James Kim

(Concern for the salvation of souls!)

When all Hope of Our Being Saved is Gradually Abandoned

[Acts 27:1-26]

Chuck Colson, who was a counselor to President Nixon, wrote a book called "Born Again," focusing on his prison experience. He observed three types of prisoners: the first type, those without hope, who would bang their heads against the wall and harm themselves; the second type, also without hope, who would sit huddled in their cells, motionless; and the third type, prisoners who, while waiting for their release, would go out to the yard and exercise whenever there was an opportunity. Even though they were confined physically, they behaved as if they were free, anticipating the day they would leave. Living with hope brings freedom, and those who embrace hope overflow with it. Positive and proactive individuals seek light even in the midst of darkness, while pessimists see darkness even in the presence of light. Looking at Jeremiah 29:11, God speaks about His thoughts towards us: "For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope."

However, in today's passage from Acts 27:20, we see people who have lost all hope of salvation. This passage recounts a moment during Paul's journey to Rome as a prisoner, where the ship encounters a severe storm, and the passengers lose hope. Out of the 276 people on board, aside from Paul, the remaining 275 had given up on life, realizing there was no hope for salvation. At that time, while everyone else had abandoned hope and resigned themselves to death, Paul not only had hope for salvation but was also confident in it. He believed that God would save the lives of everyone on board, not just his own (vv. 22-26). When considering such contrasting reactions, we can pose two questions:

The first question is, 'Why did the remaining 275 people on the ship, apart from the Apostle Paul, think there was no hope of salvation and give up on life?'

The reason the 275 people on the ship, apart from the Apostle Paul, lost hope of salvation and gave up on life is that they focused on the situation rather than looking to the true Savior, Jesus Christ. In other words, they lost hope of salvation and gave up on life because they looked at the severe storm (v. 20) rather than fixing their gaze on the Almighty Creator, the Lord. Just like Apostle Peter, who, while walking on water, looked at the situation instead of keeping his eyes on Jesus. He was fine when he looked at Jesus but started sinking when he became afraid upon seeing the wind (Mt. 14:29-31). Why did Paul and the others encounter such a severe storm? The reason is that Julius, the centurion in charge of escorting Paul and other prisoners to Rome (v. 1), ignored Paul's advice (disregarded it) and followed the captain and owner of the ship, who insisted on proceeding with the voyage (vv. 11, 21). Despite Paul's warning that it would be perilous to sail to Phoenix, a harbor in Crete, as they approached Miletus (v. 9), Julius did not heed Paul's counsel and chose to believe the captain and owner of the ship over Paul (v. 11). Logically, Julius' decision seems correct. From his perspective, would he listen to Paul or to the captain and shipowner? Who is the expert, Paul or the captain and shipowner? In this situation, it would have been better if Julius had listened to Paul's advice instead of the captain and shipowner. Even Apostle Peter, when Jesus told him to put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch (Lk. 5:4), although the professional fishermen had toiled all night without catching anything, they caught a great number of fish when they obeyed Jesus' words (v. 5). Ultimately, when Julius, along with many others, believed they made a wise decision as the gentle south wind started blowing, facilitating smooth sailing towards their destination (v. 13). The reason was that the mild south wind was a favorable wind for sailing, making it possible to reach the destination smoothly (Yoo). However, as they could not make much progress, the south wind turned into the feared and deadly northeaster (Euraquilo) (v. 14, Yoo). As a result, the ship was at the mercy of the storm, being dragged here and there (v. 15). Despite their efforts, following Paul's advice would have led them safely to their destination, the severe storm became so overpowering (v. 20). Even though they threw the cargo overboard (v. 18) and later even the ship's tackle (v. 19), since neither sun nor stars appeared for many days, and no small tempest lay on us, all hope of our being saved was at last abandoned (v. 20). In the face of such a great storm, human efforts were futile. People must have felt their own helplessness in the face of the powerful storm. Despite all their exertion, they eventually gave up and resigned themselves. At this point, when facing the overwhelming storm, even if they perceived the situation as hopeless, had they known and looked to Jesus, the Creator who could calm the storm, they would not have given up on life, no matter how bleak the circumstances seemed.

I'm reminded of the hymn "With Christ as My Pilot", verses 2 and 3: (V. 2) Though tempests may threaten the craft and the crew, And wide gape the jaws of the deep for me, too, With Christ at the oar I am safe in His will, And Jesus my Savior is my Pilot still. (V. 3) If Jesus but speak, in His voice of great pow'r, The billows must sleep and be still from that hour, And I, at the brightness of dawning, shall be, With Jesus, my Pilot, safe over the sea. (Chorus) I nothing can fear! I nothing can dread! For Jesus keeps watch here, and by Him I'm led. My seas may be rough, but when voy'-ges are past, My haven of hope will be heaven at last. Living in a world similar to this dark sea, we often face challenging situations and difficulties that seem like never-ending storms in our lives. When confronted with such storms, if we focus only on the turbulence and fail to look to the Creator God, who can calm the storm, we may find ourselves helpless and resign to

despair. This week, I heard the news of the tragic suicide of the entertainer Mr. Ahn due to pressures of 4 billion won in debt. While contemplating how difficult it must have been for him to take his own life, it is saddening to think that in the midst of such a great storm, he might have lost hope and not looked to the Lord while facing challenges. Why do people go so far as to take their own lives? It is because they lack hope. Without even a thread of hope to hold on to, people give up on life. Humans cannot live without hope.

The second question is, 'How did Paul have confidence in the hope of salvation even in a seemingly hopeless situation, unlike others?'

His confidence was based on the Word of God. Look at Acts 27:23-24: "For this very night there stood before me an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I worship, and he said, 'Do not be afraid, Paul; you must stand before Caesar. And behold, God has granted you all those who sail with you.'" Even in the midst of the great storm that seemed to eliminate any hope of salvation due to natural causes, God sent His message to Paul: "Do not be afraid, Paul; you must stand before Caesar. And behold, God has granted you all those who sail with you." This message was a guarantee that Paul would not die until God's will for him to stand before Caesar was fulfilled. In other words, until God's will was accomplished, Paul would not die. Therefore, God's message was an assurance that Paul would not die as long as God's will remained unfulfilled. Hence, when God's will was accomplished, Paul's life was in danger due to the great risk he faced. Not only did God promise to save Paul, but He also promised to save the remaining 275 people on the ship who sailed with him. Therefore, Paul not only reassured the other 275 people in desperate situations, saying, "Take heart, for there will be no loss of life among you but only of the ship" (v. 22), but he also confidently declared, "I believe that God will be exactly as I have been told" (v. 25). In the midst of despair, the voice of God assured Paul and the others of hope. God did not just promise to save Paul from imminent danger in the midst of crisis and despair but also promised to save the remaining 275 people who sailed with him. Therefore, in the face of imminent danger, Paul not only received the assurance of his safety from God but also believed that God would save the others.

