

Those who are pure in heart!

Victory Presbyterian Church 30th Anniversary
40 Days of Scripture Meditation

James Kim

"I dedicate this book to Pastor Chang-she Kim, my beloved father and retired pastor of Victory Presbyterian Church and church family, whom I love dearly."

It resonates with my heart.

Pastor Kyung Won Kim, Seohyun Church

Even if we say that we live in a flood of books, it would not be an exaggeration. Every day, we encounter numerous books, and new books are published every day. Just as it is said that water is precious during a flood, how much of the many books are truly necessary for our lives? Furthermore, while pondering how many books can be a remedy for our souls and serve as valuable meditations, Pastor James Kim's Word meditation book are truly like fresh water, quenching the thirst of our souls and serving as precious spiritual nourishment.

Pastor Kim, having grown up as the son of an excellent pastor as a 1.5 generation immigrant, received God's calling and now serves as the senior pastor of the church his father served. He came to our church several years ago for training in Korean pastoral ministry, and for few years, he led our church's English worship and Bible study, bearing abundant fruits in his significant ministry.

On a personal level, I have had very meaningful times of fellowship, exchanging great love, and even now, that fellowship continues. He always pray and strive to become a good pastor and a good preacher. I am very happy to see the words that were preached from the pulpit of the church where Pastor Kim serves, who prays and endeavors to become a good pastor and a good preacher, now published this book. I hope that many people will read it and find spiritual nourishment. There is an important reason why Pastor Kim's writings, beloved co-worker, resonate with our hearts. Above all, Pastor Kim is genuine. His writings, like his faith and life, are not pretentious but truly authentic. That's why they are so moving. Another reason is his faithful meditation on the Scripture. He deeply meditates on God's word itself, not in worldly terms, and writes down the inspiration that comes from it. Because of this, we can feel the touch of God that moves and comforts our souls. Looking forward, I anticipate more excellent meditation books and believe that many people will receive it with love. I recommend this meditation book with joy.

Holiness is the mark of a saved believer and the goal of life.

Rev. David Suh (Author of 'Interpretation of th conundrum Bible')

The Bible is the word of God and can also be considered a letter sent to us by God. Therefore, the Bible should not be read like a newspaper or a novel. While reading it carefully and meditating on it are good, reading it in such a way may help us remember the words. But it may not necessarily assist us in applying and obeying those words in our lives. In fact, today our challenge is not being deeply moved by sermons from pastors who interpret the Scripture and call us to apply and practice them in our lives, and it's not easy to make decisions for life change. The Bible says that blessed are those who read, hear, and do the word (Rev. 1:3). However, if our lives do not experience transformation and blessings through preaching in worship, then studying the Bible with the goal of application and practice in life can be an alternative. But it is important to note that our salvation, those who have not yet received salvation, the life of distinguished believers are all personal. If this is true, there may be nothing as important as meditation on His words.

I congratulate and rejoice at Pastor James Kim's compilation of the teachings that he has shared from the church pulpit where he has served. This meditation book is the result of the author's deep contemplation on the Word, which he meditated on intensely after the morning worship and first applied to his own life with sincere reflection. He also prayed and applied it for the transformation of the church and the faith lives of the congregation. The reason for enthusiastically recommending this book is not only the author's boldness and sincerity in confessing his shortcomings and mistakes before the Word but also his earnest desire for change. This meditation book delves into how a saved believer can live a life that glorifies God and shines in the world, becoming the salt and light. Therefore, it urges us to guard against hypocrisy, spiritual pride, reliance on one's abilities, legalism, fleshly desires and indulgences, covetousness, and jealousy while pursuing humility, purity, love, and the practice of truth before the Lord. Readers of this book will be empowered to engage in effective meditation on the Word, reflect on themselves boldly and sincerely before the Word, and come to repentance. Furthermore, it provides deep insights, motivation, and strength to live a sanctified life that can stand before the Lord without blemish or fault, with the assurance that those who have been saved can lead a life of holiness in the world. I sincerely hope that as many believers as

possible come into contact with this book so that, like the author, their earnest prayers and meditation on the Word will lead to a sanctified life that overcomes the world and brings glory to God. In any case, we pray that the grace of leading a distinct and sanctified life that conquers the world and brings glory to God will abound abundantly as believers read this book.

Joy of sharing the meditation of the Word

Elder Soo Woong Park (Author of “Ready to Love”)

The first time I met Pastor James Kim was at the University of California, Irvine. At that time, Pastor James served in a Christian fellowship called Korean Christian Fellowship (KCF). In the 80s and 90s, God accomplished significant works through this KCF fellowship, raising many pastors, missionaries, and lay church workers. Among those workers were Pastor James Kim and my son, Pastor Peter. In such an environment, God worked in Pastor James Kim's life, transforming his shyness into boldness and enabling him to approach people. Moreover, God allowed him to experience the joy of transparent fellowship within the Lord.

Recently, I had the opportunity to lead a 'Happy Family Seminar' at the Victory Presbyterian Church where Pastor James Kim ministers. During the seminar, I divided the content into three parts on how we can discover talents or missions in our lives: (1) What is your hobby? (2) What comes easy to you? (3) What do you enjoy? Pastor James Kim's hobby is soccer. Despite his age, he enjoys playing soccer without finding it too strenuous. However, what he truly enjoys is meditating on the Word and sharing it (QT sharing). Therefore, even now, Pastor James actively shares in meditation on the Word online [Victory Presbyterian Church Website (www.vpcla.org), Cyworld (www.cyworld.com/chmonk106), Naver Blog (<http://blog.naver.com/kdicaprio74>), Facebook (<http://www.facebook.com/#!/profile.php?id=570315874>)] (This part is optional). His writings focus more on who he is rather than fancy words or ideas. Pastor James takes pleasure in meditating on God's Word and also in sharing his meditations in writing.

This book is a small fruit of Pastor James Kim's desire to be transparent and passionate about God's calling, wanting to be faithful. I hope that God will use this meditation book to bear beneficial fruit in the lives of many.

Prologue

In Celebration of the 30th Anniversary of Victory Presbyterian Church...

Victory Presbyterian Church is a church that is build by the Lord. It is a church that holds fast to the promise of the Lord's word, "...I ... will build my church..." (Mt. 16:18) and moves forward. Guided by this promise, our Victory Presbyterian Church pursues a mission - to build God's church, and thereby to build the God's kingdom! Believing that the Lord is advancing this mission, our church actively participates in it, even in a time when there is a shortage of workers amidst a plentiful harvest (Mt. 9:37). We are striving to raise the leaders with a vision, sending out workers who have a Christ-centered vision, to expand the kingdom of God.

In the midst of this, as we celebrate the 30th anniversary of the church's establishment, we are grateful and joyful to publish the 40-day meditation book titled "Those who are pure in heart". First and foremost, I thank God. I also express my gratitude to the members of Victory Presbyterian Church. Especially, I am thankful to the elder and ordained deacons of the church board who have loved and supported me since I was 12 years old, and who continue to serve the church alongside me. Additionally, I extend my sincere thanks to Pastor Kyung Won Kim, Pastor David Seo, and Elder Soo Woong Park for their recommendations and love for such young and lacking servant like me. In particular, I deeply appreciate Elder Young Chul Kim of Seohyun Church (CEO of Kookmin Publishing) and the publishing team for their love and assistance in publishing this book, as I was unsure of how to proceed.

It is my hope and pray that my sharing of God's word, which I have meditated upon, will be beneficial to all of you. I pray that you will also receive the grace to be further established through God's word. Especially, I pray that as we obey the voice of God heard through meditating on His word, our souls will be purified, allowing us to love fervently with a sincere heart, free from falsehood (1 Pet. 1:22).

In fellowship, receiving restoration through the Lord's word,

Pastor James Kim
(July 2010)

Day 1: Those who are pure in heart

[Psalms 73]

Once, when I bought a new car, I advised my children not to eat in the back seat to keep it well-maintained. For about a year, I was able to keep the car clean without any issues. However, a year later, my oldest son Dillon suddenly threw up a lot in the back seat of my car. Perhaps he had been feeling unwell since the previous night and eventually vomited in my car. At that moment, my oldest daughter Yeri covered her nose with her hand, complaining about the strong smell. Even my youngest daughter Karis expressed her discomfort with the smell. Haha. Fortunately, there was a gas station nearby. I quickly drove there and used towels to clean up all the food that came out of Dillon's stomach and wiped down the car floor and seats. This incident reminded me of the word of Jesus: "What goes into a man's mouth does not make him 'unclean,' but what comes out of his mouth, that is what makes him 'unclean' (Mt. 15:11). So, I had a conversation with my children to teach them those words. I told them that when food goes into our bodies, it's not dirty in itself, but what comes out from inside can smell and be dirty like this. Therefore, I tried to teach my children to guard their hearts against bad thoughts, lies, jealousy, envy, and sinful things.

We must guard our hearts, which are the source of life (Prov. 4:23). We have to protect our hearts from the sinful things of this world. There are so many sinful things around us that want to pollute our hearts. Among the things we see, hear, feel, smell, and touch, there are many sinful things that try to deceive and defile our hearts. Living in this sinful world full of such sinful things, you and I must strive to maintain the purity of our hearts. In Matthew 5:8, Jesus says to us, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God." We should strive to be blessed individuals with pure hearts who can see God.

In today's passage, Psalms 73, Asaph, the psalmist, truly affirms that God does good to those in Israel whose hearts are pure (v. 1). However, Asaph confesses that his feet had almost slipped (v. 2). Why

did his feet almost slipped? What are the factors that almost cause us to stumble in trying to maintain purity of heart? Asaph teaches us about three factors in today's passage:

First, Asaph almost stumbled because he saw the prosperity of the wicked.

Look at Psalms 73:3 – “For I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.” Asaph was on the verge of stumbling as he envied the prosperity of the wicked. We can fully understand Asaph's envy (jealousy). Once, an elderly saint asked me a similar question: 'Why is it that those who believe in Jesus are often poor and struggling, while those who don't believe in Jesus seem to have plenty of money and live comfortably?' It seemed like this saint had pondered this question a lot. However, I believe this concern isn't unique to this saint alone. I think many of us, Christians, have these kinds of thoughts. The danger of such thoughts is that Satan tries to deceive saints who have them and plant jealousy in their hearts. Consequently, we end up, like Asaph, envying the prosperity of the wicked. What does the prosperity of the wicked entail? It means they have no burdens (v. 5). Furthermore, the wicked are healthy (vv. 4-5). Additionally, they are always at ease and accumulate wealth (v. 12). How many things there are that even the righteous might envy! We can ask ourselves this question: 'Why is it that people who don't believe in Jesus live without suffering and have good health, while the righteous constantly experience difficult trials, their bodies deteriorating, even though they believe in Him?'

Second, Asaph was on the verge of stumbling due to the arrogance of the wicked.

Look at Psalms 73:6a – “Therefore pride is their necklace,” Asaph not only saw the prosperity of the wicked, but he also witnessed their arrogance. The arrogance of the wicked can be considered in three aspects:

(1) It's the pride in their actions.

This refers to the violence of the wicked. Look at verse 6b: “... The garment of violence covers them.” This means that all their actions and expressions are marked by oppressing and exploiting others (Yoon-seon Park).

(2) It's the pride in their hearts.

This is indicated by the haughty eyes of the wicked. Look at verse 7: "Their eyes bulge with fatness; their hearts overflow with follies." When one's belly is full, what happens? Their eyes

become haughty. In other words, their imagination knows no bounds, leading to an insatiable desire to amass wealth. Consequently, they gain more income than their budget allows (Park).

(3) It's the pride in their speech.

This points to committing sins with their mouths. Look at verses 8-9: "They scoff and speak with malice; loftily they threaten oppression. They set their mouths against the heavens, and their tongue struts through the earth." What does this mean? When the Bible says, "they set their mouths against the heavens," it signifies a self-assuredness as if they were as high as the heavens. And when the Bible says, "their tongue struts through the earth," it denotes behavior focused on spreading slander wherever they go. In other words, the wicked, in their arrogance, go about boasting and spreading slander.

When observing such behavior of the wicked, the righteous, who are enduring suffering, can easily stumble.

Third, Asaph was on the verge of stumbling because of the people who followed the wicked.

Look at Psalms 73:10-11: "Therefore his people turn back to them, and find no fault in them. And they say, 'How can God know? Is there knowledge in the Most High?'" What Asaph witnessed was that a faction arose, accepting the wicked's evil thoughts and adopting their arrogant ideology, leading to an increase in the number of people following the wicked. When Asaph saw this, he was very close to stumbling. Those who imitated the wicked turned apostate, doubting the providential rule of the God they once believed in. They thought that God was indifferent to the affairs of this world. How challenging must this have been for Asaph? When he saw God's people, who were supposed to follow Him, now following the wicked, Asaph surely must have been shaken even just a little. In this situation, Asaph's conclusion regarding the wicked was as follows: "Behold, these are the wicked; always at ease, they increase in riches" (v. 12).

When you see the prosperity of the wicked, that is, their constant ease and increasing wealth, how do you think you would react? Wouldn't you feel discouraged? Might you not feel angry? Perhaps you would even be tempted to curse them in your heart? How did Asaph respond to the prosperity of the wicked?

(1) Asaph considered his own commitment to righteousness as in vain.

Look at verse 13: "All in vain have I kept my heart clean and washed my hands in innocence."

(2) Asaph lamented his toilsome life.

Look at verse 14: "For all the day long I have been stricken and rebuked every morning."

Ultimately, the factor that caused righteous Asaph to complain in his heart was the realization that while the wicked prospered, he himself was caught in hardship (Park). Faced with these thoughts of the prosperity of the wicked and his own hardships, how did Asaph proceed? He endeavored to understand. In other words, Asaph tried to unravel the complexity of the providence of God with his limited knowledge (Park). However, these efforts ultimately greatly troubled his heart (v. 16): " When I pondered to understand this, It was troublesome in my sight." In the midst of this difficulty, what did Asaph do? He entered the sanctuary of God. It was there that he came to realize three things:

(1) Asaph came to realize the end of the wicked.

Look at verse 17: "Until I went into the sanctuary of God; then I perceived their end." What is the end of the wicked? It is destruction (v. 18), desolation (v. 19), complete ruin (v. 19), and despise (v. 20). Look at verses 18-20: "Surely You set them in slippery places; You cast them down to destruction. How they are destroyed in a moment! They are utterly swept away by sudden terrors! Like a dream when one awakes, O Lord, when aroused, You will despise their form. The prosperity of the wicked is short-lived. They are not far from falling into destruction. God, as if in slumber, endures their wickedness for a time, but when the time comes, He awakens and brings judgment upon them.

(2) Asaph came to realize the end of the righteous.

What is the end of the righteous? Look at verse 24: " With Your counsel You will guide me, And afterward receive me to glory." The end of us, the righteous, is that the Lord will receive us into glory. The Apostle Paul also conveys a message of hope to us in Romans 8:18 - "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us."

(3) Asaph came to realize his own foolishness and ignorance.

Look at verse 22: "Then I was senseless and ignorant; I was like a beast before You." Asaph, who had previously envied the prosperity of the wicked and harbored painful complaints due to his

doubts, realized how foolish and ignorant he had been when he entered the sanctuary of God. Therefore, he blamed himself and repented for being as foolish as a "beast" before the Lord.

Thus, by entering the sanctuary of God and coming to understand the fate of the wicked and his own identity before God, Asaph makes three beautiful confessions in Psalms 73:23-28:

(1) Asaph's first confession was, "You have taken hold of my right hand."

Look at verse 23: " Nevertheless I am continually with You; You have taken hold of my right hand." Despite almost stumbling when he saw the prosperity of the wicked, their arrogance, and the people who followed them, Asaph, in the midst of it all, realized that the Lord had held his right hand, preventing him from stumbling and, instead, leading him with His counsel (v. 24). What was the lesson that the Lord taught Asaph here? It was the understanding that the Lord would grant glory to the righteous in the end.

(2) Asaph's second confession was, "the nearness of God is my good."

Look at verse 28: "But as for me, the nearness of God is my good; I have made the Lord GOD my refuge, That I may tell of all Your works." Despite any hardships his body and heart may face, Asaph resolved to trust in the Lord, the Rock of his heart, and the eternal portion of his inheritance, forever.

(3) Asaph's third confession was, "Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you."

Look at verse 25: "Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you." The heart that meets God in the sanctuary, the pure-hearted saint, does not envy the prosperity of the wicked while living on this earth. That saint does not live by committing sin in the midst of arrogance, seeking wealth, avoiding hardship and suffering, and selfishly satisfying their desires. Instead, that saint knows the ultimate fate of the wicked and the ultimate fate of the righteous, desiring nothing in this world but only longing for the Lord and living for Him. It reminds me hymn "I'd Rather Have Jesus":

- (v. 1) I'd rather have Jesus than silver or gold, I'd rather be His than have riches untold;
I'd rather have Jesus than houses or lands. I'd rather be led by His nail-pierced hand
- (v. 2) I'd rather have Jesus than men's applause I'd rather be faithful to His - dear cause;
I'd rather have Jesus than World-wide fame. I'd rather be true to His holy name

(v. 3) He's fairer than lilies of rarest bloom
He's sweeter than honey from out the comb;
He's all that my hungering spirit needs, I'd rather have Jesus and let Him lead
(chorus)
Than to be the king of a vast domain Or be held in sin's dread sway.
I'd rather have Jesus than anything This world affords today.

As Asaph, whose heart was pure, was almost stumbled, Satan is striving to make us stumble by causing us to envy the prosperity of the wicked. Furthermore, Satan is trying to make us stumble by making us see the wicked as the pursued ones. In such moments, what should we do? We must, like Asaph in Psalms 73, enter into the sanctuary of God. And there, we must come to realize the end of the wicked and of the righteous. We must also, like Asaph, recognize our own foolishness. In doing so, we too can make a beautiful confession, just like Asaph: "Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you."

Desiring a pure heart,

James Kim

(Confessing that Asaph's confession is my confession as well)

Day 2: ‘The living should take this to heart’

[Ecclesiastes 7:1-4]

On Thursday, April 20, 2008, there was interesting news in South Korea YTN 11 o'clock night news. The news was about some people taking pictures for their funerals, writing their last will letters, reading that letters in a mortuary room. I saw most of them crying when they were reading down their letters. Not only did they read down their letters, but they actually went into their coffins in the mortuary room. Then the other person slowly poured the soil over the coffin with a shovel. When I was watching that moment I thought if a person who was inside the coffin heard that sound of the soil, he would probably felt real about his death. The response of those who experienced their dying process was "I wanted to live more." And they said that they remembered their family members the most when they were going through that dying process. I heard the person who is the director of the death experience center came out and said, so many people are interested about their own well-being but not many people were interested in well-dying. He said that was why he started this program. You might think that what a strange program that is. But personally I thought it was a good idea to have that kind of program. I think it is good if we could feel our deaths more realistically so that we can prepare to die.

In Ecclesiastes 7:2, King Solomon says that "the living should take this to heart." What is "this" here? Here, "this" is the destiny of everyone which is death. Look at Ecclesiastes 7:2 – "It is better to go to a house of mourning than to go to a house of feasting, for death is the destiny of everyone; the living should take this to heart." We have to think about our death. We have to ponder about the fact that someday we all have to our end in this earth, which is death. From this point of view of death, we have to think seriously and momentarily about how we shall live. How can we do that? King Solomon gives us good way in Ecclesiastes 7:2. What is that good way? It is to go to a house of mourning (v. 2). In other words, going to a funeral is a good way to think about death. There is no better way to think about our own death than to go to a funeral. As we mourn the death of the deceased, we can imagine what death we will

face in this world. I personally have a thought to attend my funeral and often feel my death more realistically. My thought is to live well in order to die well. In the end, death at a funeral gives me an opportunity to think about how to live well.

But what is the problem? It is that our instinct prefers to go to the house of feasting rather than the house of mourning. This means we like laughter than sadness (v. 3). In other words, we like to enjoy the physical pleasure than to visit those who have lost their beloved one (Park Yun-sun). But as King Solomon had already said in Ecclesiastes 2:11, physical pleasure is useless. In other words, going to the feast house and enjoying worldly pleasures is of no benefit in God's perspective. Rather, King Solomon says that what is beneficial is to go to the house of mourning and experience grief. Why does he say that sadness is better than laughter? It is because "a sad face is good for the heart" (v. 3). What does it mean? It means that our hearts are softened by the sorrow of the death (Park Yun-sun). And when our hearts are soften, we will not pursue this worldly pleasure and waste our lives in vain. Instead, we will humble ourselves before the Lord and will be in obedience to the Word of God and live a profitable life in the sight of God. So this is what King Solomon says in Ecclesiastes 7:4 – "The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning, but the heart of fools is in the house of pleasure."

Our hearts should not be in the house of pleasure. In other words, our hearts should not be in the house of feasting where we can enjoy physical pleasure. Rather, our hearts must be in the house of mourning. We should like to go to the funeral better than the wedding. And we should go to the funeral and think about our death before the death of the deceased. We also have to go someday when the Lord calls us. The reason is because death is the destiny for all of us (v. 2). Therefore, we should think about our death and how we should live beautifully today. We have to leave the "good name" in this world (v. 1). What is the best beautiful name? We must keep in mind that it is the Name "Jesus". We who believe in Jesus should imitate Him so that at our funeral we can leave the memories of Jesus likeness to our children's hearts, in the hearts of our descendants and our neighbors. Therefore, at our funeral, there must be true praise when our children, descendants, or even neighbors think about our names. Furthermore, the people should gratefully praise God in thanksgiving as they mourn over our death.

Desire to leave the name "Christian" in the hearts of my three children Dillon, Yeri and Karis when I depart from this world,

James Kim

(Desiring to live the death perspective)

Day 3: Death is not the end

“So be on your guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears. ... In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.' ” (Acts 20:31, 35)

As I meditate on the word of God, I have a view of life that God the Holy Spirit is planting in my heart. One of those views on life is that people come to dust and return to dust. In other words, the perspective that God the Holy Spirit instills in my heart through the word of God is the perspective of death. Look at the Bible Ecclesiastes 7:2 – “It is better to go to a house of mourning than to go to a house of feasting, for death is the destiny of every man; the living should take this to heart.” So, even though I am alive now, I am praying, pondering, and working hard on how to live a life worthy of God’s view of life on this earth given the death perspective while thinking about my coming death. In the midst of this, after I preached the words of Acts 20:17-38 at the Morning Prayer meeting, I kept thinking during the prayer that ‘Death is not the end’. Of course, I know that death is not the end, because I believe there is a world after death. I didn’t think that death isn’t the end just thinking about the afterlife. But I thought that death is not the end because there are memories that we plant and leave to our loved ones and church members who remain on this earth even after we die. In other words, death isn’t the end because we leave memories to all the people in the encounters the Lord has allowed on this earth, such as family, relatives, church members, friends, neighbors, etc. Although we leave this world after death and go to the other world, heaven, our death isn’t the end because the loved ones who remain on this earth will live on this earth with the memories about us in their hearts. When I came to this view that death was not the end, I was compelled to kneel before the Lord and think again about how I should live the rest of my life on this earth.

Another view of life that God is instilling in me with the word of God is that “A life is making memories.” While living on this earth, our life is a series of encounters and partings. In these encounters and partings, we make memories in our relationships with each other during the given meeting period. Sometimes we make good memories. But we also make bad memories that we don't want. Therefore, we should think about what kind of memories we are planting in the other person's memories in the encounters that God allows in His sovereignty. The reason is because the memories that are planted will affect the other person even when we die. For example, when we think of our family, we can instill both good and bad memories in our family members. If we leave this world with good memories in the Lord rather than the bad memories we don't want, our family members will have a good influence on their lives even after we die. On the other hand, if we leave this world with more bad memories in our family members, we will have a bad influence on their lives even after we die. That's why I thought, “Death is not the end” this morning.

At the early Morning Prayer meeting today, I preached and prayed the words of Acts 20:17-38. And now after the Morning Prayer, I want to meditate on the text again like this. In particular, I want to focus on verses 31 and 35. The reason is that in these two verses there are words “remember” (v. 31) and “remembering” (v. 35). I would like to meditate on why apostle Paul told the Ephesian church elders to remember him in 2 ways when he was with in Ephesus for 3 years (v. 31), how he lived the whole time he was with them (v. 18) and what kind of memories he planted in their hearts.

First, the apostle Paul planted the word of God in the Ephesian church members.

Look at Acts 20:31 – “So be on your guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears.” From Miletus, Apostle Paul sent to Ephesus for the elders of the church (v. 17). While giving a farewell sermon before them, he exhorted them to remember that he had been warning each one day and night with tears for 3 years (v. 31). Why did the Apostle Paul exhort the Ephesian elders to remember the warning? The reason is because he knew that after he left Ephesus, savage wolves would come in among them (v. 29), and would distort the truth in order to draw away the disciples after them (v. 30), and eventually would try to deceive the flock and lead them from the faith. In other words, Paul knew that heretics would come in and deceive the church members of the Ephesian church by distorting the truth, so that some of them would fall away from the faith. That was why Paul exhorted them to remember that he never stopped warning each of them night and day with tears. Do we really understand Paul's heart?

I applied this to my family to understand Paul's heart. As the head of the family, I thought for a moment what I would say to my wife at the crossroads of life and death if I had to leave first, leaving my

beloved wife and three children in this world. As I leave my three children with my beloved wife, I ask myself if I can exhort my wife as Paul did to the elders of the Ephesian church. Perhaps I should say to my beloved wife: 'Remember, dear wife. Remember what I've been trying to instill in you and our children until this time. I have tried to instill in you and our three children the commandment to love Jesus. Please remember that. And I hope you can love Jesus twice more when I'm gone. And I hope that your love for Jesus can be planted in the hearts of these three children.' The reason I think I can say this to my beloved wife before death is because one of the two prayer topics that I have been praying for the family that the Lord will establish in the future is 'Love your spouse with God's love'. This is because I pray that my future spouse will also love me with the love of God. What is it that I love my wife or my three children with the love of God? It is keeping the commandments of God (Jn. 14:21). And in order to keep the commandments of God, I must diligently plant His word in my heart. It is my responsibility to teach my wife and my children to love the Bible and to read, hear, learn, and obey the word of God as I show first my devotion to His word. Is it really that I am faithfully bearing this responsibility to my beloved wife and children and to the members of Victory Presbyterian Church from the death perspective? I feel again the weight of this responsibility in this morning. I wonder if, after I left like Paul, I could earnestly exhort my family and church members to remember the word of God that I diligently taught to them after knowing the infiltration and delusion of heresy, which is the temptation of Satan, among my family and members of the church. I am asking myself if I am warning them day and night with tears unceasingly like Paul so that my family members and the church members may stand firm in the word of God, so no matter what Satan's delusions may come, and do well until the day we meet the Lord faithfully without turning our back on Jesus. Even if I die, if my children and church members remember the words of God that I have taught, and if they can win the spiritual battle with those words and live their lives faithfully, what a blessing it is. Even if they forget the existence of "James", if they can keep their faith by remembering the word of God that God told them through me as my wife's husband, my children's father, and my church members' pastor, and can obey the word, and can fight spiritual battle with the assurance of victory, I wonder how happy I am as a husband, father, and pastor. What must I do to enjoy this blessing and happiness? Just as Paul taught the Ephesian church members when he was in Ephesus for three years, just as he preached and taught without hesitation in public or in each house whatever was beneficial to the Ephesian church members (v. 20), the lesson that I am learning is that I must teach them the word of God diligently and faithfully that is beneficial to them during the time I have with them in this earth. And just as Paul committed them to God and to the word of His grace, which can build the elders of the Ephesus church up and give them an inheritance among all those who are sanctified (v. 32), I also commit my beloved church members and my family to the Lord and the word of His grace. I believe that the Lord will build up God's children with His word. Therefore, this morning I again devote myself to the Lord and His word. I devote myself to planting God's word diligently in the church members, and in my family.

Second and last, the Apostle Paul planted the image of Jesus in the Ephesian church members.

Look at Acts 2:35 – “In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’” This verse is the Apostle Paul’s farewell sermon to the elders of the Ephesus church, telling them that he set an example in everything while working with the Ephesian church members for three years, exhorting the elders to remember the word of Jesus. What is that word of Jesus? That word was “It is more blessed to give than to receive.” Paul, who exhorted them to remember this word, told the elders of the Ephesian church that he set an example for all the Ephesian church members in obeying this word of Jesus that it is more blessed to give than to receive. For example, Paul didn’t covet anyone’s silver or gold or clothing (v. 33). In a word, he was not covetous. The reason is because a covetous man cannot obey Jesus’ words that it is more blessed to give than to receive. Rather, the covetous man believes and obeys the exact opposite of the word of Jesus. The opposite here is that ‘it is more blessed to receive than to give’. Not only was Paul not covetous, but rather he worked with his own hands and supplied his own needs and the needs of his companions (v. 34). Paul didn’t receive from the Ephesian church members. Rather, he gave them. What did he give them? He didn’t hesitate to proclaim to the Ephesian church members the whole will of God (v. 27). Paul didn’t hesitate to preach anything that would be helpful to them but taught them publicly and from house to house (v. 20). In Ephesus he declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and had faith in the Lord Jesus Christ (v. 21). Paul didn’t just speak with his lips. He proved his faith in Jesus Christ with his life. He taught the will of God through his life. The will of God was to serve the Lord. That is why Paul told the elders of the church in Ephesus that he served the Lord with great humility and with tears, enduring trials (v. 19). Although he was compelled by the Holy Spirit to go to Jerusalem (v. 22), and knew that in every city the Holy Spirit warned him that prison and hardships are facing him (v. 23), he said this about his determination to bear witness to the gospel of grace: “... I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me--the task of testifying to the gospel of God’s grace” (v. 24). Paul considered the will of God more important than his own life to finish the work of testifying the gospel. In other words, Paul didn’t consider his life worth anything in order to fulfill God’s will. After showing this example of life, Paul told the elders of the Ephesus church to ‘remember’.

When I think of this example of Paul’s life, I think of my father. And it reminds me of the late Henry Nouwen’s book titled “The Living Reminder”. And I remember the Korean hymn “We Shall be Like Him” that I sang twice during the Morning Prayer meeting today. And I prayed to God: ‘Lord, I want to imitate the heart of Jesus. I want to be like Jesus. Make me a reminder of Jesus.’ One of the two prayer topics that I personally pray for before getting married is, ‘May my future spouse see the image of Jesus in me and I also see the image of Jesus in her’. As I have been praying until now, praying and pursuing until

the day the Lord calls me is to imitate the image of Jesus. Therefore, if I can show my beloved wife and three children a little bit of Jesus before I die, I believe that is the best gift I can give to my family. So, at the early Morning Prayer meeting today, I especially sang the hymn “Lord, I Want to be a Christian” verse 4: “Lord, I want to be like Jesus In a my heart, in a my heart, Lord, I want to be like Jesus In a my heart. In a my heart, In a my heart, Lord, I want to be like Jesus In a my heart.” This is my earnest prayer. The reason I pray so earnestly is because I believe that the work of he who imitates Jesus will continue even after his death. I believe that those who become like Jesus set the example of Jesus' life when they are alive, so the good memories planted in the hearts of our beloved brothers and sisters will work in their hearts even after they die. We should treasure the beautiful memories that are planted in our hearts as we meet with those whom we have fellowship in the Lord when they were alive and who remind us of Jesus even after their death. Those who have these beautiful memories planted in their hearts are truly blessed and truly rich.

The time will come. The time will surely come when we will have to leave this world and go to the Lord's side. We should cherish the encounters that God allows in God's sovereignty while we live in this world with this death perspective. And we must devote ourselves to making beautiful memories in the Lord through those encounters. Although bad memories can be given to each other during our encounters due to our sinful nature, we should devote ourselves in making more and more good memories in the Lord, so that the good memories cover the bad memories. In the midst of this, as the time of separation draws near, we must influence each other for good through the good memories the Lord has made for us. As we influence each other for good, we must do the Lord's will on earth as it is in heaven. In other words, we must serve the Lord with great humility, tears, and patience, and risk our lives to finish the work of bearing witness to the Lord's gospel. With such a strong sense of duty, we must prepare to part with our loved ones. We must prepare for a momentary separation on this earth. I earnestly hope and pray that we can become a good influence on those we love even after we die by making many beautiful memories that bring out the fragrance of Jesus among the encounters the Lord allows with the death perspective.

As I want to be a reminder of Jesus who is a good influence on those I love even after death,

James Kim

(Thinking of my loving parents, both my parents and my wife's parents, who have such a good influence on me)

Day 4: Who are the true Christians?