How contrasting is this with Jonah? Disobedient Jonah endangered everyone on the ship with him, while obedient Paul, used as an instrument of the Lord, rescued 275 people in danger due to the disobedience of Commander Julius and the ship's officers. I'm reminded of the third verse of the hymn "My Hope Is Built on Nothing Less": His oath, His covenant, His blood, Support me in the whelming flood; When all around my soul gives way He then is all my hope and stay. (Chorus) On Christ, the solid Rock, I stand; All other ground is sinking sand, All other ground is sinking sand. Even if everything we could ever trust in this world is shattered on that day, believers who dwell in hope through faith in the promises given by God are us. True faith is like Abraham's, hoping against hope. It is having hope even in situations where there seems to be no hope. How is this possible? How can we hope when there seems to be no hope in desperate situations? It's because of the promises given by God. The promise of His Word enables us to have hope even in the midst of despair. True faith allows us to hope against hope. The question then is, how can we hope when there seems to be no hope? The answer lies in the promises of God's Word. The promise of His Word assures us of hope even in desperate situations. Our faithful Lord will fulfill the promises He has given us, regardless

of the circumstances. The promise, 'I will build my church,' given by our Lord, is being accomplished and will certainly be fulfilled. Therefore, when we look at our church, even if it seems hopeless, even in times of despair, we must hope in faith in the promises of our Lord. Our Lord is our joy, life, and hope. Hence, we must hope in faith in the promises of God.

In Hosea 2:15, there is a promise from God to the Israelites and also to you and me. The word is, "I will give her the valley of Achor as a door of hope." The term "Achor" means "trouble," and God promises to turn the valley of trouble into a door of hope. It is a promise that He will transform the place of suffering and death caused by sin into the starting point of true hope. We are living in a world like the valley of trouble, filled with worries, anxieties, and pains. What is our true hope? What enables each of us to live each day? Our true hope is none other than Jesus. Only in Jesus can we find our true hope. By believing in Jesus, we can receive salvation. And those who receive salvation, even though they live in a world with much suffering, are moving toward the door of hope for eternal heaven.

Even in situations where hope seems absent, in the midst of despair, desiring to look to the Lord,

James Kim

(Trusting in the promise of God's salvation)

Crisis is an Opportunity!

[Acts 27:23-25]

How should we view the crisis in our lives?

When we encounter a crisis, we often think, "Why did this crisis come to me?" When we do that, we sometimes blame another person for thinking that the crisis has come to us because of that person. If we do so, then we tend to focus on the crisis that we have faced. As a result, we don't see others other than ourselves in crisis. And we are even more depressed in despair by falling into the swamp of crisis and losing the desire of salvation. Is this the reaction of the crisis that God who controls the crisis wants from us?

The lesson is that crisis is a good opportunity to hear God's voice.

When we look at the context of Acts 27:23-25, we see Apostle Paul and the 275 people who aboard with him faced a crisis. The reason why the crisis came was that the centurion of the Augustan cohort named Julius (v. 1), who was escorting Paul to Italy, believed more in the words of the pilot and the captain of the ship than Paul's words (v. 11). Here, the Paul's word was "with difficulty sailing" (v. 8) "the voyage was not dangerous" (v. 9). So Paul said to them, "Men, I perceive that the voyage will certainly be with damage and great loss, not only of the cargo and the ship, but also of our lives" (v. 10). But the centurion Julius didn't listen to Paul's words, but listened to the words of the pilot and the captain and sailed on (vv. 11-12). At that time, the centurion Julius, the pilot and the captain of the ship thought that since a moderate south wind came up they supposed that they had attained their purpose (v. 13). In other words, the centurion Julius, the pilot and the captains thought that their decision was right. "But before very long there rushed down from the land a violent wind, called Euraquilo" (v. 14). As a result, the ship was caught in it and couldn't face the wind (v. 15). Because of this crisis, the people were afraid (v. 17), and later their hope of being saved was gradually abandoned (v. 20). In the midst of this, Paul said to them, "Yet now I urge you to keep up your courage, for there will be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship" (v. 22). How could Paul have said this? It was because he heard through the messenger of God, "Do not be afraid, Paul; you must stand before Caesar; and

behold, God has granted you all those who are sailing with you” (v. 24). In other words, Paul heard the voice of God in crisis. This is the first lesson that today's text gives us. The lesson is that crisis is a good opportunity to hear God's voice.

What do you think? Do you think the crisis is a good opportunity to hear God's voice? Have you ever heard the voice of God in a crisis before? When I reflect back my life, I think I heard a lot of voices of my own voice or of situation, rather than listening to God's voice in my life crisis. When my first baby was lying in the intensive care unit due to illness, I looked at the sick baby and let the situation to speak to me rather than listening to God's voice. Then, after asking whether to let the baby die slowly or die quickly from the doctor in charge, I went home and the next morning God gave me the words of Psalms 63:3, “Because Your lovingkindness is better than life, My lips will praise You.” Through this word, God taught that God's eternal love is better than the 55 days life of my first baby Charis, and that I and my wife should praise Him with our lips. So my wife and I decided to let Charis go quickly and let her doctor know our decision. Then, I called my parents, my siblings and had worship. After worship, Charis' nurse took all the tubes out and turned off all the machines connected to my baby. And she fell asleep in my arms. Then, after cremating the baby, sprinkling the baby's ash into the water, as my wife and I were returning to the land, the indwelling Holy Spirit powerfully work in my heart to open my lips and praised God the gospel song "My Savior's Love". All of this was the grace that God let us enjoy in the midst of the crisis.

The second lesson is that crisis is a good opportunity to love our neighbors.

We become self-centered when we face crisis. When we meet a crisis, we become self-absorbed. My wife and I were like that when my first baby Charis was in the children hospital intensive care unit for 55 days. I didn't know I was self-absorbed until my wife told me that we seemed to be "self-absorbed". At that time, even though I knew that my fourth uncle and my youngest uncle were in a very difficult situation with their business, I was concentrating on my first baby. And my excuse was that the life of a person is more important than a difficult situation of a company. But this was because of my insecurities and immaturity and I couldn't see the crisis as an opportunity. But a truly mature Christian can use his or her crisis as an opportunity to love his or her neighbors. That is what the apostle Paul did.

Apostle Paul loved his neighbor as Jesus commanded when he met the crisis. He encouraged the 275 people who were with him (v. 37), when their lives were in danger. Paul urges them to keep up their courage (vv. 22, 25). He was able to do so because he heard the voice of God through the messenger of God, and he believed God that it would turn out exactly as he had been told (v. 25). In other words, because Paul believed what he heard from the angel of God, “Do not be afraid, Paul; you must stand before Caesar; and behold, God has granted you all those who are sailing with you” (v. 24), he was able to encourage the 275 people who were with him to keep up their courage. Those who have confidence in salvation can reassure those who are afraid of the uncertainty of salvation.

Those Christians who have received the God's saving love reach out to those who have no hope of

salvation and share Christ's love. Those Christians who enjoy the God's saving love obey Jesus's command "Love your neighbor as yourself" by comforting, exhorting and encouraging those who don't enjoy His saving love. In other words, those Christians who experience the Gods' saving love and have assurance of salvation make their crisis as an opportunity to love their neighbors.

The third and last lesson is that the crisis is a good opportunity to experience the glory of God's salvation.

Apostle Paul comforted those who had no hope of salvation because he had confidence in salvation. In the assurance and hope of salvation, he encouraged them to take some food, saying, "not a hair from the head of any of you will perish" (v. 34). After he said this, Paul took bread and gave thanks to God in the presence of all. And he broke it and they began to eat (v. 35). All the others were encouraged and ate the food (v. 36). How amazing is this? How can we thank God in the midst of a crisis at the crossroads of life and death?

We Christians can give thanks to God even in circumstances that seem ungrateful. The reason is that we have experienced the God's saving love and we have a hope and assurance of salvation. Furthermore, we can thank God even in circumstances that seem ungrateful for us because we see the glory of God's salvation and experience the presence of God in His actualizing the hope of our salvation. We cannot but give thanks, praise, and worship God when we experience the glory of God's salvation. In the end, the crisis in our lives is a good opportunity for us to be raised as true worshipers whom God seeks. In other words, through crisis in our lives, God is raising us up as true worshipers who give thanks to God.

We must take the crisis as an opportunity. We must make the crisis in our lives as the opportunity to hear the voice of God. We must be quick to listen to God's voice in the crisis. Also, we must make the crisis as the opportunity to love our neighbors. We must reach out to our neighbors in crisis and comfort them and encourage them with faith in God that it will turn out exactly as we have been told. In particular, we should give hope and assurance of salvation to our beloved neighbors who are suffering in despair with the assurance and hope of salvation even in crisis. Finally, we must make the crisis in our lives as the good opportunity to experience the glory of God's salvation. Our God is a good God. Our God uses even our crises and works together to do good. Our God is a faithful God who fulfills the promises which He has given to us. And this faithful God is the God of salvation who will surely deliver us from the crisis. Let us all experience the glory of God's salvation in expectation, waiting, and praying for the grace of salvation.

In situations where gratitude seems impossible, and even in circumstances where it's difficult to look forward, I desire to turn crises into opportunities within the faith of believing in God, giving thanks amidst the seemingly ungrateful, and looking ahead in situations that appear hopeless,

James Kim (Thinking of a beloved younger cousin in the face of life's crises)

For Your Salvation

[Acts 27:27-44]

Those who have come across the news this week are aware that major American companies, including Lehman Brothers, Delta Air Lines, Texaco, WorldCom, and about 15 others, have filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection. Additionally, there were speculations about the possible bankruptcy of AIG (American International Group), the largest insurance company in the U.S. with 66,000 employees, but eventually, the U.S. government stepped in to provide financial assistance. Despite this, anxiety about the financial crisis has spread, leading investment banks to explore survival strategies, such as mergers with other financial institutions. Reading a column by Cheol Lee in the Korea Ilbo regarding this situation, he comments, 'Investment banks misused investments to the point of bankruptcy' (Internet). He points out that the root cause of the problem lies in investment banks directly acquiring funds without fear, even delving into real estate investments, which eventually led to the subprime mortgage crisis. Cheol Lee states, 'Where there is high profit, there is always high risk.' He mentions that although executives were aware of this, the temptation was too great due to the substantial incoming profits, leading to an inability to resist temptation. In his words, 'Capitalism is driven by individual pursuit of interest. However, if the pursuit of profit becomes too excessive, risk management systems do not function' (Internet). This statement struck a chord with me, as it makes sense that excessive greed blinds individuals to the point where risk management systems, critical for high-risk, high-profit situations, fail to function properly. As a result, with greed causing blindness, the risk management system, which should operate effectively, fails to do so, leading to the increasing number of bankruptcy filings. Consequently, U.S. financial institutions are doing whatever it takes to survive, including seeking survival strategies through mergers.

How about you? Are you, perhaps like U.S. financial institutions, exploring survival strategies to endure these tough economic times? Amidst such thoughts, I came across an article titled '8 Keywords for Sustainable Business Survival.' This article summarizes the core keywords for how companies can consistently earn customer love and generate continuous profits after 5, 10, and even 100 years. I'll share with you about four of these key concepts (Internet):

(1) ‘Digging a Single Well Management’:

To become a strong small business, it is essential to have outstanding technical expertise in the industry, and to accumulate such expertise, one must continuously dig a single well.

(2) ‘Focused Management’:

Companies facing crises choose areas where they can maximize profits and implement focused management. The term "area" here refers not to following trends but concentrating efforts on what the company can do best, what others are not doing.

(3) ‘Trust Management’:

Futurist John Naisbitt reportedly said about the Korean economy, ‘For the Korean economy to achieve qualitative growth, it needs to go beyond just a trademark that informs consumers and create a trust mark that instills trust and emotion in consumers.’

(4) ‘Essence Management’:

One reason for the prolonged economic downturn is seen as conflicts, confusion, and the resulting increase in social costs due to the absence of principles. Therefore, to overcome an economic recession, one must faithfully adhere to the basics, which are the roots of all economies.

In Acts 27:34, the Bible states, "This is for your salvation." This statement, given during a severe storm (v. 20) that put the ship in a crisis of shipwreck, is Paul teaching survival principles to the 275 people who, despite their best efforts, could not see the hope of salvation. Today, as I contemplate Paul's survival principles, I hope to apply these three principles to our individual lives. Thus, I pray that God grants both you and me abundant life on this earth for the purpose He has given us.

First, to survive, one must eat.

The first survival method is to take good care of your health. In Acts 27:33-34, when Paul was on the ship with the 275 people, he twice urged them to eat. What is the reason for this? He said, "This is for your salvation" (v. 34). In other words, Paul advised them to eat because it was necessary for their survival after the shipwreck. Paul's recommendation to eat was likely prompted by the fact that after facing a severe storm, the 275 people lost hope of salvation and, subsequently, stopped eating (vv. 20-21). Considering the mention in verse 27 of "the fourteenth night," it appears that they had not eaten since the beginning of the storm (Yoo). In the end, with no hope of survival in sight, they refrained from eating for 14 days, despite having food on board (v. 33). It's worth noting that although the ship was at risk due to the storm, they did not throw their food into the sea. This is evident in verse 36, where it is mentioned that Paul and the remaining

275 people ate bread.

From what I've heard, during the Sunday afternoon Bible study in the first senior adults' fellowship, discussions about health are often brought up. The fact that the elders engage in conversations about health might be because, among them, there are likely more people who are older and dealing with various health issues than in the second senior adults' fellowship. Due to their firsthand experience, they may have a heightened interest in health management. Indeed, those who feel health issues more keenly may be more attentive to health care. I believe that to excel in health management, one must possess the mindset that our bodies are not our own but are a gift from God. I hold this view because many Christians, despite receiving teachings to manage the material possessions given by God responsibly for His glory, seem to lack this stewardship mindset when it comes to their bodies. As a result, without proper care and due to a lack of this stewardship mentality regarding the bodies God has given us, we often end up suffering from various illnesses. Of course, the saying "birth, aging, illness, and death" implies that as we are born and age, our bodies naturally weaken and become susceptible to diseases. However, even as we age, adopting the stewardship mindset and making a conscious effort to manage our bodies well for God's glory is our responsibility. We must acknowledge that our bodies are not ours; they are given to us by God. Therefore, we need to manage them well, giving glory to God and making good use of what He has provided. This involves taking good care of our bodies by eating well, exercising, and getting enough rest. I call this the 'Three Pillars of Health Management.' To manage our health well, these three basic elements—eating well, exercising, and getting enough sleep—are essential. Are you, in your stewardship mindset, effectively handling these three responsibilities? We must not abuse our bodies. We need to avoid activities that harm our bodies, such as excessive strain, irregular routines, and overuse. However, we should not forget one crucial aspect. Even as we fulfill our responsibility for health management, we need to pray to God. No matter how well we manage our health, it is essential to continually pray to God for good health. This is the first key to survival emphasized in today's passage.

Second, to survive, one must have a peaceful mind.