[Romans 2:17-29]

In A. W. Tozer's book "That Incredible Christian", there is a chapter called "The Importance of Self-judgment" (Ch. 31) in which the author Tozer talks about seven rules for self-discovery about how we know that we are real Christians. Although these seven rules may not reveal all about the real Christians, they will be partially helpful. Why don't you also reflect yourself on these seven rules (Tozer):

1. What we want most.
2. What we think about most.
3. How we use our money.
4. What we do with our leisure time.
5. The company we enjoy.
6. Whom and what we admire.
7. What we laugh at.

After asking these seven question, Tozer talks about eight things: Who is a fake?

1. Fake is instant: Instant Christianity tends to teach that everything is done in one act of faith. This represses the desire for further spiritual advancement.
2. Fake neglects the change of character: The first step in solving the problem is to get away from the illusion that over time will solve the problem. What we need is not time, but change. Only God can change us.
3. Fake believes that God's discipline is bearing the cross: When we are disciplined and hurt by God, we must feel that we are out of the right path for a while. On the other hand, feeling the pain of the cross tells us that we are on the right track.

4. Fake seeks forgiveness of sins by doing: An attempt to obtain forgiveness of sins by doing cannot succeed. For no one knows how much good to accumulate in order to offset one's own fault.
5. Fake ignores creeds: We shouldn't say that we can experience the mystery of God without doctrinal knowledge, and that is enough. Truth can be stipulated, and the trust that is stipulated is creeds.
6. Fake disregards theology: It is theology that is essential to live right in this world and to lead us to the eternal kingdom of heaven. We have many difficulties because we learn hard and forget easily. Therefore, we must be determined and study theology.
7. Fake neglects feelings: We must not fear or ignore feelings. It is because the feelings are our normal part of what God has made us.
8. Fake has no spiritual balance: The trust is like a bird and the bird cannot fly with one wing. But we foolishly try to fly with one wing squeezing like crazy and flipping the other wing like crazy (Tozer).

In the Bible, Romans 2: 28-29, Apostle Paul wrote a letter to the Roman church saints and talked about "a Jew who is one outwardly" and "a Jew who is one inwardly". Why did Paul talk about this? The reason is to teach Jewish believers who were condemning the Gentile brethren in their spiritual superiority and weren't forgiving them that the Jew who was one outwardly wasn't true Jew but the Jew who was on inwardly was true Jew. As I was meditating on this, I thought about 'Who are the true Christians and who are the superficial Christians, the outwardly Christians?'

First of all, let's think about the superficial Christians who are Christians outwardly.

- (1) Those Christians who are outwardly call themselves a Christian.

Look at Romans 2:17 – "Now you, if you call yourself a Jew; if you rely on the law and brag about your relationship to God." Paul said that the Jews who were one outwardly called themselves "a Jew." Why did they call themselves "a Jew" even though they weren't true Jews in Paul's view? The reason was because they had sense of privilege. The Jews of Paul's day proudly called themselves "a Jew" because they believed that only they had a special right from God. What special rights did they receive from God that they were proud of? We can think about this in three ways: (1) Belonging to the chosen people, (2) Reliance on the law, and (3) A special relationship with God. The outwardly Jews bragged about their relationship to God in front of their Gentile brothers in the Roman church community with their consciousness of the chosen

people (v. 17). Outwardly, it seemed that they were boasting God, but inwardly they were boasting themselves.

The Christians who are outwardly want to exercise their special rights in the church. Although they praise God's power with their lips, in their deepest hearts they have spiritual superiority and pride. They liked to brag themselves. And through bragging, they wanted to be honored and be recognized by people. This kind of Christians craves the praises from people. The Scriptures teach that God's wrath (1:18-32) and God's judgment (2:1-16) will be upon those who call themselves "a Christian", brag themselves in the church and claim their special rights in the church with their consciousness of the special right.

(2) The Christians who are outwardly are convinced that they are true Christians.

Look at Romans 2:19-20: "if you are convinced that you are a guide for the blind, a light for those who are in the dark, an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of infants, because you have in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth." The Jews who were outwardly believed that they themselves were a guide for the blind, a light for those who were in the dark, an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of infants. Surprisingly, these Jews didn't know that they were the blind, they were in the dark, the foolish, and the infants. The cause of this ignorance was their spiritual superiority and pride. Like this, pride makes us blind. It doesn't allow us to examine ourselves and look back on our own weaknesses and deficiencies. The outwardly focused Christians' spiritual pride brings out the weaknesses and shortcomings of other believers, compares them with themselves, and lets them boast that they are better than the other believers. This is more prominent in those who think that they know the Bible well. Those who think they don't know much about the Bible humble themselves in their ignorance and have earnest desire to learn the Word of God. Those who have long lived their faith and learned a great deal about the Bible break up the peace of the church and raise problems by putting themselves up in spiritual superiority.

(3) The Christians who are outwardly like to teach others but don't teach themselves.

Look at Romans 2:21 – "you, then, who teach others, do you not teach yourself? You who preach against stealing, do you steal?" The Jewish believers, who received the law from God through Moses, believed that they knew God's will because they relied on it (v. 17) and were instructed by the law (v. 18). And they liked to teach others with their own misunderstanding and pride. They liked to preach against stealing, to teach that people shouldn't commit adultery and abhor idols (vv. 21-22). But they themselves didn't teach themselves and were guilty of the same sin. So Paul

rebuked them like this: “You who brag about the law, do you dishonor God by breaking the law? As it is written: ‘God's name is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you’” (vv. 23-24). Apparently, Jewish believers knew much about the Bible, and their teachings seem biblical, but in reality they lived a hypocritical life. It was because they neglected to teach themselves. We as parents, teaching biblical lessons to our children is the right thing to do. But if we neglect to teach ourselves before God, we cannot influence our children's hearts. This is what Dr. Park Yun-sun said: ‘The lessons from this kind of people are not from motives for mercy, but from humiliation. Such lessons don’t affect the educated, but rather cause resentment.’

(4) The Christians who are outwardly focuses on outward living.

Apostle Paul told the Jewish believers in the Roman church about both the law and circumcision and urged them to obey the law and not just have it and hear it (v. 13). And he told them that if they didn’t obey the law, circumcision had no value and they had become as though they hadn’t been circumcised (v. 25). The reason why Paul said this to the Jewish believers in the Roman church was because they had consciousness of special right and proud. That is, they boasted of the law and circumcision. For the Jews, the law and circumcision were the signs of the people chosen by God, so both were great pride to them. But the problem is that they didn’t keep the law completely. They were guilty of boasting the law and circumcision, and arrogantly condemning the Gentiles with consciousness of spiritual superiority. This is the appearance of Christians who are outwardly. They focus on their outward life of faith, and live hypocritical life without true faith. They are trying to live a Christian life in order to be seen by people.

Second, let's think about the true Christians who are Christians inwardly.

Who are the true Christians? The true Christians are not the outward Christians, but the inward Christians. The inward Christians follow these three things:

(1) The Christians who are inwardly know that they are saved by God’s grace alone.

Look at Romans 2:29 – “No, a man is a Jew if he is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a man's praise is not from men, but from God.” Apostle Paul told the Roman church saints that the Jews who were the one inwardly, that is those who did circumcised of the hearts by the Holy Spirit. Here, those who did circumcision of the hearts by the Spirit were those whom God chose in love and gave gift of faith to believe in Jesus Christ and were saved by God's grace alone. Never were they saved by keeping the law. The reason why Paul said this to the Roman church saints was because they believed that

they could be saved by keeping the law, rather than believing in the Lord Jesus Christ. It was because their view of salvation was conditional with human efforts instead of unconditional grace of God. In other words, the Jews were guilty of greater dependence on human merit than on the merit of Jesus on the cross. That was why Paul, by his letter of Rome, taught the Roman church saints about the God's unconditional grace of salvation. The Christians who are inwardly, the true Christians, believe in Ephesians 2:8-9 completely: "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God -- not by works, so that no one can boast." True Christians know that faith and salvation is God's gracious gift. They know that salvation never comes from their works. That is why true Christians know that not only they shouldn't but they can't boast about themselves.

(2) The Christians who are inwardly have living faith.

Like superficial Christians who are inwardly, the true Christians who are inwardly are not proud of their laws and circumcision or are living their faith in their pride through their lips. They don't just talk about the words of God. They hear them. Not only they hear the words of God and obey them, they bear its' fruits. Even when they go out to the world, they don't only say 'I go to church. I believe in Jesus.' But they live in this dark world, truly shining the light of Jesus Christ. If we are true Christians, we must be ashamed. This is because we aren't shining the light of Jesus Christ in this dark world. It is because our church is like the church. It is because our lips seem to resemble Jesus, but our actions and lives are far from Him. We the church must repent our sins. We must turn to God and listen to God's Word and live the right life of faith.

(3) The Christians who are inwardly focus on inner Christian life rather than outward Christian life.

What is important to the Christians who are inwardly is to be praised by God, not by man (v. 29). They try to be recognized by God rather than by being recognized by people. They live their life of faith by cultivating their inner being. And such a life of faith is beautiful. This reminds me the hymn "Lord, I Want to be a Christian". In this hymn, the phrase "in my heart" appears 20 times: "I want to be a Christian in my heart," "I want to be more loving in my heart", "I want to be more holy in my heart" and "I want to be like Jesus in my heart". "Miles Mark Fisher, in Negro Slave Songs in the United States, writes that this African American spiritual could have been written in Virginia in the 1750s based on a story from Hanover, Virginia, 1756: "A black slave asked Presbyterian preacher William Davies, 'I come to you, sir, that you may tell me some good things concerning Jesus Christ and my duty to God, for I am resolved not to live any more as I have done...Lord [Sir], I want to be a Christian'" (Internet). Can the black slave who had to spend

harsh years as a slave try to teach others by saying that he or she was a true believer with the consciousness of spiritual superiority? Couldn't he or she only cry out to God that "Lord, I want to be a Christian" from deep in his or her heart?

May we all become true Christians, those who are Christians inwardly and not just outwardly. May we all know and believe that we are saved by God's grace alone. May we all become men or women of living faith that has action. May we all be true believers who are beautiful inside.

Day 5: Spiritual attitude

“And He also told this parable to some people who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and viewed others with contempt” (Luke 18:9).

“The kind of person you are is far more important than the kind of work you do.” When we realize that our existence is more important than our actions, as believers, we must develop appropriate spiritual attitudes within our hearts—one of which is humility.

In today's passage Luke 18:9, we see a Pharisee who believed himself to be righteous and looked down on others. He enjoyed being esteemed among people (16:15). His spiritual posture was pride. He considered himself better than even tax collectors and other sinners. Look at the Pharisee's prayer in the parable of Jesus: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other people—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get' (18:11-12). When considering why the Pharisee was so ensnared in spiritual pride to offer such a prayer, I think it's because he focused on what he did for God rather than what God had done for him. Charles Swindoll refers to this as one of the worst heresies in his book 'Grace Awakening'. It's easy for us to fall into this heresy. We can easily become trapped in spiritual pride and superiority because we focus on what we do for God rather than on what God has done for our salvation in Jesus Christ. If we don't guard against this, bit by bit, without us realizing, our hearts will be filled with spiritual pride and superiority.

Unlike the Pharisee, the tax collector stood at a distance in the temple. He didn't even dare to look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner' (v. 13). At least he approached God in prayer acknowledging and admitting he was a sinner. So, he cried out, 'God, have mercy on me.' This is a blessing. Realizing one's own sin before the holy God is a blessing. And being able to confess and plead for mercy from God in the midst of this precious realization is truly an undeniable blessing. Being able to humble oneself before God is a blessing. We must humble ourselves before God, just as the tax collector did. We should yearn for the blessing of our sins being exposed by the holy

presence of God. We must acknowledge our sins and confess them to God because His holy word pierces our conscience. In the midst of all this, as stated in Philippians 2:3, we should consider others better than ourselves.

God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble (Jam. 4:6). We must humble ourselves before the holy God. We should never believe ourselves to be righteous, like the Pharisees. To do so, we must live our faith not before people, like the Pharisees, but before God. Continually, with hearts and motives laid bare, we should turn to God in repentance through His holy Word, even confessing hidden sins. In the midst of this, we must look to what God has done for us in Jesus Christ and trust in His work for our salvation. Relying on the precious blood shed on the cross by Jesus, we must repent of our sins. We must humbly bow down before God in repentance, trusting solely in the righteousness of Jesus. By relying on the merit of Jesus' sacrifice on the cross, we approach the throne of God's grace, seeking His help in humility.

While guarding against spiritual pride and superiority,

James Kim

[Celebrating the 9th birthday of beloved son Dillon (Means “faithful and truthful”)]

Day 6: Distrust, disobedience, discontentment

“But for all this, you did not trust the LORD your God” (Deuteronomy 1:32).

Those who believe in God obey His word. And those who obey God's word believe in Him. The more we obey God's word, the more we experience His guidance, leading us to have even greater faith in Him. When we obey God, we come to know Him more as our God. Those who do not believe in God disobey His word. And those who disobey God's word do not believe in Him. The more we disobey God's word, the less we experience His guidance, leading us to dwell more in disbelief. When we disobey God, we become more ignorant not only about God's nature but also about ourselves, making us prone to sin more against God in our hearts, driven by arrogance and pride. The wicked fruits of those who sin against God are disobedience and discontentment. In other words, the sinful fruits of disbelief are disobedience and discontentment.

In Deuteronomy 1:32, the Bible speaks of the Israelites who did not believe in God. Due to their disbelief, they disobeyed God's command. Although God had commanded them to go up and possess the land of Canaan, saying "Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged" (v. 21), the Israelites did not delight in going up, and they opposed God's command (v. 26). They not only resisted God's command but also poured out their complaints to Him. They harbored resentment towards God. In a word, their complaint was that “The Lord hates us” (v. 27). So, they claimed that God had brought them out of the land of Egypt just to hand them over to the hands of the Amorites to destroy them. The Israelites truly expressed absurd thoughts to God. If God truly hated them, why would He have delivered them from Egypt? Clearly, God loved the Israelites and saved them, but the Israelites thought that God hated them. Why did the Israelites think this way? I believe the root cause was their disbelief. In other words, because the Israelites did not believe in God, and because they disobeyed His command, they could not feel God's love. And because they could not feel God's love, they could only feel discontentment. Ultimately, disbelief bore the bitter

fruits of disobedience and discontentment, and it led to a numbness where they could not feel God's love. Furthermore, the Israelites not only blamed God alone in their discontentment but also blamed the twelve spies who returned from scouting the land of Canaan. Aside from Joshua and Caleb, who gave a faithful report, the other ten spies gave a report of disbelief. The essence of their complaint was 'They have made us lose heart' (v. 28). I can't help but think, when God commanded, "Go up and take possession of it as the LORD, the God of your fathers, told you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged" (v. 21), if they had simply said "yes" and obeyed, would this have happened? Instead, the Israelites devised and implemented a plan, saying, "Let us send men ahead to spy out the land for us and bring back a report about the route we are to take and the towns we will come to" (v. 22). Why did they go through with this plan, leading to the sinful fruit of blaming the ten spies who gave a report of disbelief? The reason is they did not believe in God. In other words, the Israelites did not believe in the God who was going before them (v. 30). Therefore, they sent men ahead (v. 22). And because they did not believe that God would fight for them, the Israelites, in their fear of having to fight against the Amorites, blamed God in their fear and also blamed their brethren, the spies. In the end, blame, as a sin, is also the bitter fruit of disbelief, which is not believing in God.

We must believe in God. We should believe in the God who has rescued us from the kingdom of Satan, like Egypt, and is leading us to the promised land, His kingdom. In our faith in God, we must also obey His commandments. When we obey God's commandments, we can clearly feel the love that God bestows upon us. And when we feel this love from God, we can obediently follow His commandments with boldness and without fear, not hesitating. We can obey God's commandments boldly with faith, believing in the God who goes before us and fights on our behalf. Furthermore, with faith in the God who has embraced us in our journey and led us to this point, just as a man carries his son, we can continue to obey God's commandments and move forward. And we can move forward in obedience to God's word with a heart filled with gratitude, finding satisfaction in being embraced by our loving God and Father. Are we truly obeying God's commandments with a heart of gratitude, stemming from our belief in God? Are we truly finding contentment in God alone and obeying His commandments?

Desiring a life of faith, obedience, and contentment,

James Kim
(While guarding against disbelief in my heart)

Day 7: We should fear in receiving material blessings

“You may say to yourself, ‘My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me’” (Deuteronomy 8:17).

It seems that those who believe in our Lord Jesus greatly delight in receiving material blessings. When we constantly seek after blessings and wealth, it appears that we are serving both God and material possessions at the same time (Mt. 6:24). This is not pure faith; it is rather a form of syncretism. We should serve God if it is God and serve material possessions if it is material possessions. However, we find ourselves serving both God and material possessions. Perhaps we may not even realize that we are serving God for the sake of material gain. This idolization of material wealth ultimately enslaves us, leading us to live entirely for the pursuit of material gain. We study for the sake of material gain, work for the sake of material gain, and even practice our faith for the sake of material gain. Therefore, when we pray, we often seek God's blessing in material wealth, and when we receive blessings from pastors, we greatly appreciate prayers for material blessings. Both our lips and ears eagerly long for blessings related to material wealth. Our hands and feet are also occupied with the pursuit of material blessings. This is because our hearts are fixated on materialism. The words of Jesus come to mind: "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (v. 21). Our hearts have been captivated by the treasures of this world. We are addicted to the riches of this world. We must be cautious. We must fear loving money (1 Tim. 6:10). We must fear receiving material blessings. We must not hastily seek material blessings from God.

In Deuteronomy 8:17, we see that Moses had a fear. This fear stemmed from the concern that the Israelites might say in their hearts, " My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me." Even though God had indeed given them the ability to acquire wealth (v. 18), Moses was afraid that the Israelites might attribute it to their own abilities and strength. In other words, Moses feared that the

Israelites might become prideful and forget God (v. 14). When was it that the Israelites were at risk of becoming prideful? It was when their possessions became abundant (v. 13). In other words, when the Israelites entered "a good land" (v. 7), a land that didn't lack nothing for them (v. 9), where they would eat and be satisfied (vv. 10, 12), build beautiful houses and dwell in them (v. 12), where their herds and flocks increased, and their silver and gold multiplied, that their possessions became abundant. This is when the Israelites were at risk of becoming prideful. Moses feared this. We too should fear. We should fear that we might become prideful. We should be wary of becoming so satisfied and full that we forget God. Especially in this prosperous land of America where it may seem that we lack nothing, we should fear becoming so full and prideful that we forget God. We must guard against the fat of heart within us. We may unknowingly become so filled with desires and greed that we become slaves to them. We should fear our hearts becoming prideful. What should we do then? We should enter the wilderness ourselves. And in that wilderness, we should humble ourselves. In other words, rather than living in the lap of luxury in a prosperous city, seeking after material blessings, we should enter the wilderness ourselves, experiencing poverty and hunger, and seek after the blessings of the wilderness even more. What are these blessings of the wilderness? They can be summarized in one or two points:

(1) The blessings of the wilderness are essentially the blessings of character.

In other words, the blessings that God gives us in the wilderness are primarily humility. God leads us into the wilderness to humble us (vv. 2, 3, 16; see also Hos. 2:14). We should cherish this humbling blessing. We should recognize that being humble before God is far more precious and significant than being exalted in the eyes of the world. Therefore, we should enter the wilderness ourselves, prostrating humbly before God in prayer. We should believe that the place where we enter our inner chamber and pray before God is the highest place in God's eyes. When we do this, God will lift up the humble prayer and use it to manifest the exalted and great nature of the Lord.

(2) The blessings of the wilderness are the blessings of the Word.

Look at Deuteronomy 8:3 - "He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your ancestors had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD." God led the Israelites through the wilderness for forty years not only to humble them but also to teach them that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD. We should enter the wilderness ourselves and come to understand that we do not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord. Therefore, out of reverence for God, we must keep and observe His commandments (v. 6).

We should fear receiving material blessings. The reason is that material blessings can lead us to become proud and forget God. Therefore, we must be cautious when material wealth increases. We should be vigilant when our businesses prosper. We should stay awake when the number of congregants grows. We should be cautious when our bellies are full and we become affluent. We must guard against our hearts becoming fat. We should be wary of becoming slaves to greed and desires. We must be vigilant not to forget God's word. We must enter the wilderness ourselves. Instead of desiring to enjoy the world's abundance in the midst of the city, we should prefer to enter the wilderness and receive the blessings of character and the Word that God bestows. We must turn the lonely wilderness into a solitary garden (Hosea). In the wilderness, we must lower ourselves, becoming even more humble through the sacred discipline of God. Our character should be shaped in the wilderness. And we should be delighted to hear God's voice in the wilderness. Furthermore, we must listen to God's voice and obey. In doing so, we can enjoy the blessings of character and the Word that God bestows. We should be deeply afraid of seeking material blessings in the world while rejecting the blessings of character and the Word in the midst of the city.

With a heart that prays for spiritual blessings, prosperity, and material blessings to be bestowed upon the members of our Victory Presbyterian Church family,

James Kim

(Fearing that the 'blessing' of material wealth, when not led with humility by God's word, can become a curse.)

Day 8: Hypocrisy

[Psalms 50]

Adrin Gostick & Dana Telford's book "The Integrity: Advantage & Works" reveals the 10 characteristics of a faithful person. The third of those 10 characteristics is that 'Honestly admit when I make a mistake.' Regarding this characteristic, the authors are saying these meaningful words: 'The mistake is not a gross fault. The really gross fault is the act of covering up that mistake' (Internet). But our nature is to try to cover up our mistakes. In other words, it is our sinful nature to hide our sins. That's why there seems to be a word "hypocrisy". What is hypocrisy? The Hebrew meaning is 'concealing one's real character or motives' or 'the hypocrite'. In the New Testament, it was originally used to refer to an actor who wears a mask or a stage player. And later, the word 'hypokrites' was used, which means hypocrites and hypocrisy. This word refers to a false attitude that has the form of godliness, especially for religious people, but without the power of godliness. An appropriate expression of hypocrisy is a case of being a very godly Christian on the outside but full of lies and hypocrisy on the inside. The representative hypocrites in Jesus' day were the Pharisees. When I think about this hypocrisy, I think of David's sin that I meditated on during this morning prayer meeting. David tried to send Uriah to pregnant Bathsheba in order to cover up his sin. But when the faithful Uriah didn't go down to his house, David eventually sent Uriah to General Joab with his letter and eventually killed Uriah, a soldier loyal by the Gentiles' sword. So God sent Prophet Nathan to David who was covering up his sins and revealed his sins. And this was what God said to David: "Indeed you did it secretly, but I will do this thing before all Israel, and under the sun" (2 Sam. 12:12). We sin in secret, but the holy God is the God who reveals our sins before everybody.

In Psalms 50:5, God is saying, "Gather My godly ones to Me." Here, the psalmist Asaph teaches that the saints are those who have made a covenant with God through sacrifice. If we apply this word to us,

we can refer to Christians who made a new covenant with God through Jesus' sacrifice on the cross as 'My saints,' that is, saints of God. Why did God tell the psalmist Asaph to gather His saints before Him? The reason was because of the hypocrisy of the Israelites, the saints of God (Park). I sincerely hope and pray that the hypocrites will gather before God and make it an opportunity to repent after listening to God's rebuke while meditating on three things what God wants to say to us.

First, God is saying that He will judge our hypocrisy (Ps. 50:1-6).

Look at Psalms 50:6 – “And the heavens declare His righteousness, For God Himself is judge. Selah.” The psalmist Asaph says that God, the chief Judge, judges the hypocrites in proclaiming His justice openly and universally. Asaph powerfully pointed out how great the sins of the hypocrites were:

- (1) Asaph said that all the people of the world should see the scene of God's judgment against the hypocrites.

Look at Psalms 50:1 – “The Mighty One, God, the LORD, has spoken, And summoned the earth from the rising of the sun to its setting.” This is the God's word of terrifying judgment that even though hypocrites might sin in secret, God would reveal their sins, uncover them openly in front of all the people whom the psalmist invited. This word also can be applied to us. As children of light, holy God will expose our sins in front of all the people if we don't expose the fruitless deeds of darkness but participate in the fruitless deeds of darkness (Eph. 5:11).

- (2) In judging the hypocrites of the Israelites, God would do so with His revealed Word, and it is feared like fire.

Look at Psalms 50:2-3: “From Zion, perfect in beauty, God shines forth. Our God comes and will not be silent; a fire devours before him, and around him a tempest rages.” It means that God judges according to the truth (light) of the true church. Jesus also said that “the word I spoke is what will judge him at the last day” (Jn. 12:48). In Psalms 119:130, the Bible says, “The unfolding of Your words gives light; It gives understanding to the simple.” We become foolish when we continue to sin in secret. Our hearts are also hardened. We don't regard sin as a sin. To such foolish people like us, God makes His Word shine in our hearts to convict us of our sins.

- (3) God will judge the hypocrites first.

Look at Psalms 50:4 – “He summons the heavens above, and the earth, that he may judge his people.” Yoon-sun Park said: ‘The Church of God has received a peculiar blessing and has a

heavy responsibility. Therefore, judgment is first carried out in the household of God (church) (1 Pet. 4:17).’

Second, God is wary of our hypocritical formalism (Ps. 50:7-15).

Look at Psalms 50:7 - “Hear, O my people, and I will speak, O Israel, and I will testify against you: I am God, your God.” Here, God is saying that He will “testify” to Israel, and this is to warn against the hypocrisy of the Israelites, that is, formalism. That formalism is that the Jews thought that when they go up to the temple and offer sacrifices to God will satisfy God (Park). To the Israelites who were devoted solely to performing external ceremonies rather than worshiping God in spirit and truth, the psalmist Asaph teaches three lessons about worshiping God:

(1) Asaph said to sacrifice thank offerings to God.

Look at Psalms 50:14a – “Sacrifice thank offerings to God” Why should we offer sacrifices (worships) in thanksgiving to God? The reason is because it honors God (v. 23). And those who offer sacrifice of thanksgiving to God not only offer sacrifice of thanksgiving to God with their lips but also with their life. They don’t just offer thanksgiving worship to God with their lips, but also live life of worship.

(2) Asaph said to fulfill our vow to God.

Look at Psalms 50:14b – “... fulfill your vows to the Most High.” One of the hallmarks of a faithful person is to keep promises. By the way, how many faithful people are around us these days who keep their promises well? We live in a world where it is difficult to find someone who is truly trustworthy. That's why I think, 'If a person can't keep his promises well with other people, how can he keep his promises with God?' Dr. Park Yoon-sun said: ‘Keeping a promise before God can be said to be an act of not stopping God's grace’ (Park). Therefore, those who truly worship God must pay their vows to God so as not to stop His grace.

(3) Asaph said to call upon God in the day of trouble.

Look at Psalms 50:15 – “and call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you will honor me.” God demands prayer, an expression of our faith, from us rather than offering formal offerings to Him.

Third and final, God points out our sins of hypocrisy (Ps. 50:16-22).

What was the sin of hypocrisy of the Israelites? Their sin of hypocrisy was that their godliness was just words and they didn't keep the commandments of God (Park). Look at Psalms 50:16 - "But to the wicked, God says: "What right have you to recite my laws or take my covenant on your lips?" This is the word rebuking the hypocrisy Israelites for specializing in God's religion in words (Park). Look at verse 17: "You hate my instruction and cast my words behind you." What does it mean? The hypocrites Israelites hated God's instruction and threw God's word behind them. Isn't this our hypocrisy and our sin? Although we receive the word of God when we go to the church on Sunday, aren't we threw the word behind us and went to the world to sin again God? Why do we live in disrespect for God's word by putting the word of God behind us? Calvin points out the cause: 'The mark of hypocrisy religion is their lack of awe for the Word of God' (Calvin). The lack of awe for God makes us to hate the word of God and commit the sin of throwing it back.

In Psalms 50, what was the reason the Israelites, who were hypocrites without fearing God, didn't keep the commandments of God?

(1) The Israelites broke the 7th and 8th commandments of the Ten Commandments.

Look at Psalms 50:18 - "When you see a thief, you join with him; you throw in your lot with adulterers." Here, the word "When you see a thief, you joint with him" violates the eighth commandment, "You must not steal," and the word "you throw in your lot with adulterers" is breaking the 7th commandment, "You must not commit adultery."

(2) The Israelites broke the 9th commandment of the Ten Commandments.

Look at Psalms 50:19 - "You use your mouth for evil and harness your tongue to deceit." The Israelites violated the ninth commandment, "You must not testify falsely against your neighbor."

(3) It was a sin of not loving their brothers.

Look at Psalms 50:20 - "You speak continually against your brother and slander your own mother's son." This is a violation of the 6th commandment, "You must not murder." This is because "Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer" (1 Jn. 3:15).

God urged and warned the hypocrites Israelites to repent, but the Israelites misunderstood that God was indifferent to sin as they were (Ps. 50:21). In other words, they thought that God would not judge their sins. That was why the hypocrite Israelites continued to sin against God. When the hypocrites continued to commit sins, God was silent, so they thought God was like them. The Israelites were indifferent to sin.

However, God said that He would rebuke the Israelites and punished the Israelites by judging their sins one after another. And in Psalms 50:22, God warned them: "'Consider this, you who forget God, or I will tear you to pieces, with none to rescue.'" The Israelites who despised God's word and committed sins were not only forgetting God's word, but also they were forgetting God. Therefore, God urged them to "Consider this." This is to think about the fact that God would point out their sins and would judge them while guarding against their formalism. If not, there would be God's wrath and discipline, and no one would deliver them.

Don't the words of Psalms 50 spoken to the Israelites, the hypocrites, apply to us? God has gathered us today before Him and is giving us the same word. God is wary of our hypocrisy and points out our sins. And He is proclaiming that He will judge our hypocrisy. We must hear this word of God and repent our hypocrites. And because we are grateful, we must worship God. We must pay our vows and live a life of obedience to God's commandments. We must live a life of true worship.

With an earnest desire to be raised up as a true worshiper, not a hypocrite, before God,

James Kim

(While being wary of formalism)

Day 9: Vain pleasure

[Ecclesiastes 2:1-11]

What is hedonism? In the Internet Wikipedia, it defines as follow: “Hedonism is a school of thought that argues that the pursuit of pleasure and intrinsic goods are the primary or most important goals of human life.” In the end, hedonism is based on the belief that pleasure is an essential good and pain is evil. It is a form of happiness that claims that promoting happiness is good (Internet). The goal of life pursued by hedonism is happiness and happiness is achieved by pursuing pleasure. I personally think of “Epicureanism” when I think about hedonism. Epicureanism is “an ancient school of philosophy founded in Athens by Epicurus. “Epicurus believed that what he called "pleasure" (ἡδονή) was the greatest good, but that the way to attain such pleasure was to live modestly, to gain knowledge of the workings of the world, and to limit one's desires. This would lead one to attain a state of tranquility (ataraxia) and freedom from fear as well as an absence of bodily pain (aponia). The combination of these two states constitutes happiness in its highest form” (Internet). “The school rejected determinism and advocated hedonism (pleasure as the highest good), but of a restrained kind: mental pleasure was regarded more highly than physical, and the ultimate pleasure was held to be freedom from anxiety and mental pain, especially that arising from needless fear of death and of the gods” (Internet). In addition to this school, there was another school that represented the ancient Greek hedonism. The school is called the "the Cyrenaic School". This was a sensual hedonist Greek school of philosophy founded in the 4th century BCE, supposedly by Aristippus of Cyrene, a friend of Socrates (Internet). Aristippus was influenced by Socrates and emphasized the principle of happiness that a virtuous man should pursue. According to his assertion, virtue is the ability to get pleasure, and this joy is obtained by satisfaction of pleasure. Pleasure is the only good and the greatest good. The thinkers of the Cyrenaic School emphasized the sensual and physical pleasures of the moment because the future is beyond our capabilities. According to Aristippus, the wise man, the philosopher possesses the ability to enjoy the present, and thus does not become a slave of pleasure, but a master of pleasure. Therefore, the ideology of hedonism is to pursue physical desire, but to control the pleasure with wisdom (Internet).

When we look at the passage Ecclesiastes 2:1, we see the Teacher King Solomon testes himself with pleasure to find out what is good. Look at verse 1: “I thought in my heart, ‘Come now, I will test you with pleasure to find out what is good.’ ...” Here, “I will test you with pleasure” means King Solomon would test himself with pleasure. So he tried to see what can make him enjoy the pleasure. There are three things that he tried to enjoy the pleasure in today’s passage. Today I want to meditate on those three things and pray that God will give us grace so that we may live wisely in this vain world.