The second method for survival is to manage the health of one's mind well. Therefore, it is crucial to maintain peace of mind. In today's passage, verse 36 describes people who had not eaten for about 14 days. When Paul brought bread, thanked God, and broke it to eat, everyone felt relieved, and they began to eat with assurance (v. 35). Considering the intense fear of death during this period, it is likely that even the hope of surviving for 14 days without food did not exist. In our lives, there are times when severe stress makes us lose the desire to eat. In such cases, even if food is placed in front of us, we may lose our appetite and choose not to eat. Ultimately, this situation indicates the need to alleviate stress and find tranquility in the mind to regain one's appetite. Stress, worries, anxiety, and fear can all contribute to loss of appetite. Especially when faced with a life-or-death situation, as the people in today's passage were, one might lose their appetite and be tempted to give up. In such circumstances, what can we do? How can we overcome all of this and find peace in our hearts? How did Paul, facing a life-or-death situation himself, have the peace of mind to encourage and reassure the remaining 275 people, who were without hope and had lost their appetite? The

key was Paul's reliance on the words God had spoken to him, and he believed that those words would come true (vv. 23-25). Such faith provides us with the hope of salvation and gives us confidence, boldness, and courage. Therefore, even in challenging situations, we can comfort and encourage others to be at ease.

How is your heart right now? Do you have the incomprehensible peace of God in your hearts? Can you confess, as the lyrics of the hymn "When Peace, Like a River, Attendeth My Way", verse 1 say, "When peace, like a river, attendeth my way, When sorrows like sea billows roll; Whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say, It is well, it is well with my soul"? Is your heart truly at peace? Even in the midst of life's raging storms, do you want to experience a deep and serene peace in your heart? Let us all incline our ears to the calm yet powerful voice of God amidst the raging storm. To do so, especially in the busyness of life, let's earnestly approach God in prayer. Let's pray, holding firmly to the words in Philippians 4:6-7 with faith: "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

Third and last, to survive, one must live a life of obedience.

As we have already contemplated, the centurion Julius, who was escorting Paul and other prisoners to Italy, initially did not heed Paul's advice but rather listened to the captain and the shipowner. Consequently, he eventually steered everyone into a perilous situation, seemingly devoid of hope for salvation. However, in today's passage, we see a change in the behavior of Centurion Julius, who now listens carefully to Paul's words. For instance, in verse 31, when Paul, suspecting that they were approaching land, observed the sailors attempting to escape in the ship's boat due to fear of running aground, he told the centurion and the soldiers, "Unless these men stay in the ship, you cannot be saved" (v. 31). Hearing Paul's words, the soldiers trusted him, preventing the sailors from escaping by cutting the ropes to the small boat (v. 32) (Yoo). This must have been a challenging decision for the soldiers because cutting the ropes meant they, too, couldn't escape to the land using the small boat. In other words, the act of cutting the ropes connected to the small boat was a demonstration of a collective attitude: a commitment to either live together or die together. Those sailors, who had intended to escape for their lives, likely faced a difficult choice. By cutting the ropes connected to the small boat and allowing the sailors to remain on the ship, the soldiers displayed a spirit of unity and solidarity, choosing to either live or die together. Certainly, the soldiers believed Paul's assurance that he would survive, leading them to act in obedience (Yoo). Take note, observe how Centurion Julius, who was initially disobedient, now demonstrates obedience to Paul's words when the ship is in peril due to a great storm. Through the hardships and crises of life, Centurion Julius, who was initially disobedient, transforms into one who obeys. Later, he goes to great lengths to save Paul (to bring salvation), preventing the soldiers from killing the prisoners (v. 43). Ultimately, Centurion Julius rescues Paul from the danger of death (salvation) and even allows those who can swim to make their way to land, while others use planks or pieces of the ship to reach the shore (v. 44). As a result, all 276 people on board land safely, obtaining salvation (v. 44). God, in His promise to the Apostle Paul, not only spared Paul's life but also saved everyone on the ship, including Centurion Julius, the soldiers, the captain and shipowner, Aristarchus, and all the prisoners (vv. 24,

44).

There is a faithful promise from God that He is revealing to you and me today. It is found in Acts 16:31: "... Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household." Truly, believing in Jesus is the path for you and me to live. The key to our survival is solely in accepting Jesus as our Savior. By believing in Jesus, we receive salvation, and God grants us eternal life. I hope and pray that you, your family, and all your loved ones may also, through faith in Jesus, live forever in heaven.

Wishing to live a life God has given to the fullest on this earth,

James Kim

(Pursuing health, peace of mind, and a life of obedience in the physical and spiritual realms)

A Refuge

[Acts 28:1-10]

In the Old Testament, 1 Samuel 22:1-2 mentions the "Adullam Cave." The name "Adullam" means "refuge" or "shelter." This cave served as a place of refuge for David when he fled from King Saul to the region of Gath. However, David's presence in the Adullam Cave became known, and his father's household, along with distressed, indebted, and discontented individuals, gathered to him. David became their leader, and about 400 men were with him. Recent biblical archaeologists exploring the region discovered a cave on a mountain slope in the Adullam region, which could accommodate around 400 people (Conder, Robinson). Those who were "distressed" suffered politically due to Saul's oppressive rule, the "indebted" faced economic hardship under Saul's unjust fiscal policies or extortionate loans, and the "discontented" bore emotional and spiritual wounds from Saul's immoral and ungodly behavior. These individuals, including warriors, prophets, and leaders, were not content to remain silent and complacent in the deteriorating kingdom of Saul. They chose to gather around David, who had been called by God to bring about a new Israel. Together, in the refuge of Adullam Cave, they found rest, healing for their souls, and began to dream of a unified and renewed Israel. Drawing parallels, a missionary, Rev. Young Sun Kwon (Rebecca Kwon), who set foot on German soil in 1983 as a UBF (University Bible Fellowship) student missionary, authored a book titled "The Road to Adullam." In this book, she discusses the dream of reform within the Korean church and missionary organizations. The book emphasizes that reform is not merely about changing external organizational forms but requires a transformation of individual and collective consciousness. The book notes: "Reform should always be about the present, not the past or the future. Changing the external form of an organization does not constitute reform. It is our individual and collective consciousness that needs to change (Internet). The idea is that as individuals undergo transformation, the church will change, enabling it to fulfill its role as light and salt in the world."

I will begin by examining our awareness of the church, focusing on Acts 28:1-10, and seeking to discard any non-biblical thoughts while contemplating a biblical perspective on the church. In the

midst of this, I pray for our church to be transformed into a community pleasing in God's eyes. In Acts 28:1, despite the storm making salvation seem impossible, the Apostle Paul and the remaining 275 people experienced a miraculous intervention from God, allowing them to safely land on the island of Malta. Here, the island referred to as "Melite" (Malta) is located south of the island of Sicily. The name "Melite" for the island means "refuge" or "shelter" (Park). On this island, Paul and the other 275 people received exceptional hospitality from the natives. God, who saved all 276 people, provided a refuge for them. Having faced a life-and-death situation, God, in a dramatic display of grace, fulfilled the promise He made to Paul, allowing him and the other 275 people on the ship to find refuge. Reflecting on the events centered around the island of Malta, I've considered three aspects of what a refuge might entail. In the midst of this, I pray for our community, established by the Lord, to become such a refuge.

First, a refuge should involve an open-hearted reception.

In the midst of a great storm, after Paul and the 275 people miraculously survived by God's grace (v. 1), they arrived at the island of Melite. There, they received an extraordinary reception from the locals, people who spoke a different dialect, not Greek (Yoo). Look at Acts 28:2 - "The islanders showed us unusual kindness. They built a fire and welcomed us all because it was raining and cold." The inhabitants of Melite, whether they believed in Jesus like Paul, Luke, Aristarchus, the Roman soldiers, the wealthy shipowner and captain, or the rest of the prisoners—welcomed them all. How beautiful is the sight of this refuge, where everyone, regardless of distinctions and discriminations, is welcomed by the islanders? However, during the time of Jesus, the religious leaders, the Pharisees, did not act in the same manner. For example, when they saw Jesus eating with tax collectors and sinners, they criticized Him, claiming that He was welcoming sinners (Lk. 15:2). Jesus came to save sinners, yet the Pharisees, who considered themselves righteous, did not welcome sinners. Instead, they discriminated against and criticized them. The problem is that such sinful actions still occur in the church today. People discriminate, criticize, and fail to welcome others with the heart of the Lord. The root cause of this problem is the arrogance of considering oneself righteous, similar to the Pharisees. Therefore, we must not sit in high positions, looking down upon others, making light of them, and criticizing them with a sense of spiritual superiority. This attitude is a sin before God. We should obey the command in Philippians 2:3, which tells us to consider others better than ourselves. In doing so, in a community where we welcome each other with the heart of the Lord, whether in Hispanic ministry, English ministry, or Korean ministry, transcending countries and cultures, regardless of gender or wealth, let us put aside all forms of discrimination and, in the name of the Lord, welcome everyone. I hope and pray and strive for our community to become a refuge like the island of Melite.

Second, a refuge should involve special kindness.

Look at Acts 28:7 - "There was an estate nearby that belonged to Publius, the chief official of the island. He welcomed us to his home and showed us generous hospitality for three days." Not only the locals of Melite but also Publius, the highest-ranking person on the island, welcomed Paul and his

companions, treating them with kindness for three days. It might be challenging to assert that all 276 people stayed at Publius's house. When it says "us," it at least refers to Paul and the author of Acts, Luke, who clearly stayed at Publius's house. Still, we don't know who else stayed at his house. However, the crucial point is that Publius opened his heart, not only welcoming strangers but also hosting them in his house for three days. Welcoming unfamiliar strangers and allowing them to stay in one's home for three days is not an easy task. It is challenging even with people you know well. In the Bible, kindness is translated as gentleness, as seen in "Love is patient, love is kind" (1 Cor. 13:4). Christians, as children of God in Christ, should be gentle and kind.

Tolstoy had this to say about kindness: 'Kindness is the only thing that makes this world beautiful. It resolves all reproach, unties what is tangled, makes difficult things easy, and turns gloom into joy' (Internet). Such kindness should be present in our church. There should be kindness that makes our church even more beautiful, resolving reproach, untangling complexities, making each other's difficulties easy, and turning gloom into joy. Our community should be a true refuge with inclusive reception, kind treatment, and especially kindness in welcoming strangers (Heb. 13:2). Especially when newcomers, unfamiliar with our church, arrive, we should open our hearts, welcome them as they are, and treat them kindly. Through our kind actions, we should make them feel welcomed. Therefore, we need to build a genuinely beautiful refuge-community.

Third and last, a refuge should have healing.

In today's passage, Acts 28:1-10, there is one miraculous event and two healing incidents. The miraculous event is the story of Paul being bitten by a viper on the island of Melite and yet, despite the venomous bite, suffering no harm, a remarkable manifestation of God's saving power (vv. 3, 5). Initially, the locals of Melite assumed Paul was a murderer when they saw him bitten by the snake (v. 4). However, after witnessing Paul shake the snake off into the fire without any harm, they changed their perception and thought of Paul as a "god" (v. 6). God saved Paul, who had been bitten by the snake, during the storm when the ship was breaking apart over the past fourteen days, aligning with His purpose, which led the islanders to regard Paul as a divine figure (Yoo).

When considering a refuge, it's essential to understand that there should be no harm in the church (v. 5). Unfortunately, the harsh reality is that many people within the church are getting hurt nowadays. Not only pastors but also elders, deacons, and all church members are causing harm to each other amidst disputes and conflicts rather than welcoming and treating each other kindly. Such behavior is by no means the true image of a church. A genuine church does not cause wounds but rather heals them. Look at the two healing incidents in today's passage. Paul healed Publius, the father of the highest-ranking man on the island, who was suffering from fever and dysentery, through the laying on of hands and prayer (v. 8). Once this news spread, Paul healed all the sick on the island with the healing power of Jesus (v. 9). Reflecting on these healing events, I find the lesson of what our community should be in Hosea 6:1 - "Come, let us return to the LORD. He has torn us to pieces but he will heal us;

he has injured us but he will bind up our wounds." In the church as a refuge, there should be ministries that make things better and heal. There should never be a probing into others' pasts or wounds. Instead, we should open our hearts wide, welcome each other as we are, and embrace them with Christ's love. In such an environment, there should be comfort, encouragement, and healing.

Psalms 46:1 declares, "God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble." Yes, our Lord is the God who becomes our great help in times of distress. Only He can be our refuge. When we approach Him in faith, our Lord will welcome and embrace us with His outstretched arms of the cross. Our Jesus is a Lord with a gentle and humble heart. When we approach Him in this manner, our Lord will treat us with special kindness. As the Lord who becomes our refuge, He will use His healing right hand to bind up our wounded and torn hearts. Hymn "What a Fellowship, What a Joy Divine", verse 1 and the refrain, beautifully express this sentiment: "What a fellowship, what a joy divine, Leaning on the everlasting arms; What a blessedness, what a peace is mine. Leaning on the everlasting arms. Leaning, leaning, Safe and secure from all alarms, Leaning, leaning, Leaning on the everlasting arms."

Desiring to rest in the arms of Jesus, who bore the cross,

James Kim

(Dreaming of a community with welcome, kindness, and healing)

The Relationship between Ministers and Congregants

[Acts 28:11-15]

Last Wednesday, October 1st, those who followed the news in Korea were likely shocked to hear about the suicide of a well-known entertainer, Jin-sil Choi. The news of her death, after maintaining her status as a top talent for 20 years, could not have been anything but shocking to many who knew her through TV, newspapers, and other media. This marks another instance of a famous celebrity's suicide within a month, causing not only the entertainment industry but the entire nation to be enveloped in shock. Furthermore, within three days of Jin-sil Choi's suicide, concerns about copycat suicides arose as two more individuals, a 55-year-old woman named Park and a 30-year-old woman from Gang-neung, took their own lives in a similar manner. In response to these incidents, lawmakers Han Na-rae and Dang Ha-na submitted a bill titled 'Law for Suicide Prevention and Cultivation of a Culture of Respecting Life' to the National Assembly. The purpose of this proposed law is to establish a legal basis for the active intervention of the state in citizens' suicide attempts. Reports also mention discussions about the introduction of the 'Jin-sil Choi Law,' which aims to address baseless insults and malicious comments on the internet, considering the immense suffering Jin-sil Choi experienced due to online harassment (Internet).