First, King Solomon tried to test himself with “wine”.

Look at Ecclesiastes 2:3 – “I tried cheering myself with wine, and embracing folly--my mind still guiding me with wisdom. I wanted to see what was worthwhile for men to do under heaven during the few days of their lives.” The first thing that King Solomon tried to cheer himself was with wine. He tried to make his body cheerful with wine. So as he drank wine, he controlled his mind with wisdom. Like what the Cyrenaic School emphasized, King Solomon enjoyed drinking wine but not becoming a slave of wine but a master of wine. In other words, he tried to delight himself with wine while dominating the pleasures of wine with his wisdom, as the claims of the Cyrenai School. But what was his conclusion? It was “embracing folly” (v. 3). In a word, King Solomon's conclusion was ‘It is foolish to try to enjoy pleasure by drunkenness.’

What is the pleasure of alcoholism? Why do people drink until they are drunk? I saw an article on the internet and this is what it says regrading why people drink from Monday to Sunday (Internet): 'Monday is - the day of drinking; Tuesday - a hot day to drink; Wednesday – a day to drink from time to time; Thursdays - the day of drinking with a long neck; Friday - the day of drinking soon and drinking again; Saturdays - a day of drinking until you vomit; Sunday - the day of drinking until you cannot get up. The same internet article mentions the following as well: ‘A cup is said to drink for health. If it is hot, you drink for pleasure. And if it gets drunk, there will be indulgent behavior and madness (Internet). One of the reasons for drinking is that it feels good. Why do people feel better when they drink alcohol? The reason is that when you drink a little alcohol, the central and peripheral nerves are initially excited, the secretion of the stomach is promoted, and the neurotransmitter called dopamine is secreted. However, alcohol overuse or long-term abuse can lead to brain cell destruction, which, unfortunately, inhibits brain function. If not, normally 100,000 brain cells die automatically every day. Drinking a lot of alcohol causes more brain cells to die. Both academic and memory or thinking abilities decline and their decline is directly proportional to the concentration of alcohol. When you drink alcohol too much, you cannot remember what you said and what you did. This is called ‘film break’ phenomenon. Another man says he drinks because these reasons: ‘I drink when I have good things. I drink when I have bad things. I drink when I have something to celebrate. I drink to get acquainted. I drink to confess. I drink in order to forget a person whom I missed. I drink alcohol when I am upset. I drink when I want to see someone. I drink

when my heart is depressed and when it rains. I drink when I am tired of exhaustion. I drink for unity. I drink because of curiosity. I drink drink when I am lonely' (Internet).

In my case when I look back in the years of my puberty, the reason why I drank was because of curiosity. I drank with my friends and even vomited because of too much drinks. Then, in the first year of college, I was called by the Lord during the church college retreats. And I repented my sins and lost interest in drinking. However, I often stayed at the drink places with my friends. In those times, I thought about what is beneficial for drinking. I even remembered two of my friends who were shot and killed at the drinking places. I still remember the memories at the funeral of my friends. There is nothing beneficial to alcohol. Liquor is useless.

This is what Ephesians 5:18 – “Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit.” In Genesis chapter 9, Noah was blessed by God after the flood (v. 1) so he proceeded to plant a vineyard (v. 20). One day he drank some of its wine and became drunk. And he lay uncovered inside his tent (v. 21). Although Noah was “a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked with God” (6:9) he was drunken and naked. When I think about this Noah, Matthew 24:37-39 came into my mind: “As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man.” I think this era is a time when we can not understand the crisis of destruction while eating and drinking like the days of Noah. I think people seem to be absorbed in many kinds of pleasures. It seems that they are preoccupied with wealth, absorbed in sexual pleasure, and addicted to so many things of this vain world. Among those, I think alcohol addiction is serious. About drunkenness, King Solomon says ‘Drunkenness is talking folly.’

Second, King Solomon tried to test himself with “great projects”.

Look at Ecclesiastes 2:4 – “I undertook great projects:” In order to know what was worthwhile for men to do under heaven during the few days of their lives (v. 3) King Solomon tested himself with “great projects” (v. 4). Here, the great projects that he tried without relying on God was to build houses for himself, to plant vineyards (v. 4), to make gardens and parks and planted all kinds of fruit trees in them (v. 5) and to make reservoirs to water groves of flourishing trees (v. 6). And in order to manage all these houses, the vineyards, the gardens and parks and so, King Solomon bought male and female slaves and had other slaves who were born in his house (v. 7). Why did he make such great projects? What was the reason? Of course, there was reason to try to enjoy pleasure, but in the end it was 'wealth'. Look at v. 7b – 8a: “... I also owned more herds and flocks than anyone in Jerusalem before me. I amassed silver and gold for myself, and the treasure of kings and provinces.” King Solomon sought

this kind of glory for his own personal life. He was corrupted in such a time of peace (1 Chron. 22:9) (Park Yun-sun).

We can pursue a luxurious life when we are as peaceful as King Solomon. And luxurious life eventually destroys the personality (Park Yun-sun). What is luxury? Luxury means spending more money than you need or excessive lifestyle (Internet). I saw an article on the internet OhmyNews titled "Why are you enthusiastic about luxury?" (Internet). In that article, a person named Kim Nan-do said there are four types of people who buy luxury goods: Show off, Jealousy, Fantasy and Sympathetic.

- (1) Show off luxury is the rich people buy luxury goods because they are conscious of their class characteristics. They are afraid that they are like others. They are the owners of wealth in capitalist society who think of themselves as special. So, they have class consciousness as capital. For them, luxury is to show off.
- (2) Jealousy luxury is the fake rich people imitating the real rich. They are desperately trying to avoid being ignored. So do not give up luxury even if you have no capacity.
- (3) Fantasy luxury is a kind of narcissistic people who are afraid of shabby things and are dreaming about transformation. They want to own expensive and popular things. If they do, they believe that they will be like them too. Although I understand such a thing because everyone has a narcissism, but fantasy luxury is very worrisome because it can cause horrific results. It can lead to addiction.
- (4) Sympathetic luxury is a case when you are purchasing to level up to avoid being bullied by your friends or others. For example, all of my friends are dressed in expensive clothes, so I have a feeling that I should wear them too. This is especially true in young people. People rationalized themselves by thinking 'Since others are buying it, I buy it too'. So they buy luxury even though it is irrational. And they have guilty feelings about this. But the problem is this can continue as an adult.

We must not live beyond our limit. To do so, it is important to know our limitations. I want to share a story about an American immigrant society that is satirized in the world. When people come to the United States, those who go to Los Angeles buy luxury cars first, even if they live in a rented room. Those who go to New York, they buy business first, and people who go to Chicago, they buy house first. This means that New York and Chicago immigrants look out for themselves and know their limit and prepare for the future to live, while Los Angeles immigrants are gorgeous outwardly but poor inwardly. They are externally-minded and conscious of the other person's eyes first (even though they are not) (Internet). Each

of us has our own limitations. We should know our limitations and should not act too much on our limitation. It's not good to go beyond our limitation. If we go beyond our limitation, we will surely make mistakes. Also it is the cause of misfortune and of disease. Overeating, overdrinking, overworking and overuse all harm our health and make us unhappy. Keeping a limitation means that we are not being excessive. We must be satisfied with our life and know how to stay where we are supposed to stay (Internet). We must watch out for a desire to possess things. Especially those who do business, they should guard their hearts against possessiveness. Ultimately, possessions can never be satisfied. Look at King Solomon. Although he owned more herds and flocks than anyone in Jerusalem before him (v. 7) he wasn't satisfied with them. So, he amassed silver and gold for himself and treasure of kings and providences (v. 8). We can never satisfy our desire to make all these things our own. The more we possess, the more desire we will be. After all, such possessions are also vain. King Solomon confessed that doing the great projects was "embracing folly" (v. 3).

Third, King Solomon tried to test himself with "many concubines".

Look at Ecclesiastes 2:8 – "... I provided for myself male and female singers and the pleasures of men--many concubines" (NASB). This is what God said in Deuteronomy 17:17 regarding a king of Israel: "He must not take many wives, or his heart will be led astray. He must not accumulate large amounts of silver and gold." But King Solomon broke this commandment. Obviously, God commanded the Israelites not only to intermarry with the Gentiles, but also not to let them interfere with the Israelites (1 Kgs. 11: 1-3). God forbids this because the Gentiles would turn the hearts of the Israelites to follow the Gentile gods (v. 2). But King Solomon, the leader of a nation, "loved many foreign women besides Pharaoh's daughter" (v. 1). He had 700 wives of royal birth and 300 concubines, and his wives led him astray (v. 3). When King Solomon grew old, his wives turned his heart after other gods (v. 4). Eventually, the problem that King Solomon intended to satisfy the lust of the flesh made him to sin against God, even to the sin of spiritual adultery of worshiping idols. In other words, physical adultery which is done to satisfy the lust of the flesh will eventually bring forth the sinful fruit of spiritual adultery.

Long time ago, I read an internet news 'Sex with God's will ... a pastor who sexually assaulted a woman in a church' (Internet). A police has filed for arrest warrants for a rape charge against pastor "A"(46 years old) of "T" religious organization who raped women for more than 10 years. After organizing a "T" religious organization in Dongjak-gu, Seoul Korea, "A" had raped six teenage 20-year-old many times for the past 10 years by telling them that he was doing it according to God's will and their sins would be washed away if they have sex with him. Although I was little bit relieve by seeing that the "T" organization wasn't Protestant but Unification church but nevertheless I think this crime of sexual degradation seems to be inevitable reality among us too. When we speak of the lust of the body, we can have 'sexual desire' as an example. 'Sexual desire' is one of the three needs of human beings along with

appetite and sleeping desire (Internet). When a man is captured by sexual desire then he will commit serious crimes such as rape. A typical example of sexual desire explosion is rape. Swapping of an upper class couple without any guilt, a change of life that has even removed the concept of marriage, unbelievable premarital sexual intercourse under the pretext of love, easily get divorce because no more love, phone sex, video chatting sex, instant sexually transmitted images through camera phones or computer cameras, teen sex trafficking through Internet chat, rapid growth of sexual experiences spreading even to elementary school students, not to mention not only middle and high school students, internet or cyber porn that causes addiction to men as well as women! If we see our sex culture becoming more and more exciting, outspoken and anomalous, there seems to be no one who can control sexual desire, and sexuality can also be perceived as a natural phenomenon by instinct, regardless of time, place or object (Internet). Indeed, this is a serious social phenomenon. Nowadays it seems perception that the couples' having affair is prevalent in the world. Now we live in an era where sexual pleasures are prevalent. We who live in this era must realize how dangerous and foolish King Solomon's efforts were to satisfy his own physical desire.

In conclusion, what is the message that God is trying to give to us through King Solomon who tested himself with wine, wealth and possessions through his great projects and 1,000 women of wives and concubines in order to know what pleasure is as his heart was controlled by his wisdom? Look at Ecclesiastes 2:1-2: "I said to myself, 'Come now, I will test you with pleasure. So, enjoy yourself.' And behold, it too was futile. I said of laughter, 'It is madness,' and of pleasure, 'What does it accomplish?'" In other words, King Solomon's experiential conclusion of enjoying himself in falling into pleasure was 'This is also vanity'. Why is it vain to pursue pleasure? How did King Solomon know that pleasure was vain? That was because he asked this question: "what does pleasure accomplish?" (v. 2) This was King Solomon's answer: "Yet when I surveyed all that my hands had done and what I had toiled to achieve, everything was meaningless, chasing after the wind; nothing was gained under the sun" (v. 11). Although he denied himself nothing his eyes desired and refused his heart no pleasure (v. 10) the conclusion through such an experience was "everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind; nothing was gained under the sun" (v. 11). In conclusion, pleasure is vain and empty.

How should we live? How should we live after listening to the message of King Solomon who concluded that the pleasure he pursued in this vain world actually and experientially was vain and empty? I looked up the answer in Westminster Short Catechism question and answer 1: Q. What is the chief end of man? A. Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever. Enjoying God here means that we should make our God our highest joy (Ps. 43: 4). And living a life that makes our God our highest joy is to keep God's commands as we fear God (Eccle. 12:13). Therefore, as we remain in Jesus' love by keeping the Lord's commandments, our joy will be full (Jn. 15: 9-11). This is the joy of obedience. We must seek the joy of obeying the Lord's commandments. The apostle Paul, who enjoyed this joy, obeyed the Lord's command and boldly proclaimed the gospel of Jesus Christ. And as he wrote the letter to the believers in

Philippi, he said “my brothers, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown” (Phil. 4:1). I hope and pray that Jesus is our greatest joy, and we will be able to dedicate our lives in obeying the Lord’s command

in preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ and make His disciples. As a result, they will be more Jesus’ disciples who are our joy and our crown and thus the Lord’s joy can be our joy as well.

1. O! Thou, in whose presence my soul takes delight, On whom in affliction I call,
My comfort by day, and my song in the night, My hope, my salvation, my all!

5. Dear Shepherd! I hear, and will follow Thy call; I know the sweet sound of
Thy voice; Restore and defend me, for Thou art my all, And in Thee I will ever rejoice.

(O Thou, in whose presence)

My joy, my hope, my life, the Lord who became all these for me, I praise you during the prayer meeting,

James Kim

(Admiring the Lord who has become my greatest joy)

Day 10: ‘You have gone too far!’

“They came as a group to oppose Moses and Aaron and said to them, "You have gone too far! The whole community is holy, every one of them, and the LORD is with them. Why then do you set yourselves above the LORD's assembly? ... and tomorrow put fire and incense in them before the LORD. The man the LORD chooses will be the one who is holy. You Levites have gone too far!" (Numbers 16:3, 7)

The church is hindering evangelism. The church is failing to fulfill its role as the light and salt of this dark world. Instead of showing God's love to the world, jealousy, rivalry, fighting, and disputes are rampant within the church. The church, which should be reflecting God's holiness, is becoming increasingly worldly. What could be the cause of such strife within a church that is heading down a worldly path? I found one answer in today's passage, Numbers 16:3, 7. The answer lies in excessive ambition.

In Numbers 16, we see Korah, a descendant of Levi, along with Dathan, Abiram, and On, descendants of Reuben, forming a faction (v. 1). They, along with 250 prominent leaders chosen by the Israelite assembly, rose up against Moses (v. 2) and Aaron, challenging their authority (v. 3). They gathered together and confronted Moses and Aaron, saying, "You Levites have gone too far! ... Why then do you set yourselves above the Lord's assembly?" (v. 3). Their rebellion stemmed from their envy of Aaron and his sons' priestly duties, as the Levites coveted the role of priests (Park). Why did the Levites covet the priestly duties of Aaron and his sons? The reason was that they regarded their own roles as

insignificant. Listen to what Moses told the Levites: “Isn't it enough for you that the God of Israel has separated you from the rest of the Israelite community and brought you near himself to do the work at the LORD's tabernacle and to stand before the community and minister to them?” (v. 9). The duties of the Levites were by no means small, yet they considered them as such. Due to this perception, they envied the priestly duties of Aaron and his sons, which seemed more significant. Despite each having their own honorable role, the Levites, because they viewed their own roles as small, displayed excessive ambition in both words and actions.

When we entertain excessive ambitions, there is a high risk of speaking with excessive fervor. One of these fervent expressions, akin to what the Levites said to Moses and Aaron, is "You ... have gone too far" (v. 3). When we harbor overflowing sentiments, we are prone to manifesting them through our words and actions. One of these exuberant actions is resisting leaders. Those who resist leaders, while harboring excessive thoughts, end up forming factions. Similar to how the Levites, Korah, Dathan, Abiram, and On, along with 250 renowned leaders chosen by the Israelite assembly, rose against Moses and Aaron, creating a faction (vv. 1-2), individuals within the church who hold overflowing sentiments may, after forming factions, rise against church leaders along with prominent figures or influential individuals within the church. Why do those with excessive sentiments resist church leaders? The reason lies in their desire to exalt themselves (v. 3). They aspire to elevate themselves within the church, so they form factions. After forming these factions, they gather influential individuals within the church, creating a resistance against the church leadership. Eventually, this leads to conflicts within the church. They are not peacemakers, but rather, they are ones who disrupt peace and stir up disputes. As a result, the church endures reproach from the world.

In the church, conflicts seem to primarily occur among leaders, especially between the head pastor and the elders. Of course, within these conflicts, there also seem to be contributions from the pastor's wives, as well as the wives and the elders' wives. However, lately, when we hear news of conflicts within the church, we also see the assistant pastors taking sides and becoming embroiled in the disputes. These conflicts within the church mostly involve leaders who are fervently serving the church. Why are we fighting, arguing, and causing disputes? The reason lies in pride. Instead of exalting the Lord who is the head of the church, we seek to exalt ourselves. If we were to humble ourselves in the Lord, He would exalt us in due time. However, because we desire to exalt ourselves, we create conflicts within the church. The desire to exalt oneself is an excessive ambition. We must be sober-minded (Rom. 12:3) and think according to the measure of faith (v. 6). Moreover, we must never consider the responsibilities given to us as small. If we start to belittle the responsibilities entrusted to us, we will eventually view them more as positions. Consequently, we will become envious and covet positions that appear more prominent. It seems like everyone is in a frenzy to become an elder or deacon. It's bewildering how elections for elders in the church seem to resemble worldly politics. Moreover, wives often take the lead in trying to make

their husbands elders. Due to these wives' efforts to promote their husbands as elders, these elections appear even more chaotic and disorderly. Additionally, it seems that money and material possessions are also involved in these elections. What's even more perplexing is that during elder elections in the church, it's said that regionalism and factionalism, reminiscent of the politics of Gyeong-sang and Jeon-la provinces, also come into play. If the chosen elder hails from a certain region, it appears that congregants from that same region predominantly vote for them. I'm not entirely sure if these things truly happen within the church. These are just stories I've heard, but somehow, they don't seem entirely fabricated. Observing such absurd occurrences taking place within the sacred church of the Lord, one cannot help but contemplate how I, and we, should serve the Lord's church. In our contemplation, we must take this matter very seriously.

Indeed, how should you and I serve the Lord's church? Firstly, we must serve with humility. It brings to mind the hymn, "O Master, Let Me Walk With Thee". The first verse goes like this: "O Master, let me walk with Thee In lowly paths of service free; Tell me Thy secret, help me bear The strain of toil, the fret of care." When we serve the Lord's church humbly, there may indeed be many trials. However, we must continue to serve His church with the strength the Lord provides. How should we serve with this strength? We must serve the Lord's church faithfully with the power of grace that the Lord bestows upon us. We should serve with the power of grace. We have no merit of our own. It is solely through the merit of Jesus' sacrifice on the cross. As we serve the Lord's church, we must cast aside any sense of merit. We must continually let it go. Instead, we should humbly serve His church with faithfulness through the power of the grace given by God. We must never consider the responsibilities entrusted to us lightly. Instead, may we, through esteeming our holy responsibilities, progress in faithful service to the Lord's church with the strength of His great grace.

Guarding against excessive ambition,

James Kim

(Praying that we may humbly serve His church with the power of grace given by the Lord)

Day 11: A jealous eye

“And from that time on Saul kept a jealous eye on David” (1 Samuel 18:9).

When I think about “jealousy”, I remember the Korean drama “Jealousy” that was broadcast on MBC in June-July 1992. The drama includes actor Soo Jong Choi and actress Jin Sil Choi and it was about young people's fresh and heartfelt love stories. It is said to have been recognized as the epitome of the melodrama that the era demands by containing the pain, waiting, and beauty to realize mature love (Internet). I still remember dimly a part of the lyrics of the drama's title song “Jealousy”: ‘Who are you looking at even though I'm standing here right here ... I don't want much. I just you're your eyes of love. Even if I try to convey my heart, your eyes are saying different things’ (Internet). At that time, I was 24 years old and when I listened to that drama theme song, it stimulated my young heart. Haha. But now when I listen to that song, it is kind of insipid. However, one thing for sure is that "jealousy" can't be thought of simply. Why is that? This is because jealousy can kill a person. It is because jealousy is a terrible weapon of Satan.

What is jealousy? It is “a feeling of unhappiness and anger because someone has something or someone that you want” (Internet). When I read this definition again and again, I have nothing to say because I remembered having a feeling of unhappiness and anger about a formal church member in the Lord for no reason. Although that member didn't do anything wrong to me, I just didn't like that person. Even though I didn't want to hate that person, I couldn't help not hating that person. Of course I see myself still jealous. I see myself trying to be envious when others are praised and recognized more than me. Of course this is my inner person. After all, the jealousy in me is prideful. If I am humble before God, I am sure I won't have earthly, natural and demonic jealousy (cf. Jam. 3:15). The reason is because I would

empty myself like Jesus did (Phil. 2:5-8). If I am imitating the heart of Jesus, I will be humble and consider other members better than myself (v. 3) instead of being jealousy of others.

Of course, in the Bible, it's not only worldly and devilish jealousy that is mentioned. The Bible also speaks of God's jealousy. For example, in Numbers 25:11, God speaks to Moses about Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, saying, "Phinehas son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron, the priest, has turned my anger away from the Israelites; for he was as zealous as I am for my honor among them, so that in my zeal I did not put an end to them." The jealousy of Phinehas is described as being came from heaven (Jam. 3:17), making it a jealousy that is in line with the Scriptures and just in the sight of God. What we should seek is precisely the kind of jealousy that Phinehas had, which was rooted in God's own jealousy. However, we should not possess a jealousy like that of Saul, as mentioned in 1 Samuel 18:9, because Saul's jealousy was worldly, carnal, and devilish in nature (Jam. 3:15).

In 1 Samuel 18:9 we see King Saul jealous. The Bible says that he saw David, who was a man after God's heart (Acts 13:22), with jealous eyes. Although 1 Samuel 18:9 NASB Bible says "Saul looked at David with suspicion ...", NIV Bible says "... Saul kept a jealous eye on David." In Hebrew, it means 'Saul watched David with jealousy eye' (dictionary). Why did Saul watch David with jealous eyes? The answer is in "from that day on" (v. 9a). Here "the day" refers to the day when David killed the Philistine Goliath and the women came out of all the cities of Israel and sang "Saul has slain his thousands, And David his ten thousands" (vv. 6-7). Those women sang that the number of people King Saul killed could be counted to thousands, and the number of people David killed could be counted to tens of thousands (Park). In other words, the women exalted David higher than King Saul. Therefore, from that time on, King Saul began to see David with jealous eyes. Look at 1 Samuel 18:8 – "Then Saul became very angry, for this saying displeased him; and he said, "They have ascribed to David ten thousands, but to me they have ascribed thousands. Now what more can he have but the kingdom?" From that day on, King Saul began to look at David with jealous eyes. Think about it. Imagine that King Saul who used be the hero of the drama but David, one of the additional production personnel, became the hero by killing Goliath and everybody loves David. Everybody looked up to David and they loved him. Not only that King Saul's son Jonathan loved David as himself (vv. 1, 3), but also Michal, a Saul's daughter (vv. 20, 28) and all Israel and Judah loved David as well (v. 16). So what was Saul's heart like? Saul, knowing that the Lord was departed from him and was with David (vv. 12, 14, 28), and the evil spirit from God came mightily upon Saul (v. 10), he continued to look at David with jealous eyes. The terrible thing was that Saul, looking at David with jealous eyes, eventually tried to kill him. Saul threw a spear that was in his hand to David while David was playing the harp with his hand (vv. 10-11). Even though Saul failed to kill David, he continued to try to kill David from then on. Jealousy can make you guilty of murder. After all, Saul saw and knew that God was with David, so "Saul was even more afraid of David and was David's enemy continually" (v. 29). King Saul tried to kill David all his life. But as we know, David became a king of

Israel because God was with him, and Saul died in a war. Saul, who was jealous to kill David, was rather killed. This is the end of sinful jealousy.

So, how can we overcome the wicked jealousy like that of Saul? I found the answer in Psalms 73. Asaph, the psalmist, almost stumbled when he saw the prosperity of the wicked and envied the arrogant (v. 3). However, when he entered the sanctuary of God, he understood the final destiny of the wicked (v. 17). In other words, Asaph overcame his wicked jealousy. When he fixed his eyes on God, he realized how the holy and righteous God would judge the wicked (vv. 17-20). He also realized that there was no one on earth he desired besides God (v. 25). This was the key. We should not look at people with eyes of wicked and murderous jealousy, but rather we should look only to the Lord with the eyes of His jealousy. When we do this, we can overcome the worldly, carnal, and devilish jealousy that subtly creeps into our hearts. Knowing that God watches over us with His jealous eyes, not to doze off or slumber, we will be victorious.

Guarding against Saul's jealous eyes and seeking Phinehas' jealous eyes,

James Kim

(Relying on the faithful grace of God, who loves me to the point of jealousy)

Day 12: Husband's sin

"to bring Queen Vashti before the king with her royal crown in order to display her beauty to the people and the princes, for she was beautiful" (Esther 1:11).

We have entered an era where we cannot deny the falling authority of husbands. When considering the underlying causes, I think there are two main factors. Firstly, it is feminism. While it may seem and indeed be true that women's rights have been restored on the surface, I believe that fundamentally, the restoration of women's rights, due to its deviation from biblical principles, has become the "medicine" for the husband's declining authority, which is the "disease". Secondly, I think the husband's irresponsibility is the cause of the declining authority of husbands. I believe this is because our husbands, as fathers and heads of households, fail to take proper responsibility. Especially when they cannot bear the economic responsibilities, it seems that the authority of husbands is declining. As a result of this declining authority of husbands, the upcoming phenomenon is husband authoritarianism. Because they cannot handle the biblical authority that God has given them, they end up abusing it and ultimately transform into authoritarian husbands. Such authoritarian husbands commit sins against their wives. Today, I would like to think about this based on the Book of Esther chapter 1, focusing on the three sins committed by King Ahasuerus of Persia (modern-day "Iran") against his wife, Queen Vashti.

First, King Ahasuerus did not hold his wife in high regard.

In Esther 1:1-9, we see three banquets. The first banquet, lasting for 180 days (about 6 months), was hosted by King Ahasuerus for all his princes and attendants (v. 3). Its purpose was to display the splendor and majesty of his magnificent kingdom (v. 4). The second banquet, lasting for seven days, was

hosted by King Ahasuerus for the people of Susa, both great and small (v. 5). In contrast to these two banquets, the author of Esther describes the banquet hosted by Queen Vashti in a single verse (v. 9). This sharp contrast makes the banquet of the queen appear modest. While the king, in hosting two banquets, sought to display the grandeur and majesty of his magnificent kingdom that extended from India to Ethiopia (v. 1), he only later hosted a banquet to showcase his wife (v. 11). Particularly, in the second banquet, he invited people from the greatest to the least and allowed them to do as they pleased (v. 8), generously providing for the feast according to his great wealth (v. 7). However, the Bible remains silent on what he did for his own wife. King Ahasuerus gave his wife, Queen Vashti, a feeling of inferiority compared to the people from the least to the greatest. If King Ahasuerus had obeyed the biblical command to love his wife as his own body (Eph. 5:28), he would not have made his wife, Queen Vashti, feel so diminished.

Like King Ahasuerus, I believe our husbands commit the sin of not esteeming our wives highly. Our husbands may argue otherwise, but from the perspective of the wife, they may be giving off such a feeling. Even if it's not the truth, when a wife's value is reflected so meagerly, she cannot feel loved by her husband.

Secondly, King Ahasuerus became angry with his wife.

The sin of anger, how many times do our husbands commit this sin against their wives? In Esther 1:10-12, during the second banquet, when King Ahasuerus was merry with wine, he summoned Queen Vashti through the seven eunuchs. The reason was to display her beauty to the people. However, Queen Vashti refused to come at the king's command, which took him by surprise (v. 12). At this, King Ahasuerus became very angry and his anger burned within him (v. 12). The question we ask here is whether King Ahasuerus' anger was justified. Although it was expected for the wife to submit to her husband, Queen Vashti disobeyed the king's command. According to the Jewish historian Josephus, Queen Vashti followed the laws of Persia at the time. In other words, at that time, it was forbidden for royal women to show their faces in public gatherings. So, while Queen Vashti disobeyed the king's command, she could argue that she followed the country's law. By keeping this law, she did not submit to King Ahasuerus' authority as her husband. However, King Ahasuerus was extremely angry. I believe the reason was wounded pride. As a king who ruled 127 provinces, he couldn't control one wife. His pride must have been severely crushed. Allowing everyone else to do as they pleased but not allowing his wife, Queen Vashti, showed that King Ahasuerus sought to dominate Queen Vashti through authoritarianism.

Often, our husbands get angry with their wives, only to later realize that the wife was right and the husband was wrong. Queen Vashti, who did not violate the Persian law for her husband, showed the true face of lawfulness to King Ahasuerus and his people. However, the husband saw his wife's actions as

disobedience. When his majesty and authority faltered in public, he must have been incredibly wounded, unable to bear the anger towards his wife.

Third and last, King Ahasuerus forsook his wife.

The angered King Ahasuerus, carefully observing the demeanor of those seated in the highest position in the kingdom (v. 14), heeded the advice of a man named Memucan (v. 16). Clearly, King Ahasuerus must have known of his anger towards Queen Vashti (given his observant nature) and, being an ambitious man in the highest position in the kingdom, he would never have spoken favorably of an angry king. In the end, Memucan not only accused Queen Vashti of disobedience, but also stated that she had done wrong not only to the king, but also to all the officials and peoples of the provinces (v. 16). Furthermore, he asserted that all wives would now look down on their husbands due to the disobedience of the queen (v. 17), ultimately suggesting, let the king give her royal position to another who is better than she (v. 19) to King Ahasuerus. Indeed, these words could not help but prick the ears of an enraged king. Ahasuerus, whose judgment had been clouded by anger, obediently followed Memucan's counsel. And in the end, he divorced his wife, all because she had been disobedient by following the laws of Persia and thus appeared disobedient to him (resulting in Esther eventually becoming queen). He also issued a decree, stating that each man should be the ruler in his own house (v. 22). This act of issuing a decree, commanding husbands to rule in their own homes, while himself violating the principles and attempting to boast of his wife's beauty in public, is undoubtedly an astounding display of authoritarianism. How much, like King Ahasuerus, do our husbands commit sins against their wives?

A husband who esteems his wife, a husband who does not become angry with his wife, a husband who remains faithful to the vows made in marriage, such a husband is truly a biblical figure who establishes authority in the home. This kind of husband is enabled by God to set each household upon the cornerstone of Jesus Christ.

With gratitude to God who has paired me with the finest wife,

James Kim

(In love of Jesus, praying for the love of my wife)

Day 13: “You are the man!”

“Nathan then said to David, ‘You are the man! ...’” (2 Samuel 12:7a).

I often find myself realizing things belatedly when reflecting on my own actions. Of course, one of those realizations is the grace of God. Only after some time has passed do I come to realize God's guidance, assistance, and provision. Another thing I tend to realize belatedly is that I have spoken beyond what was appropriate. Especially after engaging in various conversations with someone, upon later reflection, I recognize that the content of the conversation applies to me as well, and I realize that I spoke as if I were discussing someone else. For instance, not too long ago, after a church meeting, during dinner, I had a conversation with a few pastors. Even in reviewing the content of that conversation, it holds true. I confidently expressed my personal belief that when pastors join a new church, they should at least seek permission from the pastor of the previous church before bringing members from there to our church, as if they were presenting a letter of transfer. Looking back, I only did this once, and yet, I spoke as if I had always done it that way. Moreover, when I made such statements in front of several pastors, I realized they heard it as if I were saying, "You all should do the same, it's the right thing to do." It was then that I regretted what I had said. I was remorseful for speaking without properly reflecting on myself. However, it seems like I've made such statements countless times. When I do belatedly realize even a small portion of what I've said, I try to look back on myself a bit more and tell myself to be more careful with my words. But unfortunately, I often find myself committing the same mistake again.

Today's passage, 2 Samuel 12:7, is a well-known Scripture. David, after committing adultery with Bathsheba, the wife of his loyal soldier Uriah (11:4), seemingly does not acknowledge this act as a sin. Upon hearing the news of Bathsheba's pregnancy (v. 5), he devised a cunning plan to cover up the sin by shifting the blame onto Uriah, Bathsheba's husband (Park). This cunning plan involved summoning Uriah from the battlefield to the palace, intending for him to go down to his house, rest, and even sending food to

him (v. 8). However, the loyal soldier Uriah did not go down to his house; instead, he slept at the palace gates with the king's servants (v. 9). So, David devised a second cunning plan. David called Uriah and encourages him to eat, drink, and be merry before sending him down to his house (v. 13). Why did David twice try to send Uriah down to his house? The reason was to make Uriah believe that Bathsheba's unborn child was a result of his union with her, not David's. At that time, without DNA tests, how could one determine whether the child was David's or Uriah's? However, as we know, Uriah did not go down to his house, but rather laid with the king's servants (v. 13). Ultimately, David intentionally orchestrated Uriah's death in battle (vv. 14-25). Later, when David heard through the messenger sent by Joab that Uriah had died in battle, he instructed the messenger to tell Joab, "Do not let this matter trouble you, for the sword devours one as well as another..." (v. 25). How can one deliberately and strategically cause the death of a loyal soldier and then say, "the sword devours one as well as another"? How can one say this after being responsible for their death? Because David's conduct was evil in the eyes of God (v. 27), God sent the prophet Nathan to David. Using a parable about a rich man and a poor man in the same city, Nathan exposed David's sin of taking Uriah's wife (12:1-4). At that moment, David was greatly angered and, in the presence of Nathan, swore by the name of the Lord that the one who did this deserved to die (v. 5). David attempted to cover up his sin so much that he even blinded his own conscience. At that time, David did not realize that he himself was the one who deserved to die. It must have been shocking for Nathan the prophet to directly accuse David, saying, "You are the man..." (v. 7). How shocking of an accusation is this? David surely did not think of himself as the one deserving of death, yet Nathan, the prophet, accused him directly. Won't our consciences be shocked when the holy God exposes our deeds as sins, deeds we did not consider as such? How ignorant can someone be about themselves, thinking that another person deserves to die when it is they themselves who deserve it? In the midst of anger and ignorance, one might utter the statement, 'The one who did this deserves to die.' How do you feel about this?

When May comes around, I preach about family. Once, when I preached about family in May, a member of the congregation said to me, "This is something my wife really needs to hear...." Perhaps the focus of my message at that time was about wives being obedient to their husbands. Often, even as I listen to God's word, I find myself thinking that I hope someone else hears this word, rather than recognizing it as God's voice speaking directly to me. Especially when I preach the word that absolves sin, I should feel it pierce my heart like a sword of the Holy Spirit. Instead, I sometimes think that the blade should be directed at others, not realizing that it should pierce me. What is the problem? It's the result of not diligently examining myself in the holy mirror of God's word. When I neglect introspection and self-reflection, I end up hearing God's voice with an attitude that says, "It's their sin," rather than confessing, "It's my sin." When I consider others as the sinners who committed the sins I have committed, how prideful a sin is that? When I try to cover up the sin I have committed in this way, it seems that even the abundant grace God has poured out on me is buried in my heart, preventing me from hearing God's word of absolution, which He

speaks to me in the midst of my pride. When I try to cover up the sin I have committed in this way, it seems that even my conscience, grace, and ears are covered. I shouldn't live like this....

Relying on the sword of the Spirit,

James Kim

(With a heart that earnestly seeks the grace to confess my sin, repent sincerely, and be truly delivered)

Day 14: We have gone astray.

“All of us like sheep have gone astray, Each of us has turned to his own way; But the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all To fall on Him” (Isaiah 53:6).

We have gone astray. We walked in misguided actions with misguided perspectives, values, and thoughts, each going our own way.

Our misguided perspective is failing to see the beauty of Jesus (Isa. 53:2). In other words, our distorted perspective prevents us from recognizing the beauty of Jesus, who obediently went to the cross to fulfill the will of God the Father. We do not feel attracted to Jesus' obedience. Consequently, we disobey the Lord. When we look at obedience from the viewpoint of our disobedience, we can only fail to see the beauty of obedience. Our misguided perspective can be better understood when we think about the statement that Eve saw the fruit as good for food, even though it was not good for food (Gen. 3:6). Clearly, when viewed from the perspective of obedience, the fruit was not good for food, but from Eve's perspective, it seemed good (Gen. 3:6). We can see that her heart was tainted with the filth of disobedience. She was enticed by the lust of the eyes (1 Jn. 2:16) and ultimately committed the sin of disobedience to God's command.

We hold misguided values. This misguided value is failing to esteem Jesus (Isa. 53:3). The reason we do not esteem Jesus is because we dislike sorrow and affliction. Jesus endured much suffering. In other words, Jesus was a man of sorrows. Furthermore, Jesus knew what it was to be afflicted. He was familiar with suffering. However, we are not accustomed to affliction. We turn our faces away from it because we dislike sorrow and affliction. The reason is that we are accustomed to joy, happiness, comfort, and peace.

Therefore, we do not hold Jesus in high regard; instead, we dislike and even despise Him. Our misguided values are influenced by the lusts of the flesh. Just as Eve not only saw the fruit as good for food but also desired it, we, in our distorted perspective, not only view many things in the world as desirable but also desire them, thus disobeying God's command. The reason is the lust of the flesh within us. The lust of the flesh leads us to forsake eternal values and instead choose momentary ones. It prevents us from distinguishing what is truly valuable from what is trivial. As a result, the lust of the flesh causes us to consume vain things, desiring them as good for food, and thus leads us to sin against God.

We have misguided thoughts (v. 4). Our misguided thoughts lead us to believe that despite Jesus enduring suffering due to our transgressions and iniquities (v. 5), we think He suffered and received punishment from God, and endured suffering for our wrongdoings (v. 4). Clearly, Jesus experienced our afflictions and sorrows (v. 4) because of our transgressions and iniquities. However, we mistakenly believe that He was crucified on the accursed tree, the cross, receiving punishment from God, and died, claiming Himself to be the Son of God, and committing the sin of desecrating the temple. Clearly, His suffering was due to our transgressions and iniquities. The root of our misguided thoughts is pride. Pride skews our thinking. It makes us consider ourselves wise. Therefore, Eve not only saw the fruit as good for food, desired it, and even found it appealing enough to make her wise. This is what the apostle John refers to as the "boasting of life" (1 Jn. 2:16). This did not originate from God, but from following the ways of the world (v. 16). Thus, the boasting of life leads us to have misguided thoughts, causing us to sin against God.

When we were living with misguided perspectives, distorted values, and erroneous thoughts, each of us was walking in our own sinful ways. At that time, God made Jesus bear all our sinful iniquities (Isa. 53:6). Just like us, sinful people, with all our wrongdoings, He endured suffering. How should we respond as we come to understand this grace of our Lord? We should lead a life of faith with correct perspectives. We must forsake our worldly outlook and live with God's viewpoint. We should emulate the beauty of Jesus, obeying the Lord just as He obeyed. Additionally, we should uphold proper values in our life of faith. Discarding momentary and futile values, we must embrace eternal ones. Moreover, we should live diligently for things of eternal significance. We need to hold right thoughts and practice a righteous life of faith. We must be vigilant in guarding our hearts against any infiltrating prideful thoughts. We should pursue biblical thinking, seeking to live in alignment with how God perceives things. Thus, just as God's will is accomplished in heaven, it should also be realized on earth through us.

Pursuing God's perspective, eternal values, and biblical thinking,

James Kim

(With a prayer for a faith life that is both righteous and balanced)

Day 15: When He was afflicted

“He was oppressed and He was afflicted, Yet He did not open His mouth; Like a lamb that is led to slaughter, And like a sheep that is silent before its shearers, So He did not open His mouth. By oppression and judgment He was taken away; And as for His generation, who considered That He was cut off out of the land of the living For the transgression of my people, to whom the stroke was due? His grave was assigned with wicked men, Yet He was with a rich man in His death, Because He had done no violence, Nor was there any deceit in His mouth” (Isaiah 53:7-9).

When we are afflicted, how do we respond? I'm reminded of the gospel song “In these dark days lift up your eyes to Jesus”: (v. 1) In these dark days lift up your eyes to Jesus Lift up your eyes He's still upon the throne And come what may, He never will forsake you For He is God to Him all things are known, (v. 2) In these dark days lift up your eyes to Jesus Lift up your eyes He's still upon the throne And come what may, He never will forsake you For He is God to Him all things are known, (Chorus) Lift up your eyes He still is there Be not dismayed He knows your weight of care In these dark days lift up your eyes to Jesus And trust in Him He will your burden bear. However, are we truly turning our eyes upon Jesus when we are afflicted? Or do we, in times of suffering, look at our difficult circumstances, becoming disheartened, disappointed, and even resentful toward God?

In today's passage, Isaiah 53:7, we see that Jesus, the Messiah, remained silent when He was oppressed and afflicted. Verse 8 also mentions that He was oppressed and was judged. As we meditate on how Jesus handled suffering when He was afflicted, we can draw three lessons for ourselves.

First, when we are afflicted, we should practice silence.

Look at Isaiah 53:7 – “He was oppressed and He was afflicted, Yet He did not open His mouth; Like a lamb that is led to slaughter, And like a sheep that is silent before its shearers, So He did not open His mouth.” Even though Jesus was falsely accused and oppressed, He chose to remain silent. The prophet Isaiah emphasizes this by repeating twice that Jesus did not open His mouth. Imagine being wrongly accused, yet remaining silent when you have every right to defend yourself. It's a profoundly counterintuitive response. In human courts, we often speak out, seeking justice and vindication. However, Jesus, who was completely innocent, chose to be like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, silently enduring the false accusations and suffering. Henry Nouwen candidly confesses in his book "The Way of the Heart": 'I am afraid of the silence. I am afraid to be alone with myself. I am afraid to be naked and vulnerable. I am afraid of the empty place. I am afraid of the dark place. I am afraid to be nothing. I am afraid to be helpless' (Nouwen). When we face unjust accusations and suffering, our natural instinct is to speak out and defend ourselves, fueled by fear and the desire to be heard. Nevertheless, Jesus' silence goes beyond human instincts. How is this possible? I find the answer in Isaiah 30:15, "... In repentance and rest you will be saved, In quietness and trust is your strength." The Messiah, Jesus Christ, did not open His mouth like a silent lamb (53:7). He trusted God the Father in quietness.

We must learn to be silent when we are afflicted. To do so, we must heed the words of Henry Nouwen: 'Words lead to silence, and silence leads to words. Words are born in silence, and silence is the deepest response to words' (Nouwen). The phrase 'silence is the deepest response to words' is a true challenge. Like Jesus, when we are afflicted, we must learn to be silent, trusting in God's (promised) word. Many voices will be heard, and we may have many things to say. But we must be silent when we are afflicted. In our silence, we must hear God's subtle voice. That voice is none other than the voice of God the Father that Jesus heard, saying, 'You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.' Henry Nouwen said these words: 'Entering into silence, it is not easy to turn away from the noisy and bothersome voices of the world and hear the small, intimate voice saying, 'You are my beloved child, in whom I am well pleased.' Nevertheless, if we boldly embrace solitude and strip ourselves of silence, we will come to know that voice.' We must boldly embrace solitude and strip ourselves of silence.

Second, when we are afflicted, we must think.

Look at Isaiah 53:8 - " By oppression and judgment He was taken away; And as for His generation, who considered That He was cut off out of the land of the living For the transgression of my people, to whom the stroke was due?" When meditating on the suffering of Jesus, who is the Messiah, at that time, the Jews mistakenly thought that Jesus was suffering and being judged by God for His own sins (v. 4). However, Jesus, as the innocent one, suffered oppression and judgment because of the transgressions of our people, and He died (v. 8). Jesus Christ, as the blameless one, suffered oppression and judgment on our behalf, and he died on the cross to atone for our sins.

We must reflect on this. While meditating on Jesus' suffering and crucifixion in silence, we must engage in biblical thinking. Especially when we are afflicted, there is a greater risk of not thinking correctly, that is, thinking in a biblical way. Usually, when we are afflicted, it is easy to not remain silent and instead complain or harbor resentment. Furthermore, it is easier for emotions to take precedence over logical thinking, making it easy to become angry. Additionally, we are more prone to commit the sin of thought under the influence of emotions rather than thinking centered on the Word. However, when we are afflicted, we must think about God's Word. We must think about Jesus when we are afflicted. When we are afflicted, we must deeply contemplate Jesus' suffering and his death while remaining in silence.

Third and last, when we are afflicted, we must not sin.

Look at Isaiah 53:9 – “His grave was assigned with wicked men, Yet He was with a rich man in His death, Because He had done no violence, Nor was there any deceit in His mouth.” d

When we are afflicted, it is easy for us to commit sin. We can sin against God with our words, and we can also sin against God with our actions. However, Jesus did not sin when He was afflicted. The Scriptures say that there was no deceit in His mouth when He was afflicted. Jesus did not sin with His words when He was afflicted. Furthermore, Jesus did not commit violence. He did not sin with His actions when He was afflicted. Our Jesus did not sin even until His death. Although His grave was made with the wicked, and He was buried in the tomb of the rich man, Joseph of Arimathea, our Jesus did not sin against God with His words or actions in any way. Do you truly think this is possible? We can learn that this is possible from Job, a figure mentioned in the Bible. Despite his immense suffering and hardship, Job did not sin with his actions or words. Because Job, a person like us, was able to do it, we too are capable. When we look at Job 1:22 and 2:10, the Scriptures say this: "In all this, Job did not sin or charge God with wrong" (1:22), "'Shall we receive good from God, and shall we not receive evil?' In all this, Job did not sin with his lips" (2:10). Instead, Job worshipped God when he was afflicted (1:20).

Therefore, when we are afflicted, we must not sin with our words or actions against God. Instead, we should be silent when we are afflicted. In this silence, we must hear the subtle voice of God the Father

saying, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased" (Mt. 3:17). We must quietly dwell before the throne of God's grace, listening to the promised word of God. In such moments, we should be led by God's word rather than being swayed by emotions in our difficult circumstances. We must view our painful situation with a biblical perspective. Especially as we gaze upon the suffering Jesus endured, we must overcome and move forward in our own trials. Victory!

Praying to hear the subtle voice of God in the silence when I am afflicted,

James Kim

(After the early morning prayer meeting on the third day of the week of suffering)

Day 16: 'When my heart is faint'

[Psalms 61]

These days, I am reading a book called "The Christian Warfare" by Pastor Lloyd Jones. The reason I am reading this book is because I felt the need to know more about the spiritual warfare as I was sharing stories of Job and about the Satan's forces with my beloved co-worker. According to Rev. Lloyd Jones, who also talked about the book of Job, said that the devil clearly had some power over nature. As an example, when Satan began to strike Job under God's permission, one of Job's servants came to Job and saw that his ox and donkey had been taken away, and the servants were dead. "While he was still speaking, another messenger came and said, 'The fire of God fell from the sky and burned up the sheep and the servants, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!'" (Job 1:16). Here, it clearly teaches that the task of causing lightning and destroying by lightning is in the domain and power of the devil. It is the fact that the devil with this remarkable ability is more interested than anything else, attacking with intense cunning and terrible power, the best gift of humanity. In particular, the devil attacks our minds with various tools, one of which is to suppress us as the spirit of terror. The reason why Peter, who said he would not abandon the Lord at any time, eventually denied the Lord three times and said he didn't know the Lord at all was because of the fear of the devil's terrifying spirit caused him to fear about losing his own life (Jones). And Rev. Jones gave these bold words to the church these days: 'The church is anesthetized, confused, fell asleep, and never knows the spiritual warfare.'

The devil that always puts a trap and a snare seems to be succeeding in the church now. Rev. Lloyd Jones said, 'The depression, the discouragement, the defeat and the complete despair are the result of the activities of the devil in general.' How many of us Christians are discouraged and depressed and living in defeat? How many of us are experiencing despair? We must fight with the power of the Lord Jesus who already won the victory in this spiritual battle with the devil. We must live a militant Christian life with the

conviction of victory. We are to have a spiritual warfare. One of the examples is in Psalms 61. When we look at Psalms 61:2, the psalmist David said “when my heart is faint”. Here, the word "faint" means "self-enveloping". This refers to the state of being disheartened and despairing surrounded by his various struggles and troubles (Park Yun-sun). David had been despairing because of the persecution of his enemies (v. 3). When our hearts are faint like David by the devil’s evil forces, how should we fight them? I want to receive four lessons from Psalms 61:

First, when our hearts are faint, we must cry out to God.

Look at Psalms 61:1 – “Hear my cry, O God; Give heed to my prayer.” I still remembering saying many times to my church members and others that when are in discouraged and in despair, we should take that as an opportunity to seek God. When our hearts are anxious, depressed, and despair because of the various hardships and suffering of life, we must cry out to God like David. And when we cry out to God, we must pray, remembering that ‘God desire me more than I desire God.’ But somehow we seem to forget that God desires us when we are so hard and painful. So David said, “From the end of the earth I call to You when my heart is faint” (v. 2). Why did David say "from the end of the earth"? The reason was that David felt so desperate that God had forsaken him, and therefore felt that God was too far away from him. In the midst of that feeling, David didn’t throw himself out of despair. Rather, he cried out to God, “Lead me to the rock that is higher than I” (v. 2). In the midst of deep despair, David cried out to God as he was looking at the rock that is higher than him.

Although we are in deep despair like David, we must yearn for God. We must cry out to Him. Although we may feel that we have been expelled from God’s sight, nevertheless we must look again toward God (Jon. 2:4) and cry out to him.

Second, when our hearts are faint, we must take refuge in God.

Look at Psalms 61:4 – “Let me dwell in Your tent forever; Let me take refuge in the shelter of Your wings. Selah.” What we can do in despair is to cry out to God and to take refuge in Him. The reason is that only God is our protector. So in the midst of extreme despair, even in the sense of being far from God, David confessed, “For You have been a refuge for me, A tower of strength against the enemy” (v. 3). How could David confess that God is his refuge and a tower of strength? I found the answer in verse 7: “... Appoint lovingkindness and truth that they may preserve him.” David was able to confess that God is his refuge and tower of strength because God preserved him with His lovingkindness and truth when his heart was faint. Therefore, David was able to cry out to God and took refuge in Him because he was being protected by the lovingkindness and truth of God even in a state of his heart was faint. Here, the lesson we can learn is that we should hold on to God's lovingkindness and truth even when our hearts are faint. In

other words, we must take refuge in the Lord by believing that God who unconditionally loves us will faithfully carry out His promise of deliverance according to His perfect plan (Park).

We must hold on to God's eternal love and truth in the midst of our life's desperation. In the midst of that we must be led by the hope that we will dwell in the tent of God forever (v. 4). We must look at God's eternal dwelling tent in the midst of our temporal despair.

Third, when our hearts are faint, we must remember the grace of God that he gave in the past.

Look at Psalms 61:5 – “For You have heard my vows, O God; You have given me the inheritance of those who fear Your name.” This refers to the government of Israel that went to the unfaithful Absalom for a moment is being restored to David (Park Yun-sun). In other words, David remembered the grace of God’s deliverance from the rebellion of his son Absalom in the past (Park Yun-sun). David remembered what God did for him in the past rather than remembering what he had done for God when his heart was faint due to his enemy (v. 3). This is by no means our instinct. Our instinct is to pray to God when our hearts are faint and to prove our actions and talk about our own merits. As an example, we can see Elijah in 1 Kings 19. Elijah was afraid and ran for his life because Jezebel threatened him (vv. 2-3). He went into the wilderness (v. 4) and then all the way to Mt. Horeb (v. 8). Then when he went into a cave, the word of the Lord came to him, “What are you doing here, Elijah?” (vv. 9, 13). Elijah then complained, claiming his act (or merit) for God in answer, "I have been very zealous for the Lord, the God of hosts" (vv. 10, 14).

One of our problems is forgetting what we must not forget and not forgetting what we should forget. For example, even though God not only forgave our sin that we repented but also forgot our sin, but we still remember it and talk about it. On the contrary, even though we should not forget God’s grace in the past, we tend to forget His grace too soon. We must remember God’s grace in our past life as David did. Especially when our hearts are faint like David, we must look back on our lives how God had been shown His grace of deliverance we must endure the present desperate and difficult situation. When our hearts are faint, the despair of our hearts must turn to hope as we remember the memories of God's grace that were given to us in the past.

Fourth and last, when our hearts are faint, we must seek the eternal kingdom of God.

Look at Psalms 61:7 – “He will abide before God forever; Appoint lovingkindness and truth that they may preserve him.” David asked God to increase the king’s life and his years for many generations (v. 6). In other words, He asked God to extend his life to the God who controls life and death. In short, David

asked God to bless him with long life. Furthermore, David asked God for him to abide before God forever (v. 7). Imagine David, who was in despair because of his enemies, but he looked to God in the midst of it and had hope in Him. And he asked God for him to abide before God forever as he remembered the grace given to him after he took a refuge in Him. We, like David, must also pray for us to abide in Him forever when we are in a momentary despair. In particular, we should pray that the King of Kings, the Lord Jesus Christ who rules over the kingdom of God forever, that we will live forever in the kingdom of God as kingdom people. As we pray for this, we should also pray that the Lord taught us to “Thy kingdom come”. And we must confess as Apostle John did, “Amen, Come, Lord Jesus,” in response to what Jesus said, “Yes, I am coming soon” (Rev. 22:20).

When David’s heart was faint, he cried out to God and took refuge in Him. Then he remembered the God’s grace of the past and longed for God's eternal kingdom. And if God answered his prayer, guiding him, protecting him and giving him the grace of salvation, then David determined to this: “... I will sing praise to Your name forever, That I may pay my vows day by day” (Ps. 61:8). Therefore, we also, like David, must cry out to God when our hearts are faint, and take refuge in Him who is the tower of strength. And we must remember the God’s grace in the past so that we may live forever in the presence of God.

After praising “Nearer My God to Thee” to God,

James Kim

(Praying to make my despair as an opportunity to seek God more)

Day 17: Crisis management

[Nehemiah 4:7-14]

I remember reading a column by Mr. Cheol Lee for the Korea Daily in America about the US economy. He saw these cases of investment banks collapsing due to poor investments. It is said that the cause of the problem is that the lump of investment banks has grown, fearlessly raised funds directly and even touched real estate investments, and then the subprime mortgage (non-prime mortgage loan) crisis occurred. High returns always come with high risks, and even though executives knew this, they said they couldn't resist the temptation because the incoming profits were so great. Then, one of his words came to mind: 'Capitalism is driven by the pursuit of individual interests. However, if you try to maximize profits, the risk management system does not work because you are blinded by greed' (Lee). I think there is a point in saying that the risk management system will not work if we are blinded by greed. If a high return always comes with a high risk, the risk management system should be working well. But in the end, greed blinds the eyes, so the risk management system, which should work well at a high level, does not work. I agree with the statement that the US economy is struggling like this.

It seems that the US economy is really struggling. If we watched the CNN Internet news today, it says that 8 out of 10 Americans are stressed out because of the bad economy. Yesterday, on Monday, due to economic problems, a 45-year-old man, the head of a family, shot his mother-in-law, wife, and three sons through the barrel, and then committed suicide. It is truly shocking. As more and more people are under stress due to such a dark economy, there are also cases of suicide due to making extreme choices in the middle of life. In such a dark economy, how should we navigate this economic crisis? We need to learn how we got through economic crises in the past. As an example, we can consider the economic crisis in the United States during President Franklin D. Roosevelt's inauguration on March 4, 1933. At that time, an unprecedented economic crisis in the United States left 15 million people unemployed, and as financial

institutions such as banks went bankrupt, extreme fear swept over the people. At this time, President Roosevelt saw that the endless anxiety and defeatism brought on by fear were the very essence of the crisis, and saw that the recovery of 'confidence' was more urgent than any economic policy in overcoming the recession. Therefore, President Roosevelt wanted to cut off the process in which a sense of crisis causes a crisis, and a crisis in turn amplifies the sense of crisis (Internet).

Even in our lives, there are times when life becomes dark due to crises. And there are times when we experience another crisis due to a sense of crisis. What could be the cause? One of the reasons is because we are not good at crisis management. All of us must have faced a crisis at least once in our past life. And if we have not properly learned how to manage a crisis through that crisis, we cannot help but face extreme pain and difficulties because we do not know how to manage the upcoming crisis as well. Therefore, we must learn crisis management through unexpected crises in our lives. In particular, in Nehemiah 4:7-14, how did Nehemiah and the people of Judah overcome the four crises that came to Nehemiah and the people of Judah (the increasing number of enemies, their combined armed attacks, discouragement, and fear)? I want to receive a lesson on crisis management that is given while thinking of three things. In the meantime, I hope and pray that we can apply the lesson to our lives and overcome the current crisis as well as the upcoming crisis.

The first lesson in crisis management is to pray together.

Nehemiah prayed to God and dealt with the four crises that he could feel, the increasing number of enemies, the combined armed attack of these enemies, and the discouragement and fear of the people of Judah. Look at Nehemiah 4:9 – “But we prayed to our God” Nehemiah prayed to God in a situation where his enemies were surrounded on all sides, from the east, west, south, and north. If we look at Exodus 14:3, the Bible says that the Israelites were “hemmed in by the desert.” At that time, the Israelites saw their surroundings and became discouraged and complained to Moses. However, Moses looked up and prayed to God (v. 15). This is the first risk management lesson I and you should learn.

Pastor George Muller, who claims to have received 5,000 answered prayers, said this about prayer: ‘He who has not learned to fight life on his knees is still the one who does not know the ABCs of the Christian faith (Muller). Do you and I really know the ABCs of Christian faith? When faced with unexpected adversity and difficulties in life, are we fighting our sense of crisis, fear, anxiety, worry with our knees? Are we coping with crises in our lives by crying out to God? Like the Israelites, we must not be discouraged and complain about the land because we are trapped in the east, west, north, and south in front of the Red Sea. Rather, like Moses, we must look upward even in such a crisis. That is, we must look to God. And we must ask the God of our salvation in faith. Then we will experience God's salvation. In particular, it is important for the church to pray together when the community encounters a crisis. Of

course, individual prayer is necessary. But when the whole church gathers together with one heart and one mind and prays earnestly to God, we will experience God's saving grace through that crisis. Even in the state of siege in the east, west, north, south, and north, we must experience God's work of salvation in our lives as well, who turned the Red Sea into dry land and allowed the Israelites to cross the Red Sea on foot. Our God will open the way of salvation for us. Like Paul and Silas who prayed and sang hymns (Acts 16), God will hear our prayers and give us the grace of salvation. I hope and pray that we will be able to experience God's work of salvation by praying together to God no matter what crisis we face.

The second lesson in crisis management is to post a guard.

Nehemiah posted a guard when a crisis came for him and the people of Judah. Look at Nehemiah 4:9 – “But we prayed to our God and posted a guard day and night to meet this threat.” Nehemiah then posted the guard to ward off the invaders. Where did he post the guard and how? Nehemiah posted the guard in prominent and vulnerable places on the wall. Look at verse 13: “Therefore I stationed some of the people behind the lowest points of the wall at the exposed places, posting them by families, with their swords, spears and bows.” Because then the invaders would be able to see that the Jews were ready to fight. The reason Nehemiah posted the guard along with all the tribes was because they knew how to stand firm together as a family and comfort each other. The people of Judah not only repaired the wall near their house (3:28-30), but they stood guard with their families to protect their home and city.

Nehemiah prayed to God and did not forget his responsibility. In other words, he diligently did what he had to do as a man of prayer. In the midst of a crisis, Nehemiah not only prayed to God with the people of Judah, but also posted the guard on the walls of Jerusalem to block many enemies who were actually trying to invade. Nehemiah posted the guard in prominent and vulnerable places along every tribe. Likewise, we must set up the guard when facing a crisis. In particular, we personally must set watch over our eyes, ears, and hearts. Why should we post the guard in our eyes and ears? It is because if we do not post the guard in our eyes when we are looking at a crisis situation, we will see the crisis situation with our physical eyes and tremble in fear. Also, we must post the guard on our ears. That way, we can block out all the news from a crisis situation. As we block the news that discourages and despairs our hearts, we must hear God's still voice louder in the midst of the crisis. In particular, we must post the guard on our heart, the source of life. We must guard our heart well. In particular, we must be wary of distrust that may arise in our hearts due to a crisis. Also, we must guard against the crisis of confidence in our hearts. Rather, in a crisis situation, we must fill our hearts with the assurance of salvation. The word of God must be a guard in our hearts. Therefore, we must not be guided by a crisis situation or our thoughts and emotions that react to that situation, but only be guided by God's word of promise. Therefore, I hope and pray that we will experience the work of salvation of God who rescues us from the midst of crisis while enduring with faith.

The third lesson in crisis management is to trust God completely.

Nehemiah constantly challenged the people of Judah to fully trust in God and have confidence when he encountered a crisis due to the enemies while rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem. Look at Nehemiah 4:14 – “After I looked things over, I stood up and said to the nobles, the officials and the rest of the people, ‘Don't be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome, and fight for your brothers, your sons and your daughters, your wives and your homes.’” The important thing here is Nehemiah's faith, conviction, and confidence as a leader. What would happen if the leader showed weak faith, uncertainty, and lack of confidence in front of the people of Judah who were discouraged and trembling in fear because of their enemies? Nehemiah's heart was occupied by the great and awesome God (1:15; 4:14). And he believed that God was strong enough to save the people of Judah in the midst of a crisis. With this faith and confidence, Nehemiah constantly challenged the discouraged and fearful people of Judah to trust God completely.

I remember reading a book that said, ‘Unbelief magnifies problems, but faith makes the Lord appear bigger.’ I agree. If we face a crisis and the crisis seems bigger than our Lord, we must keep in mind that this is unbelief. With such unbelief, we can never overcome a crisis situation. Like Nehemiah, we must have true faith. Because of the faith that makes us look at the extremely great God, we must overcome the crises that come into our lives. Even if a great crisis comes at home and at the church level, we must rather overcome it with faith in God. While longing for, praying for, expecting, and waiting for God's saving grace with conviction and confidence, we must overcome the fear that arises within us, and the fear of the adversaries who push us into a crisis situation. Hear what Moses praying said to the Israelites: “... Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the LORD will bring you today. ... The LORD will fight for you; you need only to be still” (Exod. 14:13-14). Our God fights for us. And the victory of war belongs to God. We should not be afraid because that God is with us and is fighting our enemies. Only by trusting God completely, we should not only overcome the crisis in our lives, but also use it as an opportunity to glorify God. Victory!

Desiring to learn more about crisis management,

Rev. James Kim

(Praying that crises may become opportunities to experience God's saving grace)

Day 18: Christian heart management

“Watch over your heart with all diligence, For from it flow the springs of life” (Proverbs 4:23).

There is still an unforgettable event. A mother, whom I know, was shot to death when she ran out of her store in following a robber who came into her store and stole her money. The money the robber stole from the store was \$100. It was an absurd event. Of course, I don't think she went after the robber to keep \$100 because it could be a momentary reaction. However, one precious life died for just \$100.

Too many people seem to give their whole strength, heart, and sincerity to keep money. I think we are doing whatever we can to protect money in this materialistic world. What's even more frightening is the fact that we are throwing away our hearts to protect our money. I am thinking about what we Christians are doing in this world where people try to protect money even while throwing away their conscience. Are we different from them? Aren't we trying to control the Lord's church with money by strengthening our neck in the church with money, boasting in front of the church members? Why are we throwing our hearts? Why aren't we any no longer committed ourselves to protect our hearts? Our hearts are getting dirty. What is even more frightening is that even the faith to rely on the blood of Jesus' cross is fading in our dirty hearts. It seems that we are living by showing people our form of godliness in our proud instinct to save our hearts that are being polluted by law. Our hearts are full of doubts, not faith. And such hearts test God (Acts 15:10). It is our hearts that doubt about the salvation plan of grace that God has established (Park). In short, our hearts don't know "the grace of the Lord Jesus" (v. 11).

God is giving us the word of life today. Above all else, we must guard our hearts because “it is the wellspring of life” (Prov. 4:23). We should not take this fundamental lesson lightly. We should not waste time focusing on other things while ignoring the wellspring of life. Specifically, how should we proceed to guard our hearts? We must keep it by faith. We must cleanse our hearts by faith (Acts 15:9). We must do our best to cleanse and prioritize guarding our hearts amidst Satan's devilish schemes and many temptations. Although it may be difficult, painful, lonely, and exhausted, we must guard our hearts with all our lives. In order to do that, we must claim only Christ's righteousness by faith. We must consider our righteousness rubbish. We can boast only our sins and our weakness. We must hold onto the truth, saved only through the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ, with all our heart, mind, and soul. In addition, since we are sanctified through the work of the truth of the Holy Spirit in our life of faith, we must live a sanctified life. “Create in me a clean heart, O God ...” (Ps. 51:10).