Reading these recent news from my home country, I personally found myself contemplating a couple of things: how we, as Christians, should view "suicide," and the phenomenon of online harassment, commonly known as "malicious comments" these days. When thinking about "suicide," I recall a time long ago when a brother approached me, sharing the tragic suicide of his cousin and asking, 'Pastor, does one go to heaven or hell if they commit suicide?' Our senior pastor in the church, an elderly figure, occasionally mentioned to us young pastors that if a believer in the church commits suicide, it is considered a failure of pastoral care. Even during the recent denominational assembly in September, there was emphasis on the idea that 'if you commit suicide, you go to hell.' Personally, I couldn't provide a clear answer to the brother's question back then. Even now, if someone were to ask me the same question, my response would be that only God knows. However, one thing I can state unequivocally is that "taking one's own life is a sin." The

preservation and termination of life are under God's control. God brought us into this world, and in His time, He will take us away. We should not take the life that God has given us into our own hands. Committing suicide is a sin against God. The life God has given to each of us is precious and should not be taken lightly. Apart from "suicide," another issue that came to my mind was "malicious comments" or "hate speech." With the advancement of technology, countless sinful activities are taking place in the digital space, especially on the internet. It has been reported that even after the death of Jin-sil Choi, numerous unspeakable comments appeared online. I have no desire to see how people can write such malicious comments. Reflecting on news articles attributing the responsibility of these malicious comments to the suicides, I contemplated three forms of "evil": hate speech, malicious rumors, and malevolent hearts. While meditating on the Book of Acts, we learned that one of Satan's strategies is spreading "malicious rumors," creating unfounded stories to spread gossip. In recent times, this evil act of spreading unfounded rumors, which used to take a long time to reach a large number of people, can now be done instantly through the internet, particularly by posting malicious comments. It is indeed a frightening world. What is even more frightening is the evil hearts of those who spread such malicious rumors through hate speech on the internet.

The problem is that these malicious intentions and the spread of malicious rumors (gossip) are not uncommon within the church. Particularly, you can observe this phenomenon in churches where internal conflicts escalate, leading to legal battles. Many times, as the church becomes unsettled due to baseless rumors, you witness various incidents escalating to legal disputes, with pastors often at the center. It is not uncommon to see pastors resigning from large churches due to the swelling of rumors about them, even affecting their spouses' health. Recently, I have also seen assistant pastors spreading strange rumors about their lead pastors and leaving the church. It's disheartening to witness how trust and belief have become so challenging within the church. In such an environment, even among ministers, there are instances of causing harm to one another. Witnessing these situations, I ponder on the nature of relationships between ministers and congregants. If ministers themselves are causing harm within the church, one wonders about the state of relationships between ministers and congregants. In the midst of these reflections, I turned to today's passage, Acts 28:11-15, contemplating the nature of relationships between pastors and congregants.

In this passage, after spending three months on the island of Malta (meaning "refuge") with his companions, Paul leaves on a ship called Alexandrian bound for Rome. Along the way, they stop at a place called Puteoli, where Paul spends seven days with the local believers. Subsequently, he meets other believers at Appii Forum and Three Taverns. While meditating on this passage, I considered how relationships between ministers and congregants should be.

Firstly, I pondered how congregants should relate to ministers. The lesson from today's passage emphasizes that congregants should bring comfort to the hearts of ministers.

How can congregants truly comfort ministers? There could be various ways. Among them, I personally believe that one significant way congregants can comfort ministers is by striving for the progress

of their own faith. When congregants earnestly read, meditate on, and study God's Word, living a life of obedience by listening to God's voice through His Word, ministers find great comfort. Additionally, other ways for congregants to comfort ministers include praying for them, obeying their teachings, and actively serving in the church. In today's passage, congregants are taught how to comfort ministers—they are encouraged to sincerely welcome and receive ministers. Looking at Acts 28:14, when Paul and his companions stayed in the Italian city of Puteoli for about seven days during their journey to Rome, they were warmly welcomed and hosted by local believers. The believers responded to their invitation and provided them with ample rest, becoming a place of refuge for Paul and his companions. They undoubtedly felt comforted by this hospitality. While on their way to Rome to proclaim the gospel, the Christians in Puteoli opened their hearts and homes, inviting Paul and his companions to stay, offering them rest and hospitality in various ways. When Paul experienced such love from the believers, it must have been a tremendous source of comfort for him. How comforting it must have been to feel this love of God! Indeed, how are you expressing your love to ministers?

If you read the book "The Five Love Languages" by Dr. Gary Chapman, he states, 'Our most basic emotional needs are met through the love languages,' and he describes these five love languages as follows (Internet): Words of affirmation, quality time, receiving gifts, physical touch, and acts of service. When the love languages are mismatched, even if two people love each other, they may feel unloved and unsatisfied. After receiving love and hospitality from Christian believers in the region of Boardi, which is about 80 miles from Abbio (about 122 miles from Rome) and beyond Abbio, Paul and his companions arrived in an area known as "Three Taverns," where there were many inns to accommodate travelers (v. 15). At that moment, Paul was strengthened and encouraged in his heart by the Christian believers who had come from Rome to meet him. They had traveled about 40 miles to meet Paul and his companions. When they met, Paul expressed gratitude to God and gained boldness of heart (v. 15).

So, what should the relationships between ministers and congregants be like? Here are a couple of thoughts:

- (1) Ministers should be thankful when they think about congregants who comfort their hearts.

Look at Acts 28:15. The Apostle Paul and his companions, referred to as "we," upon seeing the brothers who had come as far as Appii Forum and the Three Taverns, expressed "thanks to God," indicating they were grateful to God. Even in the midst of a great storm with no hope of survival, I am reminded of Paul's actions, giving thanks to God after breaking bread. Despite facing a life-threatening situation due to the decisions of the centurion Julius, who had not heeded Paul's advice, Paul demonstrated gratitude to God and began breaking bread. At that moment, everyone, including Paul and the 275 people on board, felt at ease and partook of the bread (27:35-36). Reflecting on this passage, our ministers should learn the lesson of not complaining or harboring resentment, even if there are disobedient congregants. Whether or not congregants comfort

ministers, ministers should, like Paul, show a constant attitude of thanksgiving before all the congregants. This principle is not limited to pastors or evangelists; it applies to pastors' wives as well. Ministry couples should serve with a heart of constant gratitude before all the congregants. In the interactions between ministers and congregants, there should be a spirit of "thanks to God."

(2) Ministers should gain boldness of heart through congregants who comfort their hearts.

In other words, ministers should be able to gain courage from congregants who receive and comfort them with love (Park). If ministers feel weakened and discouraged by congregants rather than gaining strength and courage each time they meet, such encounters may not be beneficial for either party. Paul expressed in a letter to the Christian believers in Rome about three years prior, "I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong—that is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith" (Rom. 1:11-12). The apostle Paul, who had written this letter to the Christians in Rome, wanted to be strengthened and encouraged through their faith as they met, despite the considerable distance of about 40 miles that the Roman believers had traveled to meet him. To obtain such strength and courage from congregants, ministers should meditate on God's Word day and night and also teach congregants the Word to meditate on. Therefore, congregants need to listen to God's voice and grow in faith. In doing so, mutual encouragement, strength, and courage can be obtained through each other's faith. I hope that the relationship between ministers and congregants in our community becomes a beautiful one, similar to the relationship between Paul and the Christians in Rome and Appii Forum mentioned in today's passage. May congregants comfort ministers' hearts, and ministers, in turn, gain courage from congregants, resulting in a beautiful relationship that gives thanks to God, glorifies God together, and builds up the church.

Expressing gratitude to our church congregants,

James Kim

(Gaining comfort and boldness)

A Prisoner with no Crime Worthy of Death

[Acts 28:16-22]

In 1990, you may recall that O.J. Simpson, a professional football player and movie actor who was also a national hero, was charged with the murder of his ex-wife and her lover. At that time, the decisive evidence against him was DNA collected at the crime scene, which matched Simpson's. The probability of the DNA matching was said to be 1 in 10,000, making the conclusion of Simpson being the murderer 99.99%. On the other hand, his defense argued that among the 3 million people in the vicinity of Los Angeles, 300 could share the same DNA, leading to a 99.7% chance of a false conclusion that Simpson was the killer. Ultimately, Simpson was acquitted of the charges and set free. However, 13 years later, in a separate incident, he was convicted on 12 counts, including armed robbery and kidnapping, and sentenced to life in prison by a jury. In September of the previous year, Simpson and five armed associates unlawfully entered a hotel room in Las Vegas, threatened two sports memorabilia dealers, and stole thousands of dollars worth of memorabilia. The media speculated that Simpson faced the possibility of a minimum 15-year sentence, indicating that he was destined to spend the rest of his life in prison. Considering the emotions of Nicole Brown's parents, the ex-wife who was killed, it may seem that justice was served. However, doubts arise about how well justice is truly being served in this sinful world. The legal system seems to be molding falsehoods into truths. Consequently, there is a strong call in the United States for scientific investigations to be conducted again for prisoners serving time for heinous crimes such as rape, murder, and arson. The Innocence Project, a public interest legal civil rights organization, was established in 1992, centered at the Yeshiva University Law School in New York City, to prove the innocence of those who have been wrongly incarcerated. According to the organization, it is estimated that over 100,000 American citizens have been unjustly deprived of their freedom due to deep-rooted racial discrimination, prosecution based on eyewitness accounts, unverified confessions, false convictions, and inadequate forensic methods. Following the release of 210 individuals, including 15 on death row, it has been revealed that these individuals unjustly spent an

average of 12 years, totaling 2,569 years, behind bars (Internet).

In the passage from Acts 28:16-22 that we read today, we encounter the figure of Paul, who is unjustly accused and chained, describing himself as a prisoner with no crime worthy of death. As we have already meditated, Paul received hospitality, comfort, and strength from the brethren (believers) at Appii Forum and Three Inns (28:14-15). Afterward, Paul finally arrives at his destination, Rome (v. 16). In today's passage, three days after arriving in Rome, Paul invites Jewish leaders to present his case and speaks to them. In this speech, Paul defends his innocence in response to the accusations brought against him by the Jews. Particularly, in verses 17-18, Paul says, "I was delivered as a prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans" (v. 17), and "I had no accusation against me deserving of death" (v. 18). In verse 17, observe Paul defending his innocence: "I have done nothing against our people or the customs of our ancestors. Yet I was delivered as a prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans." These words indicate that Paul is asserting that he did not oppose the traditions of the Jewish people or their ancestors. However, those Jews who opposed Paul misunderstood and falsely believed that he had forsaken the law of Moses and instructed Jews living among the Gentiles not to circumcise their children or observe Jewish customs (21:21). Therefore, the Jews opposing Paul thought that he had rejected the law of Moses, the ancestor of the Israelite people, and had taught the same to all Jews living among the Gentiles. Consequently, the Jews who opposed Paul saw him in the Jerusalem temple, seized him, stirred up crowds, and cried out, "...Help! Fellow Israelites, this is the man who teaches everyone everywhere against our people and our law and this place (the temple). And besides, he has brought Greeks into the temple and defiled this holy place..." (v. 28). By spreading malicious rumors (v. 31), those opposing Paul incited people, ultimately causing a disturbance in the entire city of Jerusalem (v. 30). What was their purpose? Their purpose was to eliminate Paul (v. 36). In the end, due to the opposition from the Jews, Paul was handed over as a prisoner to the Romans for interrogation (28:18). Paul, who was innocent, underwent questioning and received lashes from Roman soldiers according to the orders of the Roman military tribune (22:24). At that time, the tribune Claudius Lysias (23:26) wrote a letter to Governor Felix presenting the results of Paul's interrogation, stating that the accusations brought against him by the Jews were related only to their religious law, and no crime worthy of death or imprisonment was found (v. 29). Later, Governor Festus, in the presence of King Agrippa and Bernice, commented on the accusations against Paul by the opposing Jews, saying, "Concerning the questions of their own religion and about a certain Jesus, who was dead, whom Paul affirmed to be alive, I was perplexed on how to investigate such matters" (25:19). He further declared that, upon examining Paul, he found no crime deserving death (v. 25). King Agrippa, Governor Festus, Bernice, and those present concluded, "This man (Paul) is doing nothing that deserves death or imprisonment" (26:31). In other words, both King Agrippa (and those with him, including his sister Bernice) and Governor Festus, as well as Tribune Claudius Lysias, affirmed that Paul was innocent. Therefore, these Romans intended to release Paul, but due to the opposition of the Jews, Paul had no choice but to appeal to Caesar, the Roman emperor (28:19). So, as we see in today's passage, Acts 28:16-22, guided and protected by God, Paul safely arrived in Rome. In Rome, he addressed the prominent Jews, presenting his case and asserting his innocence. However, despite Paul's innocence, why did the Jews deliver him as a prisoner

into the hands of the Romans? Paul explains the reason in Acts 28:20: "...I am bound with this chain because of the hope of Israel." Here, the "hope of Israel" that Paul is referring to is the Messiah, as the national hope of the Jews, which he had already presented during his defense in Jewish courts and before Governor Felix (23:6, 24:15, 26:6-7). In other words, the reason Paul was handed over as a prisoner to the Romans despite his innocence was that he testified to the fulfillment of Israel's hope—the Messiah is Jesus Christ. Therefore, Paul is saying that he is bound with this chain because he is proclaiming the fulfilled hope of Israel, namely, the coming of the Messiah, who is Jesus Christ. Additionally, Paul preaches the gospel that Jesus Christ, by dying on the cross and shedding His blood to atone for our sins, and rising from the dead after three days, grants eternal life (heaven) to those who believe in His death and resurrection. This is why Paul finds himself in chains (Park).

Is proclaiming the excellent news of Jesus Christ's gospel, like Paul did, truly a crime worthy of death? Is sharing the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ a crime deserving death? Why would proclaiming the greatest news, the gospel that Jesus Christ died and rose again to save you and me, leading to eternal life (heaven), be considered a crime worthy of death? When thinking about Paul, the innocent prisoner mentioned in today's passage, I couldn't help but think of Jesus. Jesus, the truly innocent one, was crucified by the chief priests, officials, and Jews, despite Pilate finding no fault in Him (Lk. 23:14). In Luke 23:15, Pilate explicitly states, "Neither has Herod, for he sent him back to us. Indeed, he has done nothing to deserve death." Pilate even attempted to release Jesus, as seen in verses 16 and 20. However, the Jewish crowd insisted on releasing Barabbas, a man imprisoned for rebellion and murder, instead of Jesus (v. 19). When Pilate tried to release Jesus again, the crowd shouted, "Crucify him! Crucify him!" (v. 21). Why did Jesus, the innocent Son of God, end up being nailed to the accursed tree of the cross according to the Jewish perspective? The reason is for our salvation (eternal life). In Luke 23:21, when given the choice between releasing Jesus or Barabbas, the crowd chose Barabbas, the one imprisoned for rebellion and murder. Even when Pilate wanted to release Jesus, they insisted on having Him crucified. Jesus, the sinless Son of God, cried out, "Crucify him! Crucify him!" Why did Jesus, the sinless Son of God, willingly choose to be crucified on the cursed tree of the cross? The reason is for our salvation (eternal life). God, out of His love for us, provided the grace of salvation by having Jesus, His Son, crucified on the cross. Jesus, who had no crime deserving death, chose to die on the cross on our behalf. Therefore, those who believe in Jesus Christ receive forgiveness of sins and obtain eternal life.