Neglecting the care of the mind, sighing at the abundance of weeds,

James Kim

(In a prayerful heart, eagerly awaiting the short time spent in prayer, looking completely to the Lord who becomes the gardener of my heart)

Day 19: Benefits of sufferings

“and he said, "I called out of my distress to the LORD, And He answered me I cried for help from the depth of Sheol; You heard my voice” (Jonah 2:2).

How do we respond to the hardships we have in our lives? Henry Nowen suggests to respond in four ways in his book, "Turn My Mourning into Dancing." There are 4 steps to dance with God:

(1) The first step is to grieve the pain and suffering we go through.

We have to cry when we have to cry. We must weep in front of the cross. And when we go through pain and suffering, we must go to our Heavenly Father and tell him what we are going through. But I think many of us don't want to acknowledge our pain and suffering, but rather try to deny, ignore, or suppress them in our hearts deeply. If we do, then our sufferings will not benefit us. Rather, as in the case of the Israelites in the Old Testament, there will be a greater likelihood of committing sin to God by grumbling and complaining.

(2) The second step is to face the causes of pain and pain.

We must look straight at the hidden loss of injustice, shame and guilt that paralyze us. What causes pain and suffering? We must know what the cause is so that we can look straight to our pain and suffering. Many times we seem to be unaware of the cause of our suffering and pain. So we cannot face the causes of pain and sorrow, and even though we know the cause, our human instincts are familiar with avoiding the cause rather than directly look straight at them. We cannot

enjoy the grace given by God through pain and suffering until we face the cause of the pain and suffering that we are experiencing.

(3) The third step is to go through pain and suffering, loss and wound and pass through it.

We should never pour too much energy into denying our pain and suffering. Rather, we must enter into the suffering, pain, loss, and wounds as we acknowledge them. We should not evade anymore. We must enter the tunnel of pain and suffering. Though it may be dark and frightening, we still have to enter that tunnel. Without entering the tunnel of pain and suffering, there is no benefit of the suffering.

(4) The last fourth step is to meet Heavenly Father in pain, suffering, loss and wound.

We must enter into the tunnel of suffering, pain, loss and wound and feel the pain, suffering, loss and wound of Jesus. Then, there is healing in our pain and wounds. Furthermore, we can be used as a tool of the Lord as a wounded healer.

We can summarize the sufferings of Jonah in four parts:

(1) The suffering of Jonah was the stomach of the great fish.

Look at Jonah 2:1 – “Then Jonah prayed to the LORD his God from the stomach of the fish.” Jonah's first suffering was "the depth of Sheol" (v. 2). Like a darkened cave, Jonah, who was in the stomach of the great fish deep in the sea, was struck by the painful situation that looked around the north, south, west, and there seemed to be no solution. He was imprisoned like the Israelites who had been imprisoned in front of the Red Sea at the time of the Exodus (though this was King Pharaoh's thoughts and not the thoughts of the Israelites). Everything Jonah believed in this world was cut off. When we are in hopeless desperate situation like Jonah, we must look to the Lord who is our true Hope. This is the first benefit of suffering.

(2) The suffering of Jonah was the Lord's wave.

Look at Jonah 2:3 – “For You had cast me into the deep, Into the heart of the seas, And the current engulfed me All Your breakers and billows passed over me.” Here the word “breakers” refers to God’s given waves that were breaking Jonah (Park Yun-sun). Not only God was breaking the ship that Jonah was aboard, but also Jonah's heart as well. God was breaking the harden heart of Jonah, who forgot the Lord's mission and disobeyed God's command and running away, so that he might

soften Jonah's heart in order for him to obey God's command. This is the second benefit of suffering.

(3) The suffering of Jonah was the feeling that Jonah was expelled from God's sight.

Look at Jonah 2:4 – “So I said, 'I have been expelled from Your sight’” Jonah had this feeling because he was running away from God (1:3). In other words, Jonah was trying to flee from God's presence so he felt that God had left Him and was far away from him. In a word, Jonah felt that God forsaken him. So are we. When do we feel that we have been forsaken by God? It is when we disobey God's commands like Jonah and flee far away from God's presence we can feel that God has forsaken us. Especially when we are in trouble, no matter how we pray to God, we receive no answer of our prayer from God. Then we can feel that God has hid his face from us and God has forsaken us. That was how the psalmist felt. That was why he cried out like this in Psalms 22:1 – “My God, my God, why have You forsaken me? Far from my deliverance are the words of my groaning.” We can have a feeling that God has forsaken us when there is no answer of prayer from God and no help in spite of groaning and crying. This feeling of being forsaken by God must have been greater pain than physically suffering by God's wave and being in the stomach of the great fish. It is the most painful feeling that we have been forsaken by God than any discipline, as if we were stuck in a dark room when we were disciplined by our father, and felt that we were abandoned by our beloved father rather than discipline by our father's stick. But in this suffering, the blessing that God gives us is that we may hear the cry of Jesus “‘Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?’-- which means, ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’” of the crucified Jesus (Mk. 15:34). When we hear this voice of Jesus Christ on the cross, we are convinced and assured that we are not forsaken by God forever because of Jesus, the only begotten Son of God was forsaken by his own Father God for us. This is the third benefit of suffering.

(4) The suffering of Jonah was that he was fainting away.

Look at Jonah 2:7 – “‘While I was fainting away,’” The word 'faint' here means 'to decline'. This word tells that Jonah was in extreme discord. The situation of Jonah's suffering could not escape (or be saved) by the power of man in his total incompetence, and it was an extreme despair that such a situation was three days old. In the desperation of experiencing total helplessness and total incompetence, the grace that God gives us is to look to Him who is the hope of salvation. And by looking at the Lord of salvation, God enables us to confess from our hearts and lips that "Salvation is from the Lord" (v. 9). This is the fourth and great benefit of suffering.

We must enjoy the grace of God through suffering in our lives. In particular, like Jonah, when we are running away from God by disobeying God's command, we must enjoy the benefits of God's suffering while dancing with God through the great winds of suffering that God gives us. Hence, we also pray that we may confess like the psalmist: "It is good for me that I was afflicted, That I may learn Your statutes" (Ps. 119:71).

Learning to dance with God and match His steps,

James Kim

(While enjoying the benefits of sufferings)

Day 20: Thanksgiving in suffering

“Then Jonah prayed to the LORD his God from the stomach of the fish, ... But I will sacrifice to You With the voice of thanksgiving That which I have vowed I will pay Salvation is from the LORD” (Jonah 2:1, 9).

Suffering is painful and distressful. And when we are in pain and distress, we usually groan in wounds and tears. We even make a grudge. We blame others. We have to blame somebody for it. We blame a situation too, not just the people. We blame the people and the situation, but we do not blame ourselves. The reason is that if we are so painful and distressful, we tend to become more selfish. And if we are selfish, we will not only be able to think that suffering has come because of ourselves, but we cannot. That's why we cannot learn through suffering. Not only that we cannot learn about ourselves through suffering, but also we cannot learn the Word of God. As a result, we are not thankful to God in suffering.

But the prophet Jonah decided to give thanks to God in the midst of suffering and to offer sacrifices to God in thanksgiving (Jonah 2:1, 9). How is this possible? How could Jonah be determined to give sacrifice to God in thanksgiving (v. 9), in the situation where he was hurled into the very heart of the seas and the currents swirled about him (v. 3) and he was inside the fish (v. 1)? How could Jonah have been thankful to God in the painful feeling of being expelled from God's sight (v. 4) and when his life was ebbing away (v. 7)? What was the secret?

First, the secret was because Jonah remembered the grace of God's salvation, which he had already experienced.

Isn't this something we cannot understand? Wasn't Jonah in the stomach of the great fish and suffering? Then how can we talk about Jonah's experience of salvation? God saved Jonah by preparing the great fish and commending the fish to swallow Jonah (1:17). Jonah, who experienced this past grace of salvation, was able to give thanks to God (2:1) [The Hebrew word for "prayer" is used as a meaning of thankful prayer (1 Sam. 2:1; 2 Sam. 7:27)]. How could Jonah be grateful for God's salvation of being swallowed by the great fish and was suffering in the stomach of the great fish? Isn't the salvation that we usually pray for and expect deliverance from suffering like a "big fish stomach"? But Jonah didn't offer the prayer of thanksgiving when he on the dry land (Jonah 2:10), but when he was still in the stomach of the great fish (vv. 1-9). Although he was saved from one suffering from another (greater) suffering, he was able to give thanks to God in such suffering because he remembered the grace of God's salvation that he had already experienced. Even in the midst of suffering, those who remember the past grace of salvation and celebrate in the present cannot but give thanks to God. Let us give thanks to God even in the greatest sufferings as we remember God's grace of salvation that we have experienced in the past.

Second, the secret was because Jonah had the assurance and hope of God's salvation for the future.

The reason why we can give thanks to God in the midst of suffering is not only because of the grace of salvation that God has given us in the past, but because we believe that God, who saved us in the past, will also save us from our present sufferings. Because of this conviction and hope of salvation, we are able to praise and pray in thanksgiving to God, even though we are now going through suffering. That's what Paul and Silas did in Acts chapter 16. Paul and Silas prayed and praised God (Acts 16:25), although they could have been executed the next day in prison. How could this be possible? It was because they had confidence and hope of God's salvation. Especially because Paul believed that God would lead him to Rome and stand before Caesar, he was sure that God would save him from the prison in Philippi. That was why he was able to pray and praise God. Likewise, Jonah was able to give thanks to God in hope of salvation because he believed that God, who had saved him in the past, would also save him from the stomach of the great fish (Jonah 2:1, 9). In other words, he believed and hoped for God's faithful love of salvation, so he decided to give thanks to God and to offer a sacrifice to God with the voice of thanksgiving in the midst of suffering. We believe that the faithful God who saved us in the past will not only save us in our present sufferings but will also save us from the sufferings we will face in the future, because our God of salvation is the same yesterday, today, and forever (Heb. 13:8). When we believe and hope in this faithful God of salvation, we can eagerly desire and hope in God of salvation and give thanks to God even though we are in the midst of such 'a stomach of a great fish' that seems despicable.

Third and last, the secret is because Jonah kept the grace of God in his heart.

Look at Jonah 2:8-9: “Those who regard vain idols Forsake their faithfulness, But I will sacrifice to You With the voice of thanksgiving That which I have vowed I will pay Salvation is from the LORD.” Here the phrase “vain idols” is described in two Hebrew words: (1) ‘Hebell’: Breath that evaporates quickly; (2) ‘Sseo’: emptiness, void. In other words, vain idols mean something like vanishing as quickly as breathing. Those who serve vain idols that vanish as quickly as breathing abandon God's grace. For example, if we love material more than God, and worship false material, we abandon the grace that God has given us. As a result, we cannot worship God with the voice of thanksgiving. When we live in this world, pursuing the vainly worldly things from Monday to Saturday, we are forsaking the God's grace that God is giving us on the Lord's Day. If we fail to keep God's grace in our hearts from Monday to Saturday, then we cannot have thanksgiving in our hearts when we go to church on the Lord's Day and worship God. Not only that we cannot come in before God with thanksgiving in our heart but also we cannot praise and worship God with the voice of thanksgiving. But if we keep in our hearts the grace that God has given us, we can thank God in the Lord's presence on Sunday and give thanks and praise to God. Interestingly, idol worshippers abandon the grace of God and worship the things that quickly disappear like breathing, but God worshippers go to God and worship Him with thanksgiving in their hearts by keeping God's faithful covenant love (Hebrew: "Hesed") in their hearts. It was Jonah who worshiped God. He was able to give thanks to God in his sufferings because he kept the grace of God in his heart. Jonah determined to offer sacrifice to God with the voice of thanksgiving because he realized little bit of God's covenant love of not forsaking Jonah who disobeyed God's command and forsook his mission and tried to flee from God. In the end, those who have experienced the grace of God cannot but offer a prayer of thanksgiving and decide to worship God with thanksgiving in their hearts. We must also give thanks and prayer to God as we experience God's grace in our lives. To do so, we must faithfully keep the grace of God in our hearts.

Though suffering is painful and distressful, we must glorify God through our suffering. To do so, we must look to the God of salvation in suffering. And we must remember the grace of salvation that God has given us in the past and celebrate those graces in our present sufferings. As we faithfully hold on to the past graces God has given us, we must be convinced in the present suffering that our faithful God of salvation will save us now in our present afflictions. When we have this conviction of God's salvation, then we can hope in God in despair. When we have this hope of salvation, we can endure our suffering with faith. We can look at God's salvation quietly. We must look to the God of salvation in suffering. We must remember the past grace of God's salvation, the present conviction of salvation, and the hope of future salvation. In doing so, we will be able to pray and worship God with thanksgiving in our hearts.

With a heart of gratitude for experiencing God's grace in the midst of suffering,

James Kim
(Friday afternoon)

Day 21: Transformation

“Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect. For through the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith” (Romans 12:1-3).

We have already learned from Romans 12:1-2 that the key to a life of spiritual worship is change or transformation. The question is, are we transforming or are we deteriorating? What is truly amazing is the lives of our Christians, who do not transform even though we worship hundreds of times and say countless times that we have received grace from the word of God. How are we to explain this? Even the pastors, who are preachers of the Word, seem to give up lamenting at the unchanging appearance of the saints. And from the standpoint of the congregants listening to the Word, criticism and dissatisfaction do not seem to stop at the unchanging appearance of the preacher. How should we explain the appearance of Christians who do not change no matter how much we worship, even though we seem to faithfully handle worship, which is a religious ceremony, even out of habit? What this teaches us is that there is a problem with our worship life. No matter how much knowledge we have in the Bible, how many correct doctrines we have, and how many times we have held many worship services, we do not experience the work of transformation and are rather deteriorating.

There are two kinds of transformation. Which direction we transform is important. It is either a transformation in an evil direction or a transformation in a good direction. While we worship, we can either transform in a bad direction or change in a good direction. You may sound puzzled. Let me give you an example. During worship, we hear the word of God through the preacher, the pastor. The Scripture says that the word of God is like fire and a hammer (Jer. 23:29) and the sword of the Spirit (Eph. 6:17). This word means that the preacher himself or the saints who truly receive grace through the word of God during the sermon have their hard hearts broken, their cold hearts melted, their hearts and consciences pierced, and there is a work of true repentance and a work of being established. But at the same time, we must consider that God's word can harden our hearts. Hearing the word of God through Moses hardened King Pharaoh's heart. Likewise, those who hear the word of God through the preacher but do not obey it can rather harden their hearts by hearing the word. Obedience is a blessing, but disobedience is a curse. Then, in which direction are you and I receiving changes now? The saints who are changed in the direction of evil through Sunday worship will be conformed to this world even after they go out into the world. Outwardly, they may call themselves church members, Christians, and even worshippers. But they are Christians who have lost the ability to change the world. Greed and ambition to grow the church by increasing the number of Christians may not seem like it to people, but it is an abomination and hate in God's eyes (Isa. 1:13, 14). The transformation God is pleased with is that we are established before God as true worshippers. And the life of a true worshipper changes the world while worship and life are united and changed. I would like to think about the three transformations that we believers must pursue, centering on the words of Romans 12:1-3. Hopefully, while all of us are pursuing these three transformations, when we look back at ourselves later, we can see ourselves more transformed than before.

First, we must seek a transformation of our hearts.

Look at Romans 12:2 – “Do not conform any longer 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.” As we have already meditated on this word, we have learned that Jesus referred to this world as a wicked and adulterous generation (Mt. 12:39). Apostle Paul also referred to this generation as “the present evil age” (Gal. 1:4). At the same time, he says that before we became a new person by believing in Jesus, we followed “the ways of this world” (Eph. 2:2) or “the desires of the sinful nature” (Gal. 5:16). Then, what are the ways of this world or the desires of the sinful nature that we followed before we became new people by believing in Jesus? Look at Galatians 5:19-21a: “The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like.” A similar list is found in Romans 1:29-31: “They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they

disobey their parents; they are senseless, faithless, heartless, ruthless.” The problem is that there are times when we, who have already become new people by believing in Jesus Christ, still follow the desires of the flesh according to the habits of the old self, rather than living like new people as God's holy people. What's the problem? If we believe in Jesus and become new people, we should live like new people. But why are we still unable to abandon the things of the old self? What is the problem? The problem is our heart. We sin because we do not put the Word of God in our hearts. Hear what the Scripture tells us: “I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you” (Ps. 119:11). If we do not put the Word of God in our hearts, our hearts cannot be renewed. As a result, we have no choice but to live according to our darkened foolish hearts (Rom. 1:21) or according to the lusts of our hearts (v. 24), imitating this wicked and adulterous generation. What should you and I do? We must be transformed by the renewing of our minds. In a word, we desperately need a transformation in our hearts.

In his book “Renovation of the Heart,” Pastor Dallas Willard says, “The only thing that can surely conquer external evil is a deep inner transformation (Willard). What do you think? Do you really believe that the only thing that can truly conquer external evil is a deep inner transformation? Personally, I am pursuing an inner transformation when I think of myself as well as my church members, who are not only my physical family members but also my spiritual family members. In other words, I want to handle my personal spiritual life, family ministry, and shepherding ministry, focusing on the inner transformation God sees rather than the external changes. The reason is because there can be no real change on the outside without a change on the inside. I think the problem is that we Christians are neglecting inner changes and paying too much attention to external changes. As we pursue superficial changes without a fundamental change of heart, we Christians are becoming corrupted by committing sins in front of God and people, living in imitation of the world by being influenced by the world instead of exerting the good influence of the world. To us, our faith seems good, we pray very well, we seem to have knowledge of the Bible, and we seem to be serving the church diligently. But since there is no fundamental transformation of heart, there is no change in character or change in behavior even after going to church for many years. So, as I started this year, I set the church motto, “The Year of Meditation on the Word.” With this motto in mind, all members of Victory Church would like to meditate on the Word of God more and more with me. This is because the more we meditate on the Word of God day and night like the psalmist, the more our hearts can be transformed through the Word of God. How is this possible?

- (1) The more we meditate on the Word of God, the more the Holy Spirit hears the voice of God.

Speaking again from the perspective of today's text Romans 12:2, the more we meditate on God's Word, the more we can discern God's will.

(2) Then, as we obey the discerned will of God, true transformation take place in our hearts.

We must purify our souls by obeying the truth (1 Pet 1:22). Our hearts must be cleansed by the Word of God and live a holy life (Eph. 5:26).

I sincerely hope that a fundamental transformation of heart will take place in us as we all get closer to the Word of God, listen, read, meditate, study, and obey it. May our hearts be whole. Therefore, I hope and pray that all of us will no longer be conformed to this generation but become more and more imitated by Jesus to change the world.

Second, we must seek a transformation of our minds.

Look at Romans 12:3 – “For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith.” The word of French modern rationalist philosopher R. Descartes spoke of revealing the essence and core of human beings. It is none other than ‘I think. Therefore, I exist’. What differentiates us humans from animals is that we humans have the ability to think. Animals live by instinctive impulses. The life of animals can be summed up in these four words: ‘Eat, sleep, reproduce, and die.’ But we humans are thinking beings. We have reason, and through that reason, we are beings who think and live. In other words, we humans live while thinking and thinking (Internet). But for some reason, it seems that we are living impulsively like animals rather than thinking more and more. We are committing sins against God by speaking, acting, and living in emotions and impulses lacking in reason and logic. If we talk about these phenomena from the apostle Paul's point of view, it is because of our futile thoughts. Because our thoughts have become futile, we are living in sin against God. Look at 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.” After all, even if we know God, unless we are transformed by the renewing of our minds, we will neither glorify God nor give thanks to God. And our thoughts are bound to become futile. In other words, our thoughts are bound to be worthless and vain. In these futile thoughts, there is no choice but to do worthless and vain things. But the problem is that these worthless and vain things in the eyes of God are being done in the church as well. For example, in the church “... sexual immorality ... discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions, and envy; drunkenness, orgies and the like” (Gal. 5:19-21). So, in today's text, Romans 12:3, Paul says, “... Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you.” What does it mean? We can think of it in two ways.

(1) It means not having arrogant thoughts.

Why are these and other sins such as division and dissension being committed within the church community? It is because of arrogance. Why is there such a thing as spiritual superiority? Why is there such a preconceived notion? Isn't it because we overestimated ourselves? That's why Paul says, "Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought" (v. 3).

(2) It means to think humbly.

Look at Romans 12:3b – "... but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you." What does it mean? In a word, it means to think rationally. The word to think according to the measure of faith means to know oneself and think humbly before God, and to think soberly (Park). Those who know grace are humble. Those who know grace never think beyond their means. Rather, he is humbled. That is why Paul said, "For by the grace given me I say to every one of you" (v. 3), and in the midst of the grace he received from God, he humbly wrote a letter of exhortation to the saints in Rome.

We need a change of thinking. When we do not follow the example of this world and receive change only by renewing our mind, our thoughts are also bound to change. In other words, it comes with a change of mind and a change of thought. A renewed heart and a mind that submits to the will of the Lord can never think proudly before the Lord. Rather, a renewed heart and a submissive heart make us humble before the Lord. I hope and pray that this change of thinking continues for me and you. May we all humbly hold the same mind as well as the same thought.

Third and last, we must seek transformation in our lives.

Look at Romans 12:1 – "Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God--this is your spiritual act of worship." When there are changes in our hearts and minds, our lives are bound to change naturally as well. How is it bound to change? We no longer follow the customs of this world or the lusts of the sinful nature, but live a life of obedience to God's good, pleasing, and perfect will. And we will live a humble life, not an arrogant life. In a word, the fruit of life that comes from changing our hearts and minds is "holiness". What does "holiness" really mean? The Hebrew word "קֹדֶשׁ" (kodesh) for "holy" means to cut off, separate, and separate the unclean. In a word, the life of our saints refers to a life separated from the world and sin. In other words, the saint's life refers to a non-secular life. The Greek word for "saints" is "ἅγιος" (hagios), and holiness is a combination of the negative word 'ha' and the word 'ge' for land and world, meaning non-secular (Internet). But what about reality? The church has become secularized. Why was the church secularized?

The reason is that we are secularized. We are no different from the people of the world. While we also have the values of the people of the world and speak and act like them, our life patterns are generally not distinguished from those of the world who do not believe in Jesus. A life that is not distinguished from these worldly people is never a saintly life, a holy life. Are you and I living a holy life, the life of a saint?

Among the books I am reading these days, there is a book called “Gospel-Powered Parenting”. This is a book that teaches us how the gospel changes us parents and nurtures our children. If we look at Chapter 4 of this book, Pastor William P. Farley, the author, under the title “A Holy Father,” says that our fathers should be holy just as our fathers in the family are holy to Heavenly Father. And then he tells the wonderful truth about God the Father's holiness: “Such is holiness of the Father that when his Son bore our sin and transgressions, God separated himself from him” (Farley). What do you think of the holiness of this Heavenly Father? How should we react to the holiness of Heavenly Father, who separated Himself from Jesus, the only begotten Son who took on all our sins? We must live a life separated from sin. We must live a life separate from this sinful world. We must never be secularized and make our words and actions no different from the people of the world. Rather, we must be transformed by renewing our minds, discerning what is the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God, and living a holy life in this sinful world. Therefore, the holiness of God must be revealed in this sinful world through our holy lives.

There must be transformation in our lives. There must be a transformation in our hearts, a transformation in our thoughts, and a transformation in our lives. I hope and pray that you and I will be transformed more and more by obeying the Word of God.

Pursuing transformation, not distortion,

James Kim

(Yearning for the wilderness more than the palace)

Day 22: Waiting

[Psalms 130]

One of the shortcomings that I realized when I looked at myself is "impatience." And because of my impatience, I think I sometimes hurt others with quick words and/or actions. Moreover, I got things wrong because I was impatient. In the midst of that, the word God gave me to meditate on was 2 Timothy 3:4 – “treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God--.” The Bible says when there will be terrible times in the last days (v. 1), people will be “rash” (v. 4). Why do we get rash? Why do we get impatient? It seems that we become impatient when we fall into the thought that we can't wait any longer and almost at the same time we give up patience. Then we do what we want. This impatience leads to the inability to wait for God's will, creating wrong plans and methods, and eventually with terrible results. Impatience leads us to adopt a worldly and carnal plan and course of action. For example, we take Abraham and Sarah. Despite receiving the word of promise from God, she gave up patience in faith and became preoccupied with impatience. In the end, Sarah encouraged her husband, Abram, to sleep with her maidservant Hagar, the Egyptian (Gen. 16:1-2). Abram accepted her counsel and slept with Hagar, and eventually they had a son named Ishmael. But, as we know, Ishmael wasn't the seed of promise. Isaac was the seed of promise. The terrible consequence of impatience is giving up faith and patience (Internet). So I guess there is a saying that waiting is a virtue. Waiting is an essential element in our life of faith.

This is what Psalms 62:1, 5 says: “My soul waits in silence for God only; From Him is my salvation. ... My soul, wait in silence for God only, For my hope is from Him.” Through these words, we have been taught that we must trust exclusively in God, who is our salvation, our hope, the rock and the fortress. The reason is because it is our strength to trust in God quietly and completely (Isa.30:15). We must wait in silence for God only because our hope in from Him (Ps. 65:5). Surely the God of salvation will deliver us.

In Psalms 130:6, the psalmist compared his waiting as follow: “My soul waits for the Lord More than the watchmen for the morning; Indeed, more than the watchmen for the morning.” The psalmist spoke of his waiting compared to the watchmen waiting for the morning. By comparison he was confessing that his soul waited for the Lord more than the watchmen waited for the morning. Who were “the watchmen”? The watchmen were people who stand on the wall all night to protect their own people on the wall, in case the enemy might invade. In other words, the watchmen were the ones who guarded the wall to see if the enemy had invaded without sleeping. What did these watchmen wait for the most? It was “the morning”. They looked forward to the brightness of the night (Park). With this earnest anticipation, the psalmist was waiting for the Lord. The psalmist was waiting eagerly for the Lord with more earnest wait than the watchmen waited for the morning. In such an earnest wait, the psalmist was going up to the temple as he was singing Psalms 130.

What was the psalmist so eagerly waiting for the Lord? It was the word of God. Look at Psalms 130:5 – “I wait for the LORD, my soul does wait, And in His word do I hope.” The word of God that the psalmist was waiting for was God's forgiveness and salvation according to the revealed word (Park). Here we can guess that the psalmist sinned against God and was in a painful situation due to God's discipline. What was that painful situation? Look at verse 1: “Out of the depths I have cried to You, O LORD.” The depths that the psalmist was laid in because of his sin means an intense tribulation that made him appear drowned in water and suffocates (Park). Although like Jonah who disobeyed God (Jon. 1:2-3) and went into the depth, trapped in a big fish (v. 17) that was the deep waters under the sea and cried out to God (ch. 2), the psalmist earnestly cry out to Him. Look at Psalms 130:1-2: “Out of the depths I have cried to You, O LORD. Lord, hear my voice! Let Your ears be attentive To the voice of my supplications.” In the midst of such earnest prayer, the psalmist knew that if the Lord didn't condone all of his sins from the past to the present, but condemned (Park), then there would be no one standing before the Lord. So he said, “If You, LORD, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand?” (v. 3) If God doesn't forgive our sins and records all our past, present, and future sins, there is no one in this world who dares to stand before the holy Lord. He couldn't dare to stand before the Holy Lord as a sinner. Nevertheless, the psalmist believed in God's pardon and humbly and in fear of God (v. 4) prayed to Him for forgiveness of his sin. Then he was waiting for God's words of forgiveness. How long could he wait for this? After committing a sin, when we look to God in a deep depression due to God's discipline and pray earnestly for His forgiveness, we will eagerly wait for God to say this after that prayer: ‘I have wiped out all of your sins and erased them. I don't even remember your sins anymore.’ If we could hear that voice of God, how could we not dance and praise and worship God in freedom and liberation?

After praying earnestly for God to forgive him, the psalmist waited silently in faith before God because he longed to hear the words of God's forgiveness. In the midst of that, the psalmist prayed earnestly and waited for God to deliver him as evidence that God had forgiven his sins from the depths of

the painful situation that came to him due to his sin. In other words, he prayed, looked forward to, and waited for God's saving grace. How was the psalmist able to wait and pray for the saving grace of God? I found the answer in verses 7-8: "O Israel, hope in the LORD; For with the LORD there is lovingkindness, And with Him is abundant redemption. And He will redeem Israel From all his iniquities." Because the psalmist believed in God's lovingkindness and abundant redemption, he was able to pray, expect, and wait for the grace of salvation and forgiveness of sin. Do you really believe in God's lovingkindness and abundant redemption? Do you believe that God is the redeemer of all your sins?

Are any of you lying deep like the psalmist? Are we not in the midst of extreme trouble, as if we are drowning and sinking deeper and deeper? Maybe the reason is because of our sins. Then, like the psalmist, let's look and hope in God's lovingkindness and abundant redemption with faith, praying earnestly, expecting, and waiting with longing for the forgiveness of sins and the grace of God's salvation. Let's wait for the Lord more than the watchman waits for the morning. Surely God will forgive us for all our sins and deliver us even in the midst of the extreme trouble we face.

Longing for freedom and the joy of salvation from sin,

James Kim

(Relying on the abundant lovingkindness of God who waits more earnestly for those who eagerly wait for the word of God)

Day 23: The Word was growing mightily

[Acts 19:8-20]

Pastor 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 weak Christians. They need to be entertained with something interesting to come to church. ... Therefore, they can only stay at a morally and spiritually weak level. They barely hold on to a faith they themselves do not understand well with feeble hands.' What is the cause? Just as a salesman emphasizes only the advantages of his product and hides the disadvantages, an imbalanced evangelist only talks about the positive aspects, hiding the negative ones (Tozer). We are being deceived by a false gospel. Emphasizing the natural way without teaching the path of suffering, in other words, emphasizing the promised land without the wilderness, as if there were no death, is a fake gospel. We live in a world where false gospel thrives. Such false truths are being proclaimed from the pulpit. The church is nurturing weak Christians who want to be served rather than serve, making their hearts too comfortable.

We must become saints filled with real truth. Our Victory Presbyterian Church must become a church filled with real Word. To achieve this, what should we do? In today's passage, Acts 19:20, the Bible says: "In this way the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power." Today, under the title "The Power of the Word," I would like to receive three lessons on how the power of the Word can manifest in our church.

First, in order for the power of the Word to manifest in our church, all of us must listen to the Lord's Word.

Look at Acts 19:10: " This took place for two years, so that all who lived in Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks." In Acts 18:19-21, when Paul visited Ephesus just before going up to Jerusalem at the end of his second missionary journey, the Jews showed a very positive reaction to Paul's message and asked him to stay longer. At that time, Paul refused the request, promising that if God gave him the opportunity, he would come back. In today's passage Acts 19:1, Paul came back to Ephesus as God had given him the chance. For three months, Paul intensely taught about the kingdom of God in the synagogue of Ephesus (v. 8). At that time, some people hardened their hearts and did not obey. They even blasphemed Paul's message in front of the crowd (v. 9). They not only did not believe in the Word Paul proclaimed but also hardened their hearts. This shows that their spiritual state was in a state of irreparable stubborn unbelief. In such a state, they came out aggressively. They slandered Paul's gospel in front of people. So, Paul set apart the believers and lectured at the lecture hall of Tyrannus every day for two years (v. 10). Western manuscripts indicate that the time when Paul intensively lectured at the lecture hall of Tyrannus was from the fifth hour to the tenth hour (from 11 AM to 4 PM) (Metzger). This well reflects the cultural custom of the Asia Minor region. From 11 AM to 4 PM was essentially a time to avoid the heat and take a nap or rest. They used this break time to concentrate on learning God's Word from Paul (Yoo). As a result, whether they were Jews or Greeks living in Asia, they all heard the word of the Lord (v. 10). Here, Asia refers to the region of Asia extending along the western coast of the Anatolian Peninsula, bounded by Bithynia to the north, Galatia to the east, and Lycaonia to the south (J.A. Harrill). At that time, the population of Ephesus alone was nearly 250,000, and if we add up the populations of the surrounding areas, the number would be much larger. This indicates how many people heard the Word of God in the lecture hall of Tyrannus (Yoo).

Here, the "spread of the Word" refers to the regional dissemination of the Word, resulting in a large number of people hearing the gospel and accepting Jesus as their Savior and Lord. In other words, "growing words" means an increase in the number of believers and a growing faith. However, we must not forget that even within the spread of the Word, there are some who may harden their hearts and not obey the Word. They may adopt an aggressive attitude of slandering the Word. In other words, God's Word divides those who hear it into two groups: those who not only hear and believe but also obey the Word, and those who hear but do not believe and disobey. We must become people who hear God's Word and obey it. Therefore, the power of the Word must manifest in our church.

Second, in order for the power of the Word to manifest in our church, we must exalt the name of Jesus.

Look at Acts 19:17: " This became known to all, both Jews and Greeks, who lived in Ephesus; and fear fell upon them all and the name of the Lord Jesus was being magnified." By examining the background of Acts 19:11-17, we can see that God's remarkable miracles occurred through the hands of

Paul. Particularly, take a look at verse 11: " God was performing extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul." This indicates that Paul's ministry was a ministry of both Word and power, much like the ministry of Jesus. The reason so many Asians were able to be inclined was because the power of the Word manifested through the healing of diseases and the casting out of demons (Yoo). This indicates that there was a work of ushering in the kingdom of God through the proclamation of the Lord's Word, simultaneously liberating people from the dominion of Satan and demons. Another event that took place here is the humiliation of the seven sons of Sceva (vv. 13-16). Some Jews were going around trying to exorcise evil spirits, and among those specifically mentioned were the seven sons of Sceva (who was introduced as a chief priest in the passage). They attempted to cast out a demon by invoking the name of Jesus preached by Paul (v. 13), but the demon responded, "Jesus I know, and Paul I know about, but who are you?" (v. 15). The demon knew very well who did not truly believe and who did. And the demon also knew very well who a genuine believer was. Therefore, those who do not want to be a laughingstock, or a prey of demons must truly believe in Jesus Christ (Park). Afterward, the possessed man overpowered the seven sons of Sceva and beat them, causing them to flee the house naked (v. 16). Once the Jews and Greeks living in Ephesus learned about this, they were filled with awe (of course, this awe was a reverent fear and respect for God). Ultimately, God exalted the name of the Lord Jesus before all these people through this event.

What does the word of the Lord growing mightily mean here? It signifies the manifestation of God's power, resulting in the exaltation of the name of Jesus. Now, through whom did this power manifest? It manifested through Paul, who had a faith that even demons knew and feared (vv. 13-16). When the demons said they knew Paul, it indicates that since Paul's faith was genuine, the demons had no choice but to be afraid. Especially because both Paul, a true believer, and Jesus were present together, the demons had no choice but to be terrified. For the power of the Word to manifest in our Victory Presbyterian Church, the name of our Lord Jesus must be exalted.

Third and last, in order for the power of the Word to manifest in our church, all of us must confess.

Look at Acts 19:18: " Many also of those who had believed kept coming, confessing and disclosing their practices." 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 believed in Jesus came and confessed openly about what they had done. Here, what they had done refers to the magical and sorcerous practices they had continued to engage in even after believing in Jesus through Paul's ministry (Yoo). It's similar to some Korean Christians who, after believing in Jesus, still engage in practices like fortunetelling, face reading, and fortune telling. This indicates that while they outwardly believe in Jesus, their lives are still stuck in the shameful practices of their past (Yoo). The transformations were not limited

to those who believed in Jesus, but also occurred among the professional sorcerers who had not yet believed in the Lord. They brought their books related to sorcery and burned them in front of everyone. This was a public rejection of the contents contained in those books and a confession of their falsehood. It's reported that the value of the burned books amounted to fifty thousand pieces of silver. A single piece of silver was worth a day's wage, equivalent to one drachma. Scholars estimate that the value of the books burned at that time was an enormous amount equivalent to 50,000 days' wages.

What does the word of the Lord growing mightily mean here? It means confessing and renouncing the shameful sins that we, as believers in Jesus, still cling to. Additionally, it means that through the exaltation of the name of our Lord Jesus, even unbelievers repent and turn back to the Lord. We pray for the occurrence of such work of the the Lord's word growing mightily in our Victory Presbyterian Church.

Victory Presbyterian Church must become a church where the Word of the Lord prevails. What does this mean? Through the Word of the Lord, we must achieve victory in our personal battles, letting go of sinful old habits. Additionally, just as sorcerers who didn't believe turned away from their sorcerous professions and returned to the Lord through the Word of the Lord, there should be workds of those who didn't believe in Jesus turning back to the Lord. We must listen to the Word of the Lord in order to fight against the forces of Satan and emerge victorious. We must experience the power of the Word of the Lord. We should witness the exaltation of the name of the Lord. Living a life where we confess our sins and triumph through the Word is what we should strive for. Victory!

Wishing to live by the power of the Word,

James Kim
(Sola Scriptura!)

Day 24: The sincere faith

“For I am mindful of the sincere faith within you, which first dwelt in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice, and I am sure that it is in you as well” (2 Timothy 1:5).

Timothy, the spiritual son of the Apostle Paul, was a possessor of sincere faith. Like his mother Eunice and his grandmother Lois, he had a faith without hypocrisy in his heart. He could truly be nothing less than a precious holder of faith. His name suits him well. The name "Timothy" means "God's treasure" (Park). Such a possessor of faith is indeed a true disciple of Jesus. In other words, a genuine disciple of Jesus possesses a faith without deceit in their heart.

A faith without deceit means faithful faith, faith without hypocrisy, and genuine and sincere faith. As an example, we can consider the faith of Abraham mentioned in Romans 4:18-21. Abraham's faith can be described in three aspects:

First, Abraham's sincere faith was a faith that hoped against all hope.

Look at Romans 4:18: " Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, ‘So shall your offspring be.’"

Even at the age of a hundred, with his body as good as dead, and Sarah's womb also dead, Abraham believed in the promise of God he received when he was seventy-five, which said, "So shall your offspring be." In other words, Abraham's faith was a hope against hope that transcended the medically impossible situation of human beings. False belief, unfaithfulness, hypocrisy, and fake faith may hope

when it's possible to hope, but they cannot hope when it seems impossible. Instead, when faced with an impossible situation, they may say with their lips that they believe, but in their hearts, they cry out, "This is impossible." They may outwardly claim, "I believe," but inwardly, they declare, "This is impossible." What's remarkable is that Abraham received praise from his fellow brothers and sisters for having a precious faith. Therefore, due to this, he suffered at least in his conscience, tormented by a troubled and unbelieving heart that only he and God knew. If there were no such prickings of conscience and torment, it would truly be a false and hypocritical faith.

We must become possessors of genuine faith like Abraham and Timothy. We must be possessors of faith who can hope in God even in situations that seem utterly impossible, not just when it's possible to hope. Even when there seems to be no hope at all, we must walk in faith, looking to the hope-giving Lord, even without any visible evidence.

Second, Abraham's sincere faith was one that, even in impossible circumstances, did not weaken but rather became stronger, giving glory to God.

Look at Romans 4:19-20: "Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead--since he was about a hundred years old--and that Sarah's womb was also dead. Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God." Abraham's sincere faith, without deceit, faced the impossible reality that he and his wife Sarah confronted. Despite the fact that his faith could have weakened enough to give up on having a son, especially as the years passed and the situation became increasingly impossible, Abraham relying solely on the Lord, and his faith became even stronger. The cause of this strong faith lies in the power of God's living and active promise. In other words, Abraham's sincere faith, which did not weaken even in impossible circumstances, but rather became stronger, was due to the power of God's promise. That word was alive and at work in Abraham's heart. Thus, in such an impossible and infeasible situation, he did not doubt God's promise but instead stood firm in faith, giving glory to God.

False faith, unfaithfulness, hypocrisy, and counterfeit faith weaken when faced with impossible circumstances. As the situation progressively becomes more impossible, so does faith become progressively weaker. Such false faith is led by circumstances rather than the word of God's promise. And impossible situations expose our lack of faith. That is, impossible circumstances thoroughly reveal how much we do not believe in God's promise. Therefore, in unbelief, instead of giving glory to God by pretending to have faith, we end up concealing it. Hypocritical faith not only fails to give glory to God but also cannot do so.

We must become possessors of sincere faith like Abraham and like Timothy. In situations that seem impossible, we must walk forward with a faith that does not weaken but rather becomes stronger and more steadfast. Even as circumstances grow progressively more challenging and impossible, we should move forward with a faith that does not waver, becoming even stronger, relying on the faith in the God of the impossible.

Third and last, Abraham's sincere faith was a belief that was convinced that God is able to fulfill His promise.

Look at Romans 4:21: "being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised." In the face of seemingly impossible circumstances, Abraham was not doubtful, and his faith did not weaken. Rather, he was fully persuaded that God, who had given him the promise, was fully able to fulfill it. What persuaded him was the power of God, who had spoken the promise to him. In the midst of realizing human incapacity and helplessness, while fully relying on the power of God, believing in His omnipotence to sufficiently accomplish the promise, this kind of faith is sincere and Abraham was the possessor of such faith.

False faith, unfaithfulness, hypocrisy, and counterfeit faith believe more in one's own ability than in the power of God. False and hypocritical faith not only fail to acknowledge their own incapacity and helplessness, but also cannot realize it. Therefore, they cannot fully believe and rely on the power of God. Instead, they live by relying more on their own abilities, even leading to a dangerous reliance on their abilities to solve what is possible, which ultimately reinforces their reliance on themselves. As a result, even in impossible situations, they move forward relying on themselves rather than trusting in God. Nevertheless, they profess to believe in God. This is hypocritical faith.

We must possess sincere faith without hypocrisy and falsehood. We must not rely on ourselves but recognize our inability. We must hold fast to the word of God's promise. Not only must we hold fast to the word of promise, but we must also live by being held fast by that word. We should never be led by what seems impossible. On the contrary, the more a situation appears impossible, the more we should be led by God's promise. We must thoroughly realize our own helplessness and rely solely on the power of God as we live. Let us all be fully persuaded by the power of God and live accordingly.

Jesus said, "When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?" (Lk. 18:8). Indeed, each of us should examine our own faith to see if we can stand before the Lord again with sincere faith when Jesus returns (2 Cor. 13:5).

Desiring to live with sincere faith,

James Kim

(Spoken on the first day of the sermon event commemorating the 28th anniversary of Victory Presbyterian Church, in the afternoon at the Shepherd's Room)

Day 25: God who helps me

[Psalms 121]

Once, during a gathering of Westminster Theological Seminary alumni, I had the opportunity to have a meal with a missionary couple serving in China, along with their four children. As the children were all boys, while the missionary pastor was interacting with them, his wife shared a unique aspect of her mission work in China. She explained, showing us pictures, that she took an interest in reaching out to women engaged in the profession of prostitution. The pastor would travel by bus for about ten hours and then walk for two more hours to teach in a remote valley where foreigners were a rare sight. The people there showed genuine affection, and upon witnessing this, the pastor confessed that he, in fact, received grace from them. After a brief period of engaging in mission work, when the pastor's wife made a prayer request for us, she expressed her desire to become a channel of blessings, stating that she wanted to be a source of support, especially for pastors and their spouses in pioneering churches. In contrast to many missionary reports that often end with requests for financial support, this missionary couple expressed a desire to assist us, stating that they wanted to be a channel of blessings, particularly for pastors and their spouses in pioneering churches. Although they were the ones in need of help, witnessing their desire to extend help filled me with the conviction that a heart of love and dedication to the Lord is truly precious and beautiful. Even in such precious and beautiful attitudes, there are times when we occasionally or frequently find ourselves in need of assistance. In those times, where should we turn to seek help?

In Psalms 121:1-2, the psalmist confesses, "I lift up my eyes to the mountains— where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth." Here, the "mountains" symbolize powerful forces in the world (Park). The psalmist initially seeks help from these great worldly powers, but ultimately realizes that only God is his Savior and Helper (Park). When we are in desperate

need of help, who are we looking to and asking for assistance? Are we, like the psalmist, seeking help from people, things, or anything other than God, wondering where our help will come from? We have a sinful inclination to not rely entirely on God for help until we thoroughly recognize our own helplessness. Therefore, we often find ourselves seeking help from the "mountains" created by Him, rather than turning to the God who created heaven and earth. In the end, we may become discouraged and despair, realizing that we cannot truly find the help we need from these worldly "mountains". However, ultimately, through the work of the Holy Spirit, we are led to look to the all-powerful Creator God, even the One who created those mountains, and seek His help. As a result, after receiving God's help, we confess, like the psalmist, "My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth."

So, what is today's passage telling us about how the God who provides my help is assisting you and me?

First, God who helps us does not allow our foot to slip.

Look at Psalms 121:3 – “He will not allow your foot to slip; ...” This means that God, who helps us, will not allow us to derail from the truth (Park Yun-sun). What precious grace and blessings is this? We are the weak ones who have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way (Isa. 53:6). But the way, the truth, and the life, Jesus doesn't allow us to derail from the path of truth, what a blessing or grace is this? I am curious about the reasons for the derailment of Korean youths. The results of the questionnaire survey on the delinquent behavior of 431 middle school and junior high school students (224 males and 207 females) in the Seoul Metropolitan Government were analyzed. The results showed that the main cause of the delinquent behavior of the male students showed 'anxiety and negative emotion' and female students showed 'distorted perception of herself'. When I was reading the results of this survey, I thought about the causes why we Christians, who believe in Jesus the Truth and who are following Him, derail from the truth. I think one of the causes is a negative attitude toward the suffering of the righteous. The reason I think this way is that the psalmist Asaph's feet came close to stumbling because of the prosperity of the wicked and the suffering of the righteous (Ps. 73).

What do you think? Do you think that the negative attitude of the suffering of the righteous is one of the reasons why we derail from the truth? If you think "yes," what do you think we should do to have a positive attitude toward suffering? I find the answer in Philippians 1:29 – “For to you it has been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake.” If we know and be thankful that it is God's grace that we suffer for Jesus Christ, we will not derail from the truth. Let's pray for this. Let's pray that God will give us grace so that we may know that suffering for Christ's sake is God's grace and blessing and that we will not derail from the truth. When we pray in this way, let's pray by believing in the fact that God will not allow our foot to slip (Ps. 121:3).

Second, God who helps us keeps us.

How does God keep us?

(1) God keeps us will neither slumber nor sleep.

Look at Psalms 121:3b-4: "... He who keeps you will not slumber. Behold, He who keeps Israel Will neither slumber nor sleep." Several years ago, my son was afraid of sleeping because he had nightmares. So, I encouraged him to read the Bible and pray to God. No matter how much we love my son, I cannot keep my hand on my son's head and pray for him all night for him to have good sleep. How can I protect my son without sleeping? However, the Bible clearly states that our Heavenly Father doesn't slumber and sleep and keeps us. But what is the problem? I think the problem is when our prayers are not answered and when God's help is delayed, we sometimes think that God is sleeping. But in reality, God is not sleeping. Our God is helping us who are in trouble, in His appointed time. Therefore, we must learn to be patient. God, who is our shade on our right hand, protects us and prevents us from harmful things (vv. 5-6). Look at Psalms 121:5-6: "The LORD is your keeper; The LORD is your shade on your right hand. The sun will not smite you by day, Nor the moon by night."

(2) God is our shade and keeps us from harmful things.

Look at Psalms 121:5-6: "The LORD is your keeper; The LORD is your shade on your right hand. The sun will not smite you by day, Nor the moon by night." When I was meditating on the God's word, "The LORD is your shade on your right hand" (v. 5), this thought came into mind: 'If the sunlight continues to shine on me in the desert, what will happen to me? But the Bible says God is my shade and I am comforted by this truth.' During the summer when the sun is so hot, we tend to look for the shadow. So when we find a big tree, we go under the big tree because there is big shadow. Likewise, there is a time when we would like to go to him in the shadow of our Father in heaven, when we are exhausted by these and other things in this world. When we are living in the desert-like world, we are comforted by the truth that God is our shade and protects us from harmful things of this world. Also God, who is our shield, protects us from all dangers in this world as we are heading toward Heaven. Therefore, we can confess, as David did in Psalms 23:4, "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me."

Third and last, God who helps us protects us from all evil.

Look at Psalms 121:7 – “The LORD will protect you from all evil; He will keep your soul.” God, who helps us, keeps us from falling and protects us from all danger, protects us from all evil. Isn’t it interesting that even though God protects us, we have to go through the danger of "all evil"? It is because our thought is when God who made heaven and earth protects us, then there shouldn’t be no danger of getting harm by any evil. But the Bible says, there is all evil and God protects us and delivers us from all evil. Although God allows us to go through various kinds of tribulations, He will surely protect us and keep us. Here, I think even though God doesn’t allow us to derail from the truth, He allows us to go through tribulations because He wants to discipline us and bless us.

I remember the words of Hosea 2:14 in which God disciplined the Israelites by leading them into the wilderness but the blessing was that God spoke to their heart gently. This is the blessing of discipline and suffering. The difficulties and adversities in our lives, and all kinds of tribulation, are the blessings of God. Although it is difficult and painful at the time, it is the blessing of God that He doesn’t allow us to derail from the truth, but deepens our faith in Him. Furthermore, it is a good opportunity to experience the grace of salvation as we cry out to God in prayer and God answers it with His salvation. Therefore, we can praise God: “Faith of our fathers! living still In spite of dungeon, fire and sword; O how our hearts beat high with joy Whene'er we hear God's glorious Word: Faith of our fathers, holy faith! We will be true to Thee till death” (Hymn “Faith of Our Fathers”, verse 1).

When I feel helpless, I love to sing the hymn “Take Me as I Am.” This hymn was written by Scottish Eliza H. Hamilton and composed by a well-known pastor named D. Sankey. Pastor Ira D. Sanky recalled in the ‘Story of the Gospel Song of Sankey’, published after his blindness (Internet): “Years ago, while revival meetings were being held in one of the large towns in Scotland, a young girl became anxious about her spiritual condition. Returning from one of the meetings, she went to her own minister and asked him how she might be saved. Ah, lassie, he said, don’t be alarmed! Just read your Bible and say your prayers, and you will be all right. But the poor, illiterate girl cried out: ‘O Minister, I canna read, I canna pray! Lord Jesus, take me as I am!’ So the girl prayed like this: ‘Lord Jesus Take me as I am!’ In this way the girl became a follower of Christ; and a lady who heard of the girl’s experience wrote this hymn.” “A minister in England writes to me about a Christian woman, a shoemaker’s wife, who had a lodger that was an obstinate unbeliever. The good woman often tried to induce him to go to meetings, but in vain. Tracts which she placed on the table in his room she found crushed on the floor. She would smooth them out and again place them so as to attract his attention, but he would read nothing but his novels and newspapers. One spring the old man fell ill with bronchitis. The good woman acted as his nurse, for he had no relatives who cared for him. She used the opportunity, often speaking to him about his soul and reading the Word of God; but she could make no impression upon him. One day she was reading the hymn Jesus, my Lord, to Thee I cry, and when she came to the refrain, the old man called out to her sharply: That’s not in the book! The woman answered, Why yes, it is. He declared again that he did not believe it was in the book. The

good woman told him that he could read it for himself. He asked for his glasses, and read with wonder and amazement, again and again, My only plea — Christ died for me! oh, take me as I am. A few weeks afterward he said to the woman one morning, I am going home to-day, and I am so happy, so happy! In an hour or two he passed away, repeating those words to the last” (Internet).

As I seek the Lord’s help,

James Kim

(With thanksgiving heart because the Lord is protecting us without slumber and sleeping)

Day 26: The true church

[Psalms 87]

A. W. Tozer's book, "The Incredible Christian" is a reinstatement of true faith to warn of hypocrisy and to be a true Christian. The author criticizes the faith that has been lopsided to one side, the faith with experience but without theology, and the unpleasant faith that isn't deeply moved in meeting God but only has dead orthodoxy, and etc. as 'fake faith' distorted by modern church materialism. And he shouted that we must return to the true faith of becoming the real salt of the world and of willing to bear our own cross. Since true Christians believe in Christ's victory, they are willing to suffer in order to participate in His victory. Five things are listed in Pastor Tozer's book list (Internet):

- (1) The real is not ashamed of the rugged cross (Ch. 1),
- (2) The real rejects the cotton candy gospel and believes in the crown of thorns gospel (Ch. 2),
- (3) The real gives priority to the Lord over the Lord's work (Ch. 3),
- (4) The real desires holiness over happiness (Ch. 4),
- (5) And the real is true to the basics of faith (Ch. 5).

On the other hand, distorted Christians stress more than they need on their favorite Bible texts. In doing so, other texts are relatively underestimated. Pastor Tozer wrote eight things in his book list:

- (1) Fake is instant (Ch. 7),
- (2) Fake neglects transformation of character (Ch. 8),
- (3) Fake misunderstands the discipline of God as carrying the cross (Ch. 9),
- (4) Fake seeks forgiveness of sins by doing (Ch. 10),
- (5) Fake ignores creeds (Ch. 11),
- (6) Fake neglects theology (Ch. 12),

- (7) Fake neglects feelings (Ch. 13),
- (8) Fake has no spiritual balance (Ch. 14).

We, the believers in our Lord Jesus Christ, should listen to 1 John 4:1 – “Beloved, 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.” We must distinguish the spirit. In spirit, there is the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth, who came from God, and who leads us rightly to the truth and the evil spirit, a false spirit, that deceives us and corrupts us. We must distinguish between these two spirits. In particular, we must be able to distinguish between false prophets, false churches, false church members, and true prophets, true churches, and true church members. How can we do so? Those who are led by the evil spirit, the spirit of deception, who led the church are false prophets, those who are taught by false prophets are false churches, and those who are taught by false prophets are false church members. And those who lead the church as they are led by the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth from God, are true prophets; those who are instructed by the true prophets are the true church, and those who are instructed by the true prophets are true church members (Internet).

I would like to receive the lessons by meditating on what the true church is based on Psalms 87. And I pray that our lessons will be applied to our churches so that our churches will become more and more established as the true church in the Lord's eyes.

First, the true church has a firm foundation.

Look at Psalms 87:1 – “His foundation is in the holy mountains.” This word indicates that the spiritual foundation of the true church is solid (Park). In other words, the true church is solid. How can the true church be solid? It is because the Lord who is the Head of the Church establishes His church “on this rock” (Mt. 16:18). Here, the “rock” is the Peter's confession of faith, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” (v. 16). In other words, the church, built on the rock, is a community of people who, like Peter, rightly confess their faith in Jesus. Furthermore, the church, built on the rock, is not only the community of the believers who make the right confession of faith, but also who live according to their confession of faith as Jesus' disciples. More specifically, “rock” here refers to Jesus Christ. Look at Ephesians 2:20 – “having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone.” As Apostle Paul said, it is the church that is built on the rock has been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, in which Christ Jesus is the corner stone. The expression “the corner stone” is found in 1 Peter 2:6 and Ephesians 2:20. The word “cornerstone” in Greek is “akrogoniaios” (ἀκρογωνιαίος), and the “akro” means “high,” and refers to “the rock built uphill.” All of the Israel's buildings start with a cornerstone, and the direction of the building is determined by the direction of the cornerstone. In other words, Jesus must be the cornerstone so that the church must stand, and the direction of all church must

move according to the Christ's direction. Therefore, when we are all built together on the foundation of the word of the Lord, on the cornerstone of Jesus Christ at the center of the Word, and there is God who comes as the Holy Spirit in this house being built together, this church becomes the beautiful church and the true church (Internet).

Then why does the Lord build His church on the solid rock? This is what it says in Psalms 87:2 – “The LORD loves the gates of Zion More than all the other dwelling places of Jacob.” The Lord has established His church firmly because He loves His church. I hope and pray that our church will become the true church in God's eyes. May God's beloved church, in which Jesus Christ is the cornerstone, and in where God's servants proclaim the Word of God so that the church can be built on the solid rock and thus have the firm foundation.

Second, the true church is glorious.

Look at Psalms 87:3 – “Glorious things are spoken of you, O city of God. Selah.” Why is the true church glorious? The reason is because the true church is “the city of God” (v. 3). In other words, the true church is glorious because God is there. This is what Dr. Park Yoon-sun said: ‘It’s not because the city of God itself is beautiful, but because the Lord of glory loves it.’ The true church is glorious because the city of God which the Lord of glory loves is honored by God. This reminds me of the Augustine's book “The City of God.” The time when Augustine was living, it was the time when the Roman Empire was collapsing. The fall of the Roman Empire led to the writing of his famous book “The City of God.” The original title of this book explains the intention of writing this book, ‘The greatest city of the world will fall, but the city of God will dwell forever’ (Internet). Rome recognized Christianity as a state religion in AD 313 and finally established a great empire of politics and religion. Therefore, at that time, the people thought of Rome as the kingdom of God and called it the Holy Roman Empire. They assured that Rome would be a nation that would never perish. But these Romans were attacked and destroyed by the barbarians (Goths). So, people deeply troubled and ask, ‘How can the kingdom of God be destroyed by the barbarians?’ Augustine meditated on this problem. After meditating deeply, he concluded: ‘Roman, the kingdom of the world, is not the kingdom of God. Therefore, Rome can be destroyed at anytime. The true kingdom of God is under the Lord's reign, and it is completed at the Lord's Second Coming. And this kingdom of God will not perish but will last forever’ (Internet).

Our church is firmly established by the Lord of glory. The Lord of glory is building up His church faithfully according to His promise of Matthew 16:18, which He delighted and because He loves our church. Therefore, we must ask the Lord to build up His church as “a radiant church” (Eph.5:27). May the Lord purify our church with the Word and make it holy (v. 26).

Third, the true church is established by the Lord Himself.

Look at Psalms 87:5 – “But of Zion it shall be said, ‘This one and that one were born in her’; And the Most High Himself will establish her.” Here, “And the Most High Himself will establish her” means the Most High Lord Himself will establish Zion, His Church. This is the same meaning as the promised word of the Lord Matthew 16:18 that our church holds: ‘I will build my church....’ These two Bible verses Psalms 87:5 and Matthew 16:18 clearly tell us that the true church, the Body of the Lord, is established by the Most High Lord, the Head of the Church. And in the Lord’s own establishment of the church, the Gentiles will repent and return to Him and become the Zion people (v. 4) (Park).

The Lord’s glorious church, established by the Lord Himself, is the people of all the nations He has chosen, multiethnic and universal. Just as the Jews did not embrace the Gentiles, this church never has preconception that there is wall between nations and denies multi-ethnicity and diversity. The church that the Lord Himself establishes is the firm church. And the church that the Lord Himself establishes is the glorious church. The glorious church is being built up by the glorious Lord. Let’s keep in mind that our church is the Lord’s church. And let us not forget that the church, which is the body of the Lord, is established by the Lord Himself (Ps. 87:5; Mt. 16:18). Therefore, we must not sin against God by trying to build His church in our strength and in our own ways. If we build His church with our own strength and in our own ways, the foundation cannot be firm. And if the foundation is not strong, the church will be shaken and fall. And such church will only manifest the glory of man, not the glory of God. May the Lord Himself build His church.

Fourth and last, the true church is the community of the heavenly citizens.

Look at Psalms 87:6 – “The LORD will write in the register of the peoples: ‘This one was born in Zion.’ Selah.” Here, “The Lord will count when He registers the peoples” is a prophecy of the New Testament period when all the people who believe in Jesus Christ enter into Heaven, that is, all the believers enter salvation (Park). Among the nations in this prophecy include Rahab that is Egypt, Babylon, Philistia, Tyre, and Ethiopia (v. 4). Although these nations are enemies of Israel, the psalmist foretold that in the future God would also make them to repent and bring them back to God. That’s why the psalmist said in verse 4, “... among those who know Me....” In other words, all those who acknowledge God, both Jews and Gentiles, will be regarded by God as citizens of heaven (Park). Therefore, all those citizens of heaven respond to God’s grace: “Then those who sing as well as those who play the flutes shall say, ‘All my springs of joy are in you’” (v.7). That is, they praise God because they are thankful for God’s grace.

Let us all hold onto the word of Philippians 3:20-21 by faith: “For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; who will transform the body of our

humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself.” Our citizenship is in heaven, never on earth. We must not forget that we have citizenship in eternal heaven. Therefore, we must live as heavenly citizens while living on earth. We must live with solid faith built on the Rock, Jesus Christ. We must live for the glory of God. We must move forward to the city of God.

How do we know the true church and the fake church? The true church is a church built on a solid foundation. The true church is a glorious church. The true church is established by the Lord Himself. And the true church is a community of heavenly citizens. But the fake church is a church built on a shaking foundation or sand. The fake church seeks human glory. The fake church is built by people. And the fake church is a community of worldly citizens. I hope and pray that our churches will be established as the true church of God.

Serving the Presbyterian Church established by the Lord,

James Kim

(‘O Lord, may You build Your own Church’)

Day 27: When we think of the church

[Psalms 137]

On May 14, 2009, I read the article under the title of ‘300 Church Personnel, Emergency Declaration for Self-Promotion of Korean Churches.’ Under the heading ‘Declaration for Pastoral Evangelism and Self-purification,’ eight things were declared: (1) Repent of being unfaithful to evangelical values, (2) Reflect on failure to love one another and of the church division and conflict, (3) Reflect on the moral hazards of pastors, and maintain a higher level of morality, (4) Realize the problem of the church's capture of growing supremacy, resulting in cross-church polarization, (5) Endeavor to be the authority of spirituality more than the degrees and honors of the world, (6) Strive to exert personal piety and socially healthy influences, (7) Accomplish the clean church politics on an evangelical basis, (8) The church will endeavor to be the light and salt of society (Internet). As I read these eight emergency declarations, I thought they were precious. If the churches live according to this declaration, the church will be able to glorify the Lord. In particular, I think the first of the eight declarations is the key. In other words, we must repent of being unfaithful to the evangelical values. A more specific statement of this first declaration is: ‘Preach the gospel of salvation that was accomplished by the blood of Jesus Christ that the apostles handed down to us and continue the Reformed tradition of the Reformers in martyrdom. The church, built on this gospel, is a soul-saving hospital and a school of learning God. However, we are committed to have deep self-reflections about whether we have focused more on worldly success than on the value of the gospel, whether we have pursued higher moral and ethical lives, and whether we have done our best to love our brothers and care for our neighbors. Through this, we commit ourselves to live faithfully according to evangelical values’(Internet). It is a declaration that I cannot disagree with. In particular, I agree that we must repent that the church has focused more on worldly success than on the value of the gospel. What do you think we Christians should do when we think of the church? What should we do when we think of the church?

First, we must weep when we think of the church.

Look at Psalms 137:1 – “By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept when we remembered Zion.” The psalmist wept with the Israelites who were captivated by the Babylonians and who sat by the rivers of Babylon when he remembered Zion that was destroyed by the Babylonians. Why did he weep remembering Zion? The reason is because he longed for the grace of God's restoration (Park). When the Israelites sinned against God, God told them that they would be in their low estate, that is, captives to Babylon (136:23). Eventually, the Israelites were taken captive to Babylon because of their crimes, where the psalmist wrote this poem (Ps. 137). How sad was their Babylonian captivity. The psalmist says that when the captors, the Babylonians, demanded him and the Israelites to sing them one of the songs of Zion, they hung their harps on the poplars in order not to obey their command (vv. 2-3). The reason is that the psalmist didn't want to use holy songs for entertainment to the Gentiles (Park). How did it feel when the God's holy people were taken captive by the Gentiles, oppressed there, and were forced to sing God's holy songs for entertainment? Hence, the psalmist lamented in verse 4: “How can we sing the songs of the LORD while in a foreign land?” In this lament, the psalmist felt lonely in Babylonian captivity and thought about Zion on the banks of the Babylonian river and he wept. I think of his tears into two ways:

(1) The tears of the psalmist may have been tears of repentance prayer.

The psalmist's cry would have been the mourning of repentance. When he thought of the lost grace of God, he might have no choice but to think about the saints' sins and thus repented in contrite heart (Park). When I think about “the lost grace of God”, I remember how I was before last Wednesday night prayer meeting. When I am full of grace, I can feel my heart full of thanks, peace, and joy. But when I forget God's grace, I am filled with heaviness, anxiety, and worry. In the midst of that, God revealed my sin and challenged me to live a life that was cut off from sin by confessing my sin. The next day Thursday, after the early morning prayer meeting, tears were in my eyes when I prayed with a piece of Kentucky Fried Chicken bread left over from the yesterday Wednesday night prayer meeting. The reason is that I remembered the words of my sermon that I preached at the prayer meeting. I was grateful for God's providence for providing daily food. When we think of ourselves, of our families, especially our church, we must shed tears of repentance. What is the reason? This is because the church has forgotten the grace of God. When the church of the Lord has forgotten the grace of God, the church has no choice but to sin against God. Therefore, our church must repent to God. Then, in repentance, true restoration, reconciliation, reform, and revival can occur in the church.

(2) The tears that the psalmist shed were probably the tears of prayer in remembering God's saving grace.

Since we know that there is only one Savior God in the heart of those who truly repent, we cannot but plead with God to save us. As the psalmist was taken captive and lived with the Israelites in captivity in Babylon, he realized and repented of their sins and asked God for mercy and grace and deliverance from the Babylonian captivity and to lead them and guide them to their home land of Judah. As Jonah looked back to the Lord in the belly of a large fish and confessed, “Salvation is from the Lord” (Jon. 2:9), the psalmist longed for the grace of God's salvation, knowing that only God could save the Israelites. When we think of the church, the Lord's body, we must truly repent and ask God for His saving grace. We must pray for deliverance from all our dirty and ugly sins. We need to ask God to be born again as the holy and clean bride of Jesus, the Bridegroom. In the meantime, we should be a church preparing for the Lord's return. I hope and pray that we can shed tears of repentance and tears of prayer for God's grace of salvation when we think of the church.

Second, we must make it the highest joy when we think of the church.

Look at Psalms 137:6 – “May my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth if I do not remember you, if I do not consider Jerusalem my highest joy.” The psalmist confessed that although he lived captive in the nation of Babylon, he considered Jerusalem his highest joy. In other words, he made Jerusalem his greatest joy. This shows the psalmist's God-centered godly life. Although he lived in captivity in the foreign nation Babylon, the psalmist cried, remembering Zion, and longing for God. It seems as though the psalmist missed Jerusalem as a captive in Babylon, just as a child who left home missed his parents and his home more than before. He longed for Jerusalem to be rebuilt and flourished as before, because the city of God, Jerusalem, was destroyed by Babylon (Calvin).

This should be our earnest prayer. In other words, we must pray for the Lord to rebuild the ruined church and to prosper like the early church. I think the early church was in its heyday in the history of the church. In the days when the apostles were filled with the Holy Spirit and boldly proclaimed the gospel, the power of the gospel and the power of the Holy Spirit appeared. The Lord added to the early church's number daily those who were being saved and His loving community was built. That should be our church. We must pray for this true prosperity of our church. And as we look to the church of our time, as the psalmist shed tears of repentance and tears of prayer for the grace of God's salvation, we should ask the Lord to raise our church and to reform it. Why should we pray like this when we think of the church? The reason is because our church is our highest joy. Because the Lord who is the head of the church is our highest joy, the church of His body is also our highest joy. As the Westminster Short Catechism Question 1 says “What is the chief end of man?” and its answer says “Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever” we should enjoy the Lord forever. And he who rejoices in the Lord forever rejoices in His church as well. Then how can we enjoy the church as our highest joy? Like the psalmist, we must first

remember and weep for the Lord's church. We must see the desolation of the church with our spiritual eyes because of our sins and weep tears of repentance. Without these tears of true repentance, we cannot taste the true joy of the Lord's work of rebuilding our church. So if we want to make the Lord's church our highest joy, we must shed tears of repentance. In the meantime, we must ask the Lord to save His church. Our earnest prayer should be for the Lord to rebuild His church. And when the Lord rebuilds His church, we must come to our highest joy, our Lord God and praise and worship Him with the songs of Zion. This is the life of those who rejoice, considering the Lord's church as their highest joy.

Third and last, we must pray to God when we think of the church.

Look at Psalms 137:7-9: "Remember, O LORD, what the Edomites did on the day Jerusalem fell. 'Tear it down,' they cried, 'tear it down to its foundations!' O Daughter of Babylon, doomed to destruction, happy is he who repays you for what you have done to us - he who seizes your infants and dashes them against the rocks." The psalmist prayed to God for God's punishment for Babylon, the Israel's adversary and enemy. He asked God, "Remember, O Lord, what the Edomites did on the day Jerusalem fell" (v. 7). Of course, the Edomites weren't the Babylonians. Rather, the Edomites rejoiced when the Babylonians struck Jerusalem (Job 10-16). Although they were originally brothers with the Israelites, they were Israeli enemies and were the object of God's wrath (Park). Then the Edomites and the Babylonians had something in common: they were the object of God's wrath (Ps. 137:7-9). The reason was because they oppressed the God's people, the Israelites. The psalmist, who remembered Zion at the rivers of Babylon, prayed to God to tear it down the Edomites, who were compared to the Babylonians who desolated Jerusalem.

As we pray to God, we must pray for God's wrath to come to Satan, the enemy of the Church, and his wicked servants. Of course, we may not be used to this kind of prayer. But while we pray for our salvation as God's people, it is a bit unbalanced not to pray for the judgment of the wicked. This is because in the Bible, especially in the Old Testament, God's salvation and God's judgment usually go together. In other words, God saves His people (the Church) by judging His people's enemies. Therefore, we must pray for the salvation of the church and the destruction of its enemies. We must pray for God's righteous judgment. We must pray that God will punish the enemies of His Church. I think of two things when I think of the church as the body of the Lord. The words of the Lord promise, Matthew 16:18 that the Lord will build His church and the hymn "I Love Thy Kingdom, Lord". This was because in 2003, when I attended the church renewal annual retreat, the Lord gave me that promise of Matthew 16:18 and the indwelling Holy Spirit made me to shed tears of longing for His church, Victory Presbyterian Church. I still remember that I shed tears in thinking of our church in longing and in love. I pray that the Lord to build His church so that we can grow in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ, we can confess who Jesus is and lives according to that confession. I also pray that the Lord will build our church on the solid rock. I

sincerely pray that our church will be built as a true church that will fight against ourselves, the world, sin, and Satan and death and be victorious.

Thinking of Victory Presbyterian Church,

James Kim

(In the pastoral room of the Church that the Lord is building)

Day 28: ‘They have no comforter’

[Ecclesiastes 4:1-3]

Two things happened after the end of the New Year the church leaders’ prayer meeting. One thing is that one of the women in the church took a lot of sleeping pills and attempted suicide. On that Sunday afternoon my wife, our church elder and two young ladies went to her apartment and helped her. The next day, when my wife went to visit her apartment, the woman was already on the ambulance and went to the hospital. Now she is in the nursing home. Another thing I heard was that one of the college students who went to the church in Korea where I used to serve went to a mission field and drowned. I used to serve the English Ministry (EM) with his mother and I remembered seeing him few times during the EM worship. So, when I heard the news about his death, I was very shocked. So, I thought about how to comfort his parents and his older sister. And I wrote a letter to them and I prayed to God. “Abba Father,” I pleaded with God the Father, asking God to comfort them and his friends and church members.

Indeed, this world is full of anxious thing, of painful thing and of sinful thing. As we begin the New Year, we see our beloved brothers and sisters in pain and suffering. How can we comfort our beloved brothers and sisters in Christ who are in pain and suffering? When I think about the word “comfort”, it reminds me Job’s friends in Job 16:2 and Barnabas in Acts 4:16. When we look at Job 16:2, Job said that his friends who came to comfort him are “sorry comforters”. And when we look at Acts 4:16, the author of the Book of Acts Luke said that Barnabas is “Son of Encouragement”. Although Job’s friends were the sorry comforters, Barnabas in the early church was a true encourager. So when I personally pray for myself, I pray to God like this: ‘Lord, help me to be an encourager and an evangelist who is fire for You.’ But so many times, I don’t know how to comfort my beloved brothers and sisters in Christ around me who are in pain and suffering. Although I want to love them and comfort them with the Lord’s love, so many times I don’t know what to do.

In the book 'Spirituality of Comfort' by Rev. Robert Strand, there are 101 stories about comforting a wounded soul. The book's preface was written by a priest Henry Nowen, who says that the word "comfort" means 'to be with a lonely man'. He also says that comforting does not mean taking pain away, but rather being together. And being together, according to Nowen, refers to as "care of soul". And caring for a soul means crying together, suffering together, feeling together and sympathizes. Priest Henry Nowen said: 'Often our sorrow makes us to dance. And our dance creates space for our sadness. In the tears of losing a loved one, we find joy that we do not know. In the middle of a party celebrating success, we can feel deep sorrow. Like a clown's face that seems to be sad and rejoicing in order to make us to be sad or to laugh, sadness, dancing, bitterness, laughter, mourning, and joy belong to a single place. We can see the beauty of life where grief and dancing touch each other'. Do you and I live in the beauty of life where sadness and dancing touch each other?

The Teacher King Solomon in Ecclesiastes 4:1-3 also said what he saw: "Again I looked and saw all the oppression that was taking place under the sun: I saw the tears of the oppressed-- and they have no comforter; power was on the side of their oppressors-- and they have no comforter" (v. 1). What he witnessed in this world was the abuse of the tyrants. In other words, he saw the abused people. And he saw the tears of the abused people. But the problem was there is no one who comforts these abused people. King Solomon saw this. He saw that the abused people had no comforter. And this is what he said: "And I declared that the dead, who had already died, are happier than the living, who are still alive. But better than both is he who has not yet been, who has not seen the evil that is done under the sun." What does it mean? It doesn't mean that it is better to die than to live as if you are getting abused. King Solomon never encourages suicide, saying that suicide is better than being abused. The world we live in these days is a world that encourages suicide. How do you know this? If you look at the internet these days, there is a suicide website. What is surprising is that even if people do not know each other they meet through suicide web sites and commit suicide together. I have heard through people I know that there are few people who have committed suicide. Maybe this world is getting harder and harder now, and many people in life are trying to take their precious lives in suicide. So, it seems that the success of suicide is increasing. Maybe for these people, Ecclesiastes 4: 2 might be misinterpreted from the viewpoint of suicide, saying, 'Ah, the wise King Solomon said it is better to die than to be abused'. So, you should not take your life, thinking that it is better to die than to live like this. In today's passage, King Solomon never recommends suicide. Rather, when he saw the tears of those who are being abused by those who are in power in this world, he is saying that the lives of such abused people are less than death. In other words, King Solomon does not say that God's given life itself is not better than death, but that the painful life of unjustly oppressed is less than death (Park).

What kind of life would it be if we suffered pain that we could not die? When I think about this question, the North Korean defectors came into my mind. I read an article in the Wall Street Journal

regarding the North Korean defectors who entered the United States for the first time according to the North Korean Human Rights Act on May 1, 2006. The articles had the testimonies of the defectors who lived the miserable lives in China. The article introduces the woman, a 36-year-old woman, who was a teacher in Pyongyang. She went to a cloth shop to help her with difficult living. She went to a border town to get clothes and lost consciousness during dinner. When she woke up, she was already trafficked and was in China. From there she was sold to a Chinese man and the Chinese husband said, "Killing a North Korean woman like you is easier than killing a chicken." She was beaten so badly that her bones broke, and she thought of suicide once. Wouldn't there be many more testimonies from many other defectors as well? Although I don't know well, I still remembered what a pastor said to me: 'Because I saw the defectors, now I was able to read the Book of Exodus.'

How much more feelings and sympathy with these words in Ecclesiastes 4:3 is true for these people who suffer so much? It is better for those who have not yet been born who have not seen the evil that is done under the sun than those who are still alive (Eccl. 4:2-3). If the defectors were not born at all, they didn't have to see the evil done in this world and didn't have to suffer to the point of wanting to die? How about you? When you look back on your past life, did you ever live because you couldn't die? Have you ever been so painful that you feel it is worse than dying? So, did you ever stay in tears? But when we suffer so much to the point of wanting to die, more than suffering itself, the thing that makes us very difficult is that there is no comforter. It is the fact that when we are the hardest, the most painful, and the heart aches, our hearts are getting more and more troubled by the fact that no one really understands, sympathizes, and comforts us with our hardships, pain and suffering. What is more distressing is the fact that there are those who love us around and try to comfort us, when no one truly comforts us (or perhaps we are so distressed that we are refusing their comfort). When the evil of the wicked does not seem endless, and when the act of abuse and oppression does not show signs of ending, we no longer dream. We no longer have hope. We end up with the last line of hope. This makes us depress. Life without hope is bound to despair. What should we do when we are in such despair? We can learn three things from the Bible:

First, when we are in despair we must speak to our soul.

One of the books I still can not forget is the book *Spiritual Depression* by Lloyd Jones. What I was challenged in reading the book is that when we are disappointed and depressed, we should speak to our soul like a psalmist. How should I say it? As an example, Pastor Lloyd Jones quoted Psalm 42: 5, 11; 43: 5 – "Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God" (3x). So, when I sometimes become discouraged, I remember myself saying this prayer to myself, remembering this psalm: "James, why are you so downcast, O my soul. Why so disturbed within me? James, put your hope in God." And I try to pray with deliberate looking at the Lord who helps me. When I do, I often experience God's help. You can try it. When your heart is discouraged

and in despair, why don't you proclaim the word of God to yourself, like a psalmist. It doesn't have to be the Book of Psalms. If you have any God's promise that you want to hold onto, why don't you hold on to that promised Word of God and cry out to him. Whenever I am struggling with my church ministry, I am holding unto the His promise Word "... I ... build my church' (Mt. 16:18) and cry out to God. And I know that God certainly helps me.

Second, when we are in despair, we must seek the Lord.

When we are in despair, we must desire Jesus. We should eagerly desire him. Especially when we are in despair because of pain, we must look to Jesus' suffering on the cross. Why is that? The reason is that when we meditate on His suffering, our suffering can be connected to the sufferings of Jesus, so that true comfort and healing can occur. When I personally feel depressed, I sometimes remember the words of Jonah 2: 4 – "I said, 'I have been banished from your sight; yet I will look again toward your holy temple'." The reason I think of this Jonah is because when I disobeyed the Lord's words like Jonah, and is in the midst of a chastisement discipline, I decided that I would look to the temple of the Lord again, because I desperately want to seek him. I hope that when you are depressed and despair, you will rely on this Jonah's word and look to Him again. I hope you can turn your despair into an opportunity to seek the Lord.

Third, when we are in despair we must hope in the Lord.

Ultimately, I think desperation is making us hope in the Lord. When we live in this world and are despaired because of these and other things, despair is a good opportunity to seek the Lord. Also, I think despair is an opportunity for us to only look to the Lord and hope in Him. That's why we need to be thoroughly discouraged and in despair by this world. Furthermore, we need to be more or less discouraged and be in despair because of ourselves. The reason is that without such hopelessness, we rarely yearn for and hope in God. That's why I like the Hymn "My hope is built on nothing less" text 3 lyrics: "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." I love this song because when all the things we believed in the world are cut off, we began to rely on the Lord more and more. By doing so, all our despair in our hearts fades away and our hearts are filled with hope in the Lord. In doing so, we can praise God this way: (1) "O! Thou, in whose presence my soul takes delight, On whom in affliction I call, My comfort by day, and my song in the night, My hope, my salvation, my all!", (5) "Dear Shepherd! I hear, and will follow Thy call; I know the sweet sound of Thy voice; Restore and depend me, for Thou art my all, And in Thee I will ever rejoice."

I hope that the Lord of hope will comfort you. I pray that our Lord will comfort you when no one can comfort you. When you refuse to be comforted by anybody else due to your great and unbearable pains, I pray that the Lord fills your heart with a longing for the Lord and a hope for Him. I pray that you can see

the beauty of life, the beauty of Christians, where grief and delight touch each other. As I end this meditation of the Word, I want to share with you what I wrote as I thought about a sister in Christ who made me to see the beauty of the Christian:

You are beautiful.
Even in the tears of the heart,
You smile.
You are beautiful.
Even in the midst of your son's death,
You give thanks to God,

You are beautiful.
You think about your church members
More than your family,
You are beautiful.
You want to comfort others
More than receiving comfort from others
You love to give
More than receiving,

You are beautiful.
You who hold the heart of Heavenly Father
And use your strength to save souls,

You are beautiful.
You who are glorifying God,

You are beautiful.

I see Christ in you ...

With a heart of gratitude to the Comforter, the Holy Spirit,

James Kim
(Praying to become a fervent comforter in love)

Day 29: “My heart is steadfast, O God”

[Psalms 57]

This Monday morning, I was at home with my youngest daughter Karis, and we watched a cartoon called “Cailou”. While watching the cartoon, we saw a child named Cailou planted a tree with his father and worried about the tree because the wind was blowing. At that time, Cailou's father came to help Cailou by bringing a stick and tied it with the tree so that the planted tree wouldn't be shaken. That scene came into my mind during the Mother's Day morning prayer meeting. As I thought about the scene, I thought of becoming the stick that was tied together next to the tree to my children at home. In other words, I prayed to God that I should be strong support for my children like that stick so that they will not be shaken.

After reading the book ‘Who is the Father?’(by Jong Yoon Kim), there were these two writings among the readers' reviews: ‘I know the preciousness of my father but I overlook. Although I hate him, I think of him as a precious person who gives me strong support so I placed him in my heart. ... It was a good book that reminded me of the preciousness and gratitude of my father which I didn't think about.’ ‘The support of life, the father (Gunjong Jo): The father is the one who was not close in my life but protected me with great support’ (Internet). As I read this readers' reviews, I felt that despite hating or not close to many fathers' relationships with their sons (or daughters), the fathers were precious people and strong support to their children. Therefore, we must be strong support for our children, just as our father of faith are strong support for us. What must we do to do that? Our hearts must be steadfast. If we look at Psalms 57:7, we can see the psalmist David determined like this: “My heart is steadfast, O God, my heart is steadfast; I will sing, yes, I will sing praises!” Here, the word “steadfast” means ‘to settle the mind, has a steadfast, fixed, (belief, etc.), and immovable. In other words, it wasn't simply determined, it was confirmed. He decided and determined that there was nothing else. This means that this is only hope and the only way.

‘The life of the person who made up his mind is happy. The difference between a shaking life and a fixed life is big like the difference between happiness and unhappiness. Fear comes to those who can’t make up their mind. There is no fear for those who made up their mind. It is because there is no regret. It is a fixed heart that there is no regret. ... Our minds must be fixed and focused in one place. If a believer’s heart is fluctuating, he cannot please God. The faith of the saints must be fixed on God. When my faith in God is shaken, then I cannot live a life full of grace’ (Internet).

I would like to receive three lessons that the believers whose hearts have been steadfast do when they are in crisis and adversity, under the headline “My heart is steadfast, O God”, based on Psalms 57:7.

First, the believers whose hearts are steadfast take refuge in crisis and adversity.

Look at Psalms 57:1 – “Be gracious to me, O God, be gracious to me, For my soul takes refuge in You; And in the shadow of Your wings I will take refuge Until destruction passes by.” The psalmist David took refuge in the Lord because of the destruction that came upon him. What was that destruction? It was Saul’s persecution. As the title says, Psalms 57 is a poem that David wrote when he was in a cave. David was running away from King Saul because of Saul’s persecution. Interestingly, the word “Al-taschith” on the title means “Do not destroy.” In verse 4, David described his situation like this: “My soul is among lions; I must lie among those who breathe forth fire, Even the sons of men, whose teeth are spears and arrows And their tongue a sharp sword.” The reason why David described his enemies, that were Saul and his people, as “lions” was because they tried to harm David with such cruelty (Park). They prepared a net for David’s steps (v. 6). So David poured out his heart by saying “My soul is bowed down” (v. 6). Eventually, he took refuge in the Lord when he was at the crossroads of life and death to the point of being destroyed by Saul, the disaster that came upon him. David took refuge in Him until disaster passed by (v. 1).

So where did David take refuge? He took refuge in the shadow of the Lord’s wings. The word ‘taking refuge in the shadow of the Lord’s wings’ is a metaphor, meaning that God’s protection for the saints is like the wings that a hen embraces and protects its chick (Park). This parable appears in several places in the Bible, and among them is Deuteronomy 32:11-12. This is what God said to Moses: “Like an eagle that stirs up its nest, That hovers over its young, He spread His wings and caught them, He carried them on His pinions. The LORD alone guided him, And there was no foreign god with him.” Just as an eagle shakes its nest, drops its eaglet, flutters over its eaglet, spreads its wings to receive the eaglet, and carries it on its wings, sometime when we are so comfortable in our home, God shakes our homes, dropping us like a mother eagle pushing her eaglet from the high nest on a sheer cliff. At that time, we

struggle to get out of that crisis as if the eaglet's instinct is to lift its head up and to try to fly with its' wings in order not to fall to the ground. However, in spite of such desperate struggles, there are times when we see ourselves keep on falling, just as the eaglet falling helplessly toward the ground. Just like the moment just before hitting the ground, the mother eagle flew toward the eaglet, carrying the eaglet on its wings and flying back to the nest, our God saves us and guides us.

Second, the believers whose hearts are steadfast cry out to God in crisis and adversity.

Look at Psalms 57:2 – “I will cry to God Most High, To God who accomplishes all things for me.” David made God his refuge in the midst of disaster and took refuge in Him and cried out to God. In David's prayer as he trusted in Him, we need to think about the object of his prayer, that is God.

(1) The God David trusted in his prayer was “God Most High”.

Look at Psalms 57:2 again – “I will cry to God Most High, To God who accomplishes all things for me.” In one way or another, it can be said that David looked to God Most High and cried out to Him when he was in the lowest place. Just as the eaglet falls from its nest and sees its mother eagle before hitting the ground and screams 'help me', the deeper we fall into the pit of calamity, the more we cry out, looking at God Most High, knowing that we have no hope but only the Lord. An example is prophet Jonah. In the book of Jonah, Jonah went down to Tarshish by boat, and went further down to the deep sea in a great fish, But he prayed that he decided to look again toward the temple of the Lord (Jon.2:4).

(2) The God David trusted in his prayer was “God who accomplishes all things for me”.

Look at Psalms 57:2 again – “I will cry to God Most High, To God who accomplishes all things for me.” God Most High is the God who accomplishes His will for us. David cried out to this God. Look at Isaiah 14:24, 27 – “The LORD of hosts has sworn saying, "Surely, just as I have intended so it has happened, and just as I have planned so it will stand, ... For the LORD of hosts has planned, and who can frustrate it? And as for His stretched-out hand, who can turn it back?" What is the Lord's will for us? What are His thoughts? What is His plan? It is our “salvation”.

(3) The God David trusted in his prayer was ‘God who is loving and true God’.

Look at Psalms 57:3 – “He will send from heaven and save me; He reproaches him who tramples upon me Selah God will send forth His lovingkindness and His truth.” David cried out to God

Most High, the Lord who fulfills His will for David, with assurance of salvation. How did David convinced that the Lord would save him? He was convinced that God would send forth “His lovingkindness and His truth” from heaven and save him from the slander that would devour him. What does it mean? This is a poetic expression that personifies and speaks of God's loving and truthful act of salvation (Park). Our Lord is loving and faithful, and in fulfilling His will that is our salvation, He faithfully fulfills His will only with His love. We have no merit. Only by His lovingkindness and truth, we are saved.

Third and last, the believers whose hearts are steadfast glorify God in crisis and adversity.

Look at Psalms 57:5, 11 – “Be exalted, O God, above the heavens; let your glory be over all the earth. ... Be exalted, O God, above the heavens; let your glory be over all the earth.” How did David glorify God? David glorified God by praising Him. Look at verses 7b-9: “... I will sing and make music. Awake, my soul! Awake, harp and lyre! I will awaken the dawn. I will praise you, O Lord, among the nations; I will sing of you among the peoples.” How was David able to glorify God by praising God at the crossroads of life and death? That was because David's heart was steadfast (v. 7). What is a steadfast heart? Dr. Park said three things: (1) Those with a steadfast heart are determined to die. David was determined to die and prepared his heart for it. (2) Those with steadfast heart are prepared to do all good. The peculiarity of a fool is a person without preparation. He is always unrest without a certain goal. But the saints move with their prepared mind. (3) Those with steadfast heart trust in the Lord and courageous. We must always look to the Lord, wait, pray, and accept Him in our hearts. What does it mean to accept the Lord in our hearts? That is, as promised in the Bible, that God will walk with the believers. Those believers who have steadfast heart are assured of God's salvation under any circumstances and earnestly want the glory of God to be exalted over the world. Even though we are getting smaller, and we may be in an situation of hardship and adversity, I earnestly hope and pray that the glory of God will be covered all over the world as water covers the sea. David praised Him because he was grateful to the Lord, even though the disaster was upon him (v. 8). What was the reason? It was because he experienced His great lovingkindness and truth that was sent by God (v. 3). Therefore, I hope and pray that we, like David, can confess, “For Your lovingkindness is great to the heavens And Your truth to the clouds” (v. 10).

On Sunday afternoon, I visited the nursing home to see Grandma Jang Eul-soo of our church. I told Grandma Jang, 'Grandma, you are beautiful'. The reason I said that to her was because I saw little Jesus in her. I saw little Christ in her when she showed me an example of faith by praising the Lord with thanksgiving and by memorizing Psalms 23, the Lord's Prayer and the Apostles' Creed. I thought she was beautiful woman in God's perspective when I saw her crying out to God earnestly and glorifying Him by praising Him with steadfast heart toward the Savior Jesus who was her only hope at the crossroads of life

and death. Following her example, I also want to praise God with thanksgiving with steadfast heart until I die.

Praying that my heart will be steadfast toward the Lord, and that I will be raised as a reliable support for my children and fellow brothers and sisters in Christ,

James Kim

(After praising the gospel songs “Thee O Lord among the people” and “As The Waters Cover The Sea” to God during Wednesday night prayer meeting)

Day 30: What God wants from us

[Psalms 81]

Yesterday before we had a family worship on New Year's night, all five members of the family sat down against the wall on our bed and read a book. While sitting down, my wife and my first son were reading the Bible, Yeri was reading a princess book to her younger sister Karis. After reading for a while, I told them 'Let's have worship now'. Karis seemed she wanted Yeri to read her the princess book a little more. After having to put down the princess book, Yeri read the first chapter of Dillon's Bible. Then I briefly exhorted the Bible verse that was emphasized within that chapter. And I tried to have prayer time with them. But Karis didn't listen well. So when I asked her if she would pray together, she quietly answered "No". So I said to her, 'Then, you can go to your room with the book you were reading.' She was happy, so she smiled brightly and went to her room with the princess' book. Hahaha. Actually, before we all gathered to read the book, Karis secretly took the Dillon's book from his bookshelf, sat alone on my and my wife's bed, and said something about 'God'. Karis wanted to read more of the princess book she was reading. But when she was asked for family worship, I think she was little uncomfortable. When I talked to my wife this morning, I learned that when Dillon and Yeri were still asleep, Karis got up early and was reading the book again. Hahaha. She really wanted to read it again. Haha. From our point of view as parents, we wanted Karis to have the family worship together with us. But what she wanted was to read more of the princess's book. Although I wasn't comfortable with it, I let Karis do what she wanted to do and the rest of us have prayer meeting. Although I deliberately delayed the service time and held home worship because Karis liked her sister Yeri to read the book for her, I think Karis needed more time to read the princess' book. Haha.

As I thought of this one event, I thought that in our relationship with Heavenly Father, we may have different needs. There must be something that God wants from us, but I think there are many times

we may act the way we want. In the end, I think mature faith is a life that lives according to what the Heavenly Father wants as if the mature children understand their parents' hearts and obey the parents' will. I would like to meditate on what God wants from us in three ways under the heading "What God wants from us" based on Psalms 81. I hope and pray that we will learn three things that God wants from us and live according to the Heavenly Father's will.

First, what God wants from us is "praise".

Look at Psalms 81:1 – "Sing for joy to God our strength; Shout joyfully to the God of Jacob." The psalmist wrote a poem about the observance of a certain feast in Judah and told the Israelites to praise God (vv. 1-4, Park). The object of the praise is of course God, and the psalmist referred to that God as "God our strength" (v. 1). The God, who is our strength, is Almighty God. And our Almighty God gives us power. One of the ways to receive that power is to praise God with joy. Dr. Park said: 'Because a man truly praises God and glorifies Him, it empowers him in his own spiritual life' (Park). I agree. Praising God with joyful heart not only glorifies God, but also empowers our spiritual life. How should we praise God? We must praise God with joy. The reason is that Nehemiah 8:10 says, "... for this day is holy to our Lord. Do not be grieved, for the joy of the LORD is your strength." It is our strength to please God, so we sing praises to God with joy.

The purpose of the praise is for the unity of faith and thought, public confession of godliness, and maturity of spiritual life for those who worship God (Calvin, Park). (1) The first purpose of our praise to God is the union of faith and thoughts with one another of the saints. This is to reaffirm each other that we have one faith as we praise God together. (2) Second, the purpose of praising God is to make public confession of godliness. In other words, as we sing praises to God together, we publicly confess, 'I love God.' (3) The third purpose is 'spiritual growth'. As we publically confess together 'I love God' in our shared faith during our praise, we grow spiritually by giving publicly confessed praise to God. But what is the problem? The purpose of our Christian praise is to please ourselves rather than to please God. If the purpose of praise is to please ourselves and to please the ears of our listeners, this 'I-centered praise' can never publicly confess that we are one body of the Lord with one faith in the Lord, and that it doesn't bring our spiritual growth. Therefore, we must offer the praise that God wants from us, just as the psalmist is teaching us. We must sing with joy (v. 1), with musical instruments (v. 2), and shout joyfully to God our strength (v. 1) in the Lord's Day (v. 3). This is "a statute" that we must observe, and it is God's ordinance (v. 4).

Second, what God wants from us is "prayer".

Look at Psalms 81:7 – “You called in trouble and I rescued you; I answered you in the hiding place of thunder; I proved you at the waters of Meribah. Selah.” This is an important word that applies especially to those of us who want to devote ourselves to prayer. The psalmist recalls the events at the time of the Exodus in the past, reminding the Israelites that at the time of the Exodus the Israelites cried out to God during their hardships and that God answered their prayers. Why is the psalmist reminding the Israelites of his day, recalling that God heard the prayers of the Israelites at the time of the Exodus? The reason was because he wanted the Israelites to pray to God. In other words, the psalmist was exhorting the Israelites to cry out to God, just as the Israelites cried out to God during their hardships in Exodus. The concrete word of that exhortation was this: “... Open your mouth wide and I will fill it” (v. 10). The meaning of this word is to long for God’s grace and salvation (Park).

We must also long for God’s grace and salvation. Just as the Israelites cried out to God in suffering, so we must cry out to Him as well. We must cry out to Him for His grace and salvation. And when we cry out to God, we must pray with assurance of God answering our prayers. In the Bible Psalms 81:10, God promised to us, “Open your mouth wide and I will fill it.” As we hold onto this promised word, we must cry out to God. Our God is the God who fills it. But in order to be filled, our responsibility is to empty it. What should be emptied? It’s our sin. What kind of sin? Look at verse 11: ““But My people did not listen to My voice, And Israel did not obey Me” (v. 11). What was God's voice (word) that the Israelites didn’t hear? Look at verse 9: ““Let there be no strange god among you; Nor shall you worship any foreign god.” However, the Israelites violated this word and committed the sin of idolatry. When we repent of this sin and cry out to God with determination and dedication to listen to His word, God will hear our prayers and will give us His grace and salvation. Our God is the God who hears our prayers. The surprising fact is that despite countless times when we don’t listen to God and don’t want Him (v. 11), our God is the God who still wants us and wants to hear our prayers. To this God, who is rich in grace, we must devote ourselves to pray to Him more and more.

Third and last, what God wants from us is “obedience”.

Look at Psalms 81:8, 13 – “Hear, O My people, and I will admonish you; O Israel, if you would listen to Me! ... Oh that My people would listen to Me, That Israel would walk in My ways!” What God wants from us is that He wants us to hear His voice and obey Him. But at the time of Exodus, the Israelites didn’t want to hear God. They disobeyed God's voice. What was the result? Look at verse 12: “So I gave them over to the stubbornness of their heart, To walk in their own devices.” There are two ways in which God punishes a sinner: “One is to leave the sinner to continue their sins, and the second is to actively cause the sinner to suffer or to be destroyed (Park). Of these two ways, I personally think the first is scarier. The reason is because if God leaves us to our harden hearts, we will endlessly violate God's word and live a life of disobedience. In the end, God disciplined the disobedient Israelites and let them be subdued to their

enemies (v. 14). But God promised that if the Israelites repent and return to God, He would also bless them. The psalmist speaks two promises: (1) The first promise was that God would quickly subdue the enemies of the Israelites (v. 14). God's disciplinary hand that was toward the guilty Israelites would turn toward their enemies when the Israelites repent. (2) God's second promise is written in verse 16: "But I would feed you with the finest of the wheat, And with honey from the rock I would satisfy you." This promise refers to material blessings (Park). Although the Israelites broke the word of God and committed the sin of worshipping foreign gods when they were living in abundance in the land of Canaan, it is God's promise that if they repent of their sin and return to God, God would make it more abundant in that abundant land.

I hope and pray that we will hold on to this promise word of God and pray. Let's hold on to the Lord's promise of Matthew 16:18, "I ... will build My church ..." and cry out to God. Not only that, just as the 120 members of the early church gathered and prayed earnestly together as they held onto the promise of Acts 1:8, let us do the same. In doing so, if we refuse to listen to God's word, disobey and sin against God, we must hold onto the promise of Psalms 81:14, 16 and repent our sins and return to Him. Then our God will forgive our sins and turn the hand of punishment that has been on us to our enemies and will be with us with abundant blessings.

Yesterday, on New Year's day, all the family members gathered at my older brother's house to have family worship. The word of God that was proclaimed through a pastor (a husband of my aunt) was 1 Thessalonians 5:18. I wanted to make an effort to be the year of being grateful in all circumstances. Although my third uncle, Pastor Andrew Kim, was suffering from cancer, we all decided to thank God and prayed for him after worship. And we decided to do family fasting prayer relay and began to put it into practice. Later, before we all departed, Pastor Andrew Kim, who was lying on the bed in a room, came out to the living room and praised God in front of all the family members. He sang the hymn that he loves, which is "How Great Thou Art", just verse 1 and chorus. Although he was in pain, we prayed together for him and praised God and committed ourselves to obey the message that we heard, which was "give thanks in all circumstances." When I saw this, I feel that this is what our God wants from our family members.

As I desire "Your will be done on earth, as it is in heaven,"

James Kim

(After New Year's first Wednesday morning prayer)

Day 31: The secret of victory

[Psalms 18:28-42]

Yesterday at 8 o'clock in the evening, there was a soccer game between the Korean national team and LA Galaxy. One of the controversial focal points was whether to use a "three-back" or "four-back" defense system. The three-back defense system is typical and familiar to the Korean players, and the four-back defense system is the new defense system to them. It is said that during the 2002 World Cup, Hiddink also tried to use the four-back defense system, but was unable to adapt to it, so he returned to three-back defense system. Professor Lee Yong-soo, Sejong University, who was the chairman of the technical committee at that time, said, 'In fact, whether it is a three-back or four-back is an inappropriate classification of the dichotomy. Although Hiddink used a three-back, the key was the organic movement of all players. To do that, it required a high level of tactical understanding, and it required steel strength' (Internet). What I felt through Professor Lee's words is 'the organic movement of all players.' I believe that the organic service of our church members is also important because the church is also an "organization" and an "organism". In order to live such an organic life of faith, we need to have a high understanding of the will of the Lord who is the head of the church, as well as spiritual 'steel strength' like in football. Then, we can even with our spiritual battles.

In Psalms 18:28-42, the Bible says that the secret of victory is only God's strengthen. God girded the psalmist David with strengthen to make war (vv. 32, 39). As a result, David was able to lead a war-winning life with the strengthen of God. Then, what is the strengthen of God that the Bible is talking about in Psalms 18:28-42? I meditated on it in five ways:

First, the strengthen of God is "The power of knowledge."

Look at Psalms 18:31 – “For who is God, but the LORD? And who is a rock, except our God.” Since David knew the true God and the Rock, he was able to win the war. Knowledge of who God is is our strength. And people who know God are strong. Therefore, we must grow in the knowledge of God. However, Satan is trying to destroy us by destroying our knowledge of God (Hos. 4:6). Therefore, we must work harder to know who our God is (6:3). Prophet Jeremiah said “let him who boasts boast of this, that he understands and knows Me” (Jere. 9:24). What God should we boast? We must boast God our lamp who illumines our darkness (Ps. 18:28). Here, the word “You light my lamp” means prosperity, and when it applies to David, a soldier, it refers to victory in the war by God’s grace (Park). In other words, the God we must strive to know is the God of victory and God who makes us victorious. We can live a triumphant life as we know this triumphant God in our daily lives.

Second, the strength of God is “The power of the Word.”

Look at Psalms 18:30 – “As for God, His way is blameless; The word of the LORD is tried; He is a shield to all who take refuge in Him.” David lived a victorious life with the power of the word of God. The word of God is our strength. By eating His word, we can live a life of power. Apostle Paul said, “All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work” (2 Tim. 3:16-17). Indeed, we must think about whether we are being taught by the Word of God, being reproofed, being corrected, and being trained in righteousness. In every moment of life, there may be sinful thoughts, and whenever temptations are attacked from time to time, we should be taught, be rebuked, our wrong thoughts and lives should be corrected and be trained in righteousness so that we must live the victorious life by fighting against ourselves, our sinful nature, this sinful world and Satan by the Word of God. David defended himself from his iniquity by the perfect word of God and won the battle against himself (Ps. 18:23) and was protected by the power of His word even in the face of persecution of the enemy (v. 30). God made David’s feet like hinds’ feet and settled him upon His high places (v. 33). In other words, God led David to safety. The word of God is our safety zone. His word will set us upon His high places.

Third, the strength of God is “The power of dependence.”

Look at Psalms 18:29 – “For by You I can run upon a troop; And by my God I can leap over a wall.” If we think in common sense, a baby who relies on his parents will gradually become independent as he grows up. But our Christian life seems to be the opposite. Before we believe in Jesus, we live an independent life. And then, after we believe in Jesus, we gradually rely on the Lord. This is our Christian life. It is a life of faith that we realize that there is only the Lord whom we can rely on as we go through the years and put it into practice. And those who depend on the Lord are strong. God’s strong power reveals when we realize our weakness thoroughly and this is our strength. For example, David ran to Goliath in

God's holy name like running upon a troop (2 Sam. 22:30). That's what we should do. We must be those who run toward the world in total dependence on God. When we rely on God and move forward boldly and courageously, God will enlarge our steps and our feet will not be slipped (Ps. 18:36).

Fourth, the strengthen of God is “The power of skills.”

Look at Psalms 18:34 – “He trains my hands for battle, So that my arms can bend a bow of bronze.” In this word, God taught David's hand to fight and David's arm to pull the brass bow. In other words, God gave the soldier David the proper skill. Pastor Yoon-sun Park said, ‘God will give those who trust him the right skill for his job. If he is a merchant, God will give him the right skill for business. If he is a literary person, He will give him the literary skill.’ In Ecclesiastes 10:10, the wise man says, “Wisdom has the advantage of giving success.” We need skill to win the war. And the Lord gives that skill to us. According to Exodus 36:1, God made his sanctuary by giving wisdom “every skillful person” “to know how to perform all the work in the construction of the sanctuary.” In doing His work, God not only raises workers, but also gives wisdom (skills) to the workers He has raised. Although we should be innocent as doves, we should also be shrewd as snakes (Mt. 10:16). In order to fight and win in spiritual warfare, we need fighting skills. We need to know how to use “the shield of salvation” (Ps. 18:35) and how to use the sword of the Spirit (Eph. 6:17). There is no use of the sword of the Spirit if we don't know how to use it. God gives us skill and power. With that skill and power, we can live a victorious life.

Fifth and last, the strengthen of God is “The power of character.”

Look at Psalms 18:35 – “You have also given me the shield of Your salvation, And Your right hand upholds me; And Your gentleness makes me great.” Here “Your gentleness” means ‘the result of the Lord helping David by humbling Himself and with His gentleness, he became great’ (Park). The key to our Christian victory is the person who resembles Jesus. In particular, Jesus' meekness in the character makes us victorious in this world. The key to our Christian victory is the character that resembles Jesus. In particular, Jesus' meekness in the character that makes us victorious in this world.

With these five strengthens of God, we must fight against ourselves, sin, the world, Satan, and death and win. We are winning now and will continue to win. We are all the victors who are moving forward toward heaven while holding the military flag of victory and singing the hymn of victory. Victory!

Senior pastor of Victory Presbyterian Church,

James Kim (With assurance of victory in the Lord)

Day 32: Remembering, commemorating, and cherishing life

“As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive” (Genesis 50:20).

We should not dwell in the past. Instead, we must remember the grace that God has bestowed upon us in the past. Not only should we remember, but we should also celebrate the grace that God has given us in the past, in the present. In doing so, we can experience the true joy that God provides.

Today’s passage, Genesis 50:20, is Joseph's words to his brothers, as he remembers and commemorates the grace that God had bestowed upon him in the past. I want to reflect on how Joseph remembered and commemorated the grace of God in three ways.

First, those who remember and commemorate the grace of God bestowed in the past, while celebrating in the present, view every situation from God's perspective.

Joseph, at the age of seventeen (Gen. 37:2), was disliked by his ten brothers for three reasons: (1) Joseph reported his brothers' wrongdoings to his father Jacob (v. 2), (2) Joseph was loved deeply by his father Jacob (v. 3), and (3) Joseph had dreams from God (v. 5). As a result, Joseph was nearly killed by his ten older brothers (vv. 18-20), thrown into an empty pit (v. 24), sold to the Ishmaelite traders (v. 28), and eventually purchased by Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh in Egypt (39:1). He served in Potiphar's house as an overseer (v. 4). In the midst of such circumstance, Joseph, who was handsome in form and appearance (v. 6), faced persistent temptations from Potiphar's wife (vv. 7, 10, 12). However, when they were alone,

he resisted her advances, leaving his garment in her hands as he fled from the house (vv. 11-12). Due to her false accusation (vv. 14-18), Joseph was unjustly imprisoned (v. 20). If Joseph had later reflected on his past, when he became the prime minister of Egypt at about thirty years old (41:46), and only dwelled on the hardships and suffering he endured, he likely would have lived with resentment and sought revenge, sharpening the blade of vengeance in his heart. However, Joseph did not do so. Instead, he remembered the grace that God had shown him in the past. What was this grace? It was the fact that God was with Joseph, making him successful in all he did (39:2, 3, 21, 23). Specifically, Joseph remembered that even when he was unfairly accused and imprisoned, God was with him, showing him kindness, which ultimately led him to find favor with the chief jailer (v. 21). Because of this, when Joseph became the prime minister of Egypt, approximately nine years later [30 years old as prime minister + 7 years of plenty + 2 years (45:6) = 39 years old], he confessed to his brothers in this manner: "Now do not be grieved or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life" (45:5), "God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant in the earth, and to keep you alive by a great deliverance. Now, therefore, it was not you who sent me here, but God; ..." (vv. 7-8a). How was Joseph able to confess this to his brothers? It was because Joseph remembered God's grace. He recalled God's grace not only in his past experiences but also in every situation, viewing them from God's perspective. Even though he was initially despised by his brothers and almost killed, even enduring imprisonment and further confinement in Egypt, Joseph came to realize that God's purpose in making him the prime minister of Egypt was to preserve his brothers' lives and to ensure the future of their descendants in this world (v. 7). Therefore, he could confess to his brothers, 'It was not you who sent me here, but God' (v. 8).

Like Joseph, we should be able to view our lives and every situation from God's perspective. To do this, we must remember the grace that God has bestowed upon us in our past. When we remember God's abundant grace, we are able to see the events in our current lives from God's perspective. We come to realize that what is happening in our lives is not a mere coincidence, but rather a result of God's good, pleasing, and perfect will (Rom. 12:2). We also acknowledge that God's will has been unfolding in our lives from the past, and we earnestly desire for His will to be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Second, those who remember the grace of God bestowed in the past, while celebrating in the present, serve their family members with the heart of God.

How did Joseph serve his family members?

(1) Joseph forgave his brothers, who had hated him to the point of wanting to kill him.

If Joseph had not forgiven his brothers, he surely would have sought revenge against them. However, Joseph did not do so. Because God was with him and he experienced prosperity, Joseph

looked back on his past years from God's perspective. In doing so, he came to realize that God had sent him ahead of his brothers to Egypt in order to preserve their lives and establish their descendants in this world. Thus, Joseph forgave them. We can see evidence of this in the name he gave to his firstborn son in Egypt. Joseph named him "Manasseh," meaning "God has made me forget all my trouble and all my father's household" (Gen. 41:51).

(2) Joseph not only forgave his brothers, who had tried to kill him, but also showed them kindness.

When they came down to Egypt twice to buy grain from him, Joseph not only provided them with grain (42:26, 44:1) and money (42:28, 44:1), clothings (45:21-22), ten donkeys loaded with the best things of Egypt, and ten female donkeys loaded with grain, bread, and other supplies (v. 23). When Jacob and his entire family came down to Egypt, Joseph presented them with the best of Egypt's produce, calling it "the best of the land of Egypt" (45:18) and "the best of all the land of Egypt" (v. 20, see also 47:6, 11).

(3) After Jacob's death, when Joseph's brothers were afraid that he might bear a grudge against them and repay them for the wrongs they had done to him (50:15), they falsely claimed that Jacob had left instructions for Joseph to forgive them (verses 16-17). Upon hearing this, Joseph wept (verse 17) and reassured his brothers, who had prostrated themselves before him (verse 18), with earnest words of comfort (verse 21): "Do not be afraid, for am I in the place of God? 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. So do not fear; I will provide for you and your little ones" (vv. 19-21a).

How was this possible? How could Joseph not only forgive his brothers, who had once plotted to kill him out of hatred, but also generously provide for them, and comfort them as they trembled in fear? Shouldn't Joseph have been the one to seek comfort instead? How was he able to comfort his brothers instead of seeking it for himself? How could he serve his brothers and entire family? The reason lies in the fact that Joseph truly understood God's grace. Joseph's heart was not filled with hatred, resentment, or a desire for revenge; instead, it was overflowing with God's grace. Because of this, Joseph was able to serve his brothers and entire family with the heart of God.

How about us? Are we truly serving our family members with the heart of God? Are we genuinely forgiving our family members, just as Jesus forgave us, sinful as we are, even those who have caused us pain and hurt? Or do we forgive the faults of our church members but withhold forgiveness from our flesh-and-blood family? Are we living our lives by generously providing for our family members, or are we living in discontent and complaint, desiring to receive rather than give? Are we comforting those in fear and pain among our family, speaking words of earnest consolation, as Joseph did? If we do not know God's grace, we might live with strained relationships, withholding forgiveness. If we have forgotten God's grace, we might expect to receive more than we give. If we treat God's grace lightly, we may seek comfort rather than giving it. Such thoughts and actions would diminish the great grace that God has already bestowed upon us. Therefore, we must not allow it. We must not squander the grace we have received from God. We must never devalue God's grace. Instead, we must remember God's grace and serve our families like Joseph, empowered by that grace. We must serve not with our hearts, but with God's heart. And in our service, let us serve our family members as Jesus did.

How are our lives, both yours and mine, unfolding? Are we truly living lives that are beautiful in the eyes of God? Are we faithfully carrying out the missions entrusted to us within God's grand plan of salvation? Are we preparing for a death that is beautiful in God's sight? I pray that we, you and I, who commemorate and remember the grace bestowed in the past, may live in the present. I hope that we may commemorate while viewing everything from God's perspective. Additionally, I pray that we may humbly serve our earthly family members and our spiritual family members in the church with God's heart. Furthermore, I hope and pray that we may hold fast to the promise of God's word and faithfully bear the missions entrusted to us. In the midst of all this, I pray that we may be able to welcome a death that is beautiful in God's sight.

Remembering and commemorating in the present, while desiring to taste the spiritual joy in God's presence,

James

(Praying that we may live a life savoring the spiritual joy in God's presence as we remember and commemorate)

Day 33: Train up a child in the way he should go

“Train up a child in the way he should go, Even when he is old he will not depart from it” (Proverbs 22:6).

I heard about the news that there was an explosion at a train station in North Korea. As a result, it is known that there are many casualties. I heard that a lot of people are in danger of blindness because of the tremendous post-busting and glass debris, causing serious eye injuries. Especially, I heard the unfortunate news that most of the children injured at a near elementary hurt their eyes. The poet Kim Yong-taek, who had heard the unfortunate news of the children, said in his poem "Yongchun Elementary School": ‘... the children of Ryongchon! You children who are like new grass leaf from the ground ! You who lost your school, your friends, your homes and your parents and siblings, you whose faces were burned by fire. Ah! Ah! Sudden death, suffering, sorrow, cold, hunger, what must we do with these fears. What must I do now ...?’

I was challenged by his saying ‘What must I do now.’ There are so many times in our lives that we don’t know what to do when we look at the sad reality. Especially, when we look at our children whose spiritual eyes are injured and they are in a crisis of spiritual blindness, we as parents cannot but help to ask ourselves ‘What must I do?’ The sadder reality is that we are spiritually blinded as well as our children so that now the blind parents are leading the blind children (Mt. 15:14). So based on Proverbs 22:6, I want to meditate on three things that we should teach our children.

First, we should teach our children the Right Value.

We should look back our lives to see whether we are showing our children what is truly valuable or not. Is it faith? Do we think that our children are seeing in our family lives that faith is very precious?

Or aren't we busy living with the values of the world that God hates (Lk. 16:15)? The Bible says "for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Mt. 6:21). What is that "treasure" that we value? We must listen carefully the word of Matthew that where our treasure is, there is our heart. The person who had the right values was Moses. Moses regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasure of Egypt (Heb. 11:26). Who likes to suffer? Isn't it our instinct to love treasure? But Moses, by faith, regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as greater value than treasure of Egypt because he was looking ahead to his reward (v. 26). We should teach this value to our children.

Second, we should teach Clear Purpose to our children.

Too many of our children are wondering and wasting their lives for no apparent purpose of their lives. They run about in confusion, not knowing what to do. With the wrong purposes of their lives, they are wasting God's time. Westminster Shorter Catechism Question 1 says "What is the chief end of man?" The answer is "Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever" (Internet). But how many of us are trying to live for the glory of God and are enjoying him? Aren't we rather burdened by God? Don't we feel burdened even serving the Lord's church? We must learn the Daniel's clear purpose and show to our children. Look at Daniel 1:8 – "But Daniel made up his mind that he would not defile himself with the king's choice food or with the wine which he drank; so he sought permission from the commander of the officials that he might not defile himself." Although it was a good opportunity in the worldly perspective, he chose not to eat the king's choice food and drink his wine because he was pursuing the clear objective purpose, God's holiness. He was able to overcome his circumstance because he lived his life that was driven by his determination not to defile himself. Won't God be delighted to see our children resolved not to defile themselves with the worldly things but pursue God's holiness?

Third and last, we should teach our children the Eternal View of Life.

Too many of our children are committing suicide without considering God's precious gift of life. What a sad reality? Why do they take their own precious life? It is because they don't have eternal view of life. It is because they have lost the will of life. The reason is because there is no hope in eternal kingdom, heaven. This world cannot give us hope. This world cannot give us hope to live a day. In this vain and futile world, we have no hope. But the eternal comfort that is given to us in Jesus Christ is the eternal life. This is what Apostle James said in James 4:14 – "... What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes." Although our life is like the mist, why are we living now as if we will live on this land forever? Those without deep meditation and prayer for death cannot say that they have an eternal view of life. The reason is because only those who think about the gate of death look at the gate of eternal kingdom. While living in this land, Apostle Paul looked upon the eternal kingdom and preached the gospel to all souls who were his joy and crown. He said to the Philippian church saints that they were his

joy and crown (Phil. 4:1). Those who have many joy and crown, the fruit of their beautiful life at the end of their life, is a beautiful people who have eternal view of life and devote their whole life to eternal souls. We have to show and teach this to our children.

Like a poet, who thought about the children of Ryongchon Elementary School in North Korea who lost their sights, and said ‘What must I do now?’, we must look at our children whose are spiritually blinded and ask ourselves ‘What must I do now?’ And as we pray in our struggles, we must find the answer in the Word of God. We must instill right value, clear purpose, and eternal view of lie to our children. Now, what will you do?

Living with correct values, clear goals, and an eternal perspective in mind, when you think of the beloved brothers and sisters in the cherished arms of our longed-for Lord in the eternal kingdom,

James Kim

(A day before Children's Sunday)

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Day 34: “Your youth are to You as the dew”

[Psalms 110]

Last Sunday, I participated in the 4th Cell Bible Study and studied about “The spiritual war belonging to the Lord”. As we studied, we discussed the biggest battlegrounds each of us faced in the ‘Open Heart’ section. I shared that the great battleground is my home, my work, my relationship with people, and my inner self. At the same time, we asked each one the question, ‘Are we properly armed in this spiritual war?’ The reason is because we cannot win this big fight without properly armed. Are we wearing the full armor of God? Are we armed with the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, the gospel of peace as shoes, and the word of God as the sword of the Holy Spirit? Are we fighting well with the word and faith of God in the spiritual war we are fighting now? Are we fighting with the assurance of salvation? Are we using it as an opportunity to experience and share the gospel of peace?

Personally, I lost my own big battlefield on the next Monday, the fight with my inner self, after last Sunday’s section bible study. When I couldn’t sleep late on Monday night, I looked back at myself on the living room sofa, I remembered the words I had preached. I remembered the words “their heart was hardened” (Mk. 6:52) that I proclaimed at the dawn of last Friday and Saturday and Sunday English Ministry service and ‘for the sake of salvation’ (Acts 27:27-44) that I proclaimed at the Sunday Korean Ministry service. And I saw myself not being able to keep peace in my heart and disobeying God’s word as I harden my heart. Even though I knew what was proclaimed, when I saw myself, who had lived a day with intentionally rebelling against His words that I proclaimed all day long and thinking of sinful thoughts at my own will, my heart was heavy and I was disappointed by myself again. Looking at my own weaknesses, inadequacies, worthlessness, and sinfulness, I sought God’s mercy and grace while facing my inner self who had fought and defeated by my old sinful nature. I confessed my sins to God, admitted and asked for forgiveness. Then, at the early morning prayer meeting on Tuesday, when I talked about my

spiritual battle with myself on Monday, and when I prayed to God, I remembered Philippians 4:6-7 among the words proclaimed during the Sunday Korean service. Then I prayed to God with thanksgiving. And I decided and determined to be grateful. In the midst of that, God allowed me to have peace in my heart on Tuesday and let me taste the joy of victory.

In order to win this spiritual war that belongs to God, we must be raised up as the young men of the Lord like the dew in the morning mentioned in Psalms 110:3 – “Your people will volunteer freely in the day of Your power; In holy array, from the womb of the dawn, Your youth are to You as the dew.” I first heard this phrase at Seohyun Church in Korea. I heard it for the first time when an assistant pastor in charge of young adult referred to Seohyun's young people as ‘The Lord’s young people like the morning dew.’ At that time, I thought it was a really good phrase without knowing the meaning. Then, while meditating on Psalms 110, I saw the phrase “Your youth are to You as the dew”. And I began to meditate on what kind of people are the youth who are to the Lord as the dew. I would like to think of three things. In the midst of that, I pray that all of us will be raised up as the youth of the Lord like the morning dew so that we can win our spiritual battle.

First, the young men of the Lord who are like the morning dew are those who are willing to devote themselves to the Lord.

The young men of the Lord like the morning dew refer to those who are willingly or cheerfully devoted to the Lord Jesus, who is the commander on the day of the Lord's power, that is, the day of the Lord's war. These young men like the morning dew who joyfully devoted themselves to the Lord Jesus Christ, who rose from the death and ascended to heaven and who sat at the right hand of God and reigning as the King of Heaven (v. 1), are countless numbers (Internet). In other words, the countless young men of the Lord who have joyfully devoted themselves to Christ and for His church represent the Lord's spiritual army (Park). The Lord's youth, like the morning dew, that is the Lord's spiritual army, are the good soldiers of Christ Jesus. In other words, these are the good soldiers of Christ Jesus who suffer hardship with the Lord, who aren't entangled themselves in the affairs of everyday life, so that they may please the Lord who enlisted them as a soldier (2 Tim. 2:3-4).

The Lord has recruited us into His army. We are the young men of the Lord who are like the morning dew who joyfully devote ourselves to the Lord who is the captain. We must strive to become the Lord's good soldiers as the Lord's spiritual soldiers recruited into the Lord's army. In order to do so, we must participate in His suffering, knowing that suffering with the Lord is God's grace (Phil 1:29; 3:10). And we should try not to get stuck in our own lives but to please the Lord who has recruited us. In order to please Jesus, the commander of the army as the good soldiers of the Lord, we must be loyal to Him and obey His commands. We must dedicate ourselves to Jesus, the commander, and to obey His words.

Second, the young men of the Lord who are like the morning dew are those those of holy character.

The morning dew is freshness without dust. Therefore, the Lord's youth who are like the morning dew refers to the Lord's young men who are pure like the clearness of the bright dew shining in the morning light (Internet). The Lord's young and pure men were in holy array (v. 3). In other words, the Lord's young men who are like the morning dew are the Lord's holy spiritual soldiers on the day of the Lord's war. Then, what kind of war is the war in which the spiritual soldiers of the Lord go to the war of the Lord and fight by relying on Jesus, the commander? It's a holy spiritual war. We, who are in this holy spiritual war, must shine like dew as the Lord's holy spiritual soldiers. In other words, as we fight this dark world, we must shine the holy light of the Lord. To do this, we must expose and rebuke the unfruitful deeds of darkness (Eph. 5:11, 13). By no means should we, as the holy soldiers of the Lord, participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness (v. 11). Therefore, as the Lord's holy spiritual soldiers, we must give glory to the holy Lord as we triumph in holy spiritual war.

Third and last, the young men of the Lord who are like the morning dew are those who overcome the world with renewed strength.

As the Lord's holy soldiers and the young men of the Lord who are like the morning dew who engage in the holy spiritual war are triumphant in spiritual warfare by receiving fresh strength from Jesus Christ who is sitting at the right hand of God. The Lord's young men who are like the morning dew and who are in this holy spiritual war know that their struggle is not against the flesh and blood (Eph. 6:12). In other words, they keep in mind that the spiritual warfare is against "the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places" (v. 12). Therefore, the Lord's spiritual soldiers who are like the morning dew must wear the full armor of God. Especially in the fight against evil spirits, they must sharpen their only weapon, the sword of the Spirit. We must fight spiritual warfare by sharpening our minds and hearts with the Word of God, and by praying with sound judgment and sober spirit (1 Pet. 4:7). Never should the worry of the world and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word and make it unfruitful (Mt. 13:22). We cannot win if we fight spiritual war while we are spiritually dull. We must fight against ourselves, sins, the world, and Satan by faith in Jesus, with assurance of victory. This should be the image of the church. We must all live a combative life with assurance of victory.

What does the church really need to fight in spiritual warfare as the Lord's youth (armies) who are like the morning dew? It is the new strength that is supplied from the Lord every day, every moment. We must receive the new strength from the Lord, who overcame death, resurrected, and ascended to heaven, sitting at the right hand of God so that we can gain strength and win in this holy spiritual war. In order to

obtain the new strength that the Lord provides, we must listen to God's quiet voice in the quiet hearts. As the dew falls silently in the middle of the night, we must be refreshed because we hear God's small voice in the quiet hearts. In order for us to fight and win spiritual war, we must never be weakened. Rather, in order to fight against the forces of injustice and sin, we must be provided with the strength that the Lord gives us daily. We need the power of God's Word, the sword of the Holy Spirit. We need the power of the gospel. Also, in order for the church to win in spiritual warfare, we need the power of prayer.

If we look at Exodus 17:15, we find the word "The Lord is our Banner". When Israel and Amalek fought at Rephidim, Moses raised his hand and prayed, then Israel won (v. 11). When Moses' hand didn't come down for the sun to go down, Israel triumphed and built an altar and named it Jehovah Nissi (v. 15). The power that triumphed in the war was God's power in answering Moses' prayer (Internet). Today, we must hear this word and pray. We must not let go of our prayers in order to win our spiritual battle we face, the great spiritual war we are currently fighting in. As the young men of the Lord who are like the morning dew, we should be joyful and devoted to the Lord. And as good soldiers of the Lord, we must shine the light of God's holiness. We are the Lord's holy spiritual soldiers. We must fight this dark world and reveal the holiness of the Lord. We must receive the new strength from the Lord day by day and moment by moment in order to win the spiritual battles given to us. Therefore, I hope and pray that we can put the flag of victory, that is 'Jehovah Nissi' or "The Lord is My Banner" in our battlefield.

Wanting to live a militant Christian life with assurance of victory,

James Kim

(After singing the hymn "There's a Royal Banner" with my church members at the Wednesday night prayer meeting)

Day 35: A beautiful old man

“Do not cast me off in the time of old age; Do not forsake me when my strength fails” (Psalms 71:9).

Personally, I don't like young people like me to call the old people in Korean “노인네”(old man). Nevertheless, after meditating on Psalms 71:9 and titled “Beautiful old man”, I am still not sure in my short Korean language whether it is okay to call grandparents and grandmothers “노인네”(old man). My intention is to meditate on the Word by simply translating the word “in the time of old age” in the Bible. I hope that the word “old man” will not hurt the hearts of the elderly people. I would like to think about the beauty of the old man, that is who is the beautiful old man in God's eyes, focusing on Psalms 71:9. Meanwhile, I also want to become beautiful old man when I become old.

First, the beautiful old man puts his confidence in the Lord who is his hope.

Look at Psalms 71:5 – “For You are my hope; O Lord GOD, You are my confidence from my youth.” The psalmist grew up receiving instruction from the Lord from his youth (v. 17). Therefore, he was able to live in putting confidence in the Lord from his youth. And he relied on the Lord more and more as the years passed. The Lord was a strong refuge for him (v. 7). When the psalmist's enemies, who waited to kill the psalmist, conspired together (v. 10) and said, “God has forsaken him; pursue him and seize him, for no one will rescue him” (v. 11), the psalmist cried out to God, “Be not far from me, O God; come quickly, O my God, to help me” (v. 12). Those who put confidence in the Lord who is their hope pray to God.

What a beautiful image of the psalmist? We must imitate the life of the psalmist who always lived in the hope of the Lord from his youth to old age until his hair is gray. Like the psalmist, when we face many and bitter troubles (v. 20), we must rely on the more and more in God and put our confidence in Him.

Then God will deliver us from that trouble. And the Lord will restore our lives again and will again bring us up from the depths of the earth (v. 20). As the years pass by, an old man who grows older while putting confidence in the Lord is beautiful old man in God's sight.

Second, the beautiful old man declares the Lord's power to the next generation.

Look at Psalms 71:18 – “Even when I am old and gray, do not forsake me, O God, till I declare your power to the next generation, your might to all who are to come.” The psalmist wanted to convey the strength and power of the Lord to all people in his future generations. He said, “I will come and proclaim your mighty acts, O Sovereign LORD; I will proclaim your righteousness, yours alone” (v. 16). His tongue told of His righteous acts all day long (v. 24). The reason was because the unmeasurable righteousness and salvation of the Lord (v. 15), that He gave to the psalmist who relied on the Lord and put confidence in Him from his youth to old age until his hair became gray. The psalmist couldn't endure the Lord's unmeasurable grace of salvation without proclaiming to all future generations. Therefore, he prayed to God that he would not forsake him even when he was old and gray until he had done that.

The old man who passes on the heritage of faith to his children and descendants is beautiful. The old man is wise, declaring to his children and descendants the grace of God he received while relying on and putting confidence in the Lord who is his hope from youth to old and gray. The old man who testifies of the great things God has done in his life, rather than talking about what he has done in his life for Him, is entitled to confess that “... by the grace of God I am what I am” (1 Cor. 15:10).

Third, the beautiful old man praises the Lord.

Look at Psalms 71:14 – “But as for me, I will hope continually, And will praise You yet more and more.” The psalmist, who relied on the Lord as the years passed, not only shared God's wonderful works in his life, but also praised the Lord. He praised the Lord more and more as the years passed by (v. 14) and always praised Him (v. 6). The psalmist's mouth filled with His praise and with His glory all day long (v. 8). He praised the Lord with a harp even His truth (v. 22). He praised the holy Lord of Israel with harp (v. 22). When he praised the Lord, his lips shouted for joy, and his redeemed soul rejoiced (v. 23).

We always have hope and praise the Lord: “My life flows rich in love and grace/ By Christ in mercy offer'd,/ Who anguish bore, and took my place/ When on the cross He suffer'd/ His precious blood He Shed to free/ From sin and all its stinging/ Death destin'd sinners such as we!/ How can I keep from singing? (Hymn “My Life Flows Rich in Love and Grace”, verse 1). Our souls also praise the greatness of

the Lord (Hymn “How Great Thou Art”, chorus). I hope and pray that when we die, we are able to go to the Lord as we sing praises to Him.

Thinking about my church old men and women in Christ who are beautiful in His sight,

James Kim

(After visiting an old woman of the church in the hospital)

Day 36: ‘Teach us to number our days’

[Psalms 90]

There is an actress named Ingrid Bergman. She became famous for <For Who Will Ring the Bell>, <The Eighth Gospel>, and <Gas Light>, and the films she starred in were always top rated for her performance. Originally from Sweden, she went to Hollywood with great ambition to gain a greater fame from European flavors. And she starred in movies in Hollywood and won two Academy Awards. Perhaps there are few great actress like her. But the great actress cried out at the peak of her success: ‘Hollywood! Silver screen