Will you not welcome Jesus Christ as your Savior? The Bible says, "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 6:23). We must address our sin problem. We are sinners who would otherwise face eternal death. Yet, Jesus Christ, the sinless Son of God, took upon Himself all our sins, died on the cross, and rose from the tomb after three days, offering the gift of eternal life. Jesus, without any guilt, died on the cross as if He were a sinner. Whom did He die for? He did so for sinners like you and me, who have the guilt of sin deserving eternal death. What will you do? Will you not welcome Jesus as your Savior? Let us hold on to this Bible verse: Acts 16:31 - "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household." I fervently pray for God's

grace of salvation to be present among us today, in our homes, and in our lives.

I, who deserved eternal death as a sinner,

James Kim

(While contemplating Jesus Christ, who was crucified without any guilt)

The Unstoppable Spread of the Gospel

[Acts 28:23-31]

On April 3, 2008, the Korea Research Institute for Mission (Director Dr. Sang-cheol Moon, hereafter KRIM) presented 'Recent Trends in Global Christianity and Mission Based on Recent Data' at the Aurora Club, a missionary lecture gathering, covering 50 global mission trends. In China alone, about 16,500 people convert every day. 4,340 mission organizations are handling overseas missions with 453,000 missionaries, including 210,000 professional missionaries and approximately 410,000 short-term missionaries serving for a year or less," as reported on the internet. KRIM highlighted positive trends within the flow of global missions, stating, 'In the 1800s, the Christian population, which was only 200 million, has spread to 2 billion in the year 2000. The proportion of unreached people has decreased (76.4% in the 1800s to 28.3% in 2000), and Gospel-oriented Christians have increased (70 million in the 1900s to 220 million in 2000),' according to the internet. Referring to IBMR (International Bulletin of Missionary Research) data on global religious population, KRIM projected, 'The world's four major religions, including Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, and Hinduism, which accounted for only 67% of the world's population in 1900, have increased to around 73% in 2008. It is expected to continue growing to 80% by 2050 and 87% by 2200,' emphasizing the continuous increase of these religions. Looking at Matthew 24:14, the Bible says, "And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come." This verse implies that the Lord will come when the gospel is preached to the ends of the earth. Without missions reaching the ends of the earth, the imminent return of the Lord cannot occur. Therefore, saints and churches eagerly awaiting the Lord's return must devote all their efforts to missions. We must actively participate in missions to spread the gospel to the ends of the earth, anticipating the arrival of God's kingdom through the Lord's return (Internet).

In Acts 28, we encounter the figure of Paul, who dedicated himself to missions with the hope of the second coming. As an innocent prisoner, Apostle Paul, brought to Rome, spent two years freely teaching about the kingdom of God and Jesus Christ to many who came to him from morning till evening (v. 30). No one restrained him during this time (v. 31). This indicates that Paul, without hindrance, boldly testified about the kingdom of God and the gospel of Christ to those who came to him diligently from morning till evening

(v. 23). Consistent with his previous practices, Paul prioritized sharing the gospel with the Jews upon his arrival in Rome. When the Jews heard his preaching, their response was divided into two: "And some were persuaded by what he said, but others disbelieved" (v. 24). In other words, those who heard Paul's preaching were divided into believers and non-believers (Park). Ultimately, in the face of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the audience became divided. Witnessing this division, the Jews quarreled among themselves (v. 25, Yoo). Reflecting on this situation, Paul, in verses 26-27, refers to Isaiah 6:9-10, explaining the cause of the unbelief of the Jews who heard the gospel of Jesus Christ. He points out that their hearts became calloused, their ears became dull, and their eyes were closed, emphasizing their refusal to hear and obey God's word. Why did the hearts of these Jews become calloused, their ears dull, and their eyes closed, rendering them unable to understand the gospel even when they heard it and saw it? The reason lies in their refusal to hear and obey God's word. The hearts of these "disobedient Jews" (Acts 14:2) became more calloused as they rejected the gospel, eventually leading them to oppose both the gospel and its messenger even more vehemently. Due to the unbelief of the Jews, God sent His salvation to the Gentiles (v. 28). Unlike the disobedient Jews, these Gentiles actively embraced the message of salvation. In the end, Paul told his Jewish audience that the gospel of Jesus Christ would spread even more among the Gentiles. In essence, Paul was stating that the spread of the gospel would not cease but continue to flourish. This reflects the fulfillment of the key verse we meditated on in the early chapters of Acts, Acts 1:8. As the Holy Spirit came on Pentecost, Jesus' disciples received power, becoming witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. The spread of the gospel did not stop there; it continues through us, Jesus Christ's disciples, to the ends of the earth.

The record of Acts concludes with today's passage, but the central theme of the continuous spread of the gospel, which is the essence of this book, has not ended. Until the day of the Lord's coming, the gospel must be proclaimed to the ends of the earth. The One overseeing this proclamation of the gospel is none other than the ascended Jesus. Our Lord Jesus, through the Holy Spirit, desires and continues to spread the gospel through us, witnesses of the gospel, and believers (Yoo). The spread of this gospel cannot be stopped. Although disobedient Jews attempted to hinder the spread of the gospel of Jesus Christ, they could never stop the sovereign work of the Holy Spirit in spreading the gospel. Despite their attempts to spread malicious rumors, incite people, and create disturbances, ultimately aiming to eliminate Paul, they could not prevent the unstoppable work of the sovereign spread of the gospel. I hope and pray that this unstoppable work of the spread of the gospel will continue to flourish through you and me.

Gratefully acknowledging the Lord who has enabled us to participate in the unstoppable work of the spread of the gospel,

James Kim Sharing

(Only by God's grace, only Jesus, only the gospel!)

Conclusion

The spread of the gospel cannot be stopped. No one can hinder the spread of the gospel. The gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ will be spread to the ends of the earth. This is the Lord's will, and the Lord will fulfill His will. Who can possibly stop the Lord?

The Lord has called us to proclaim the gospel of Christ. As witnesses of Jesus, we must faithfully fulfill this mission. We, being sent, should carry out the Lord's will, who sent us into this world. We must proclaim the word of salvation. We should not be afraid but boldly speak the gospel. We are to testify. Simultaneously, we must live a righteous Christian life. We should be Christians who can claim integrity. We need to be exemplary in all things. We should always be in God's grace. We must give glory to God. We should spread the influence of Jesus.

The Lord's church needs true revival. The word of God needs to be vibrant. The grace-filled word must be declared. The power of prayer needs to manifest in the church. It should become a community of Spirit-filled Christians. A gathering of those sincerely desiring to be disciples of Jesus. The church must also grow. It should be a church where faith multiplies daily, a church that the Lord adds to. The relationship between ministers and saints should be centered on the Lord. They should build loving and encouraging relationships with each other. Therefore, the church must engage in both evangelism and comforting ministry. The church must cry out for salvation in this rebellious generation. It must proclaim "Jesus, whom you crucified on the cross." The church must fulfill the work of God. It will be accomplished according to the Lord's will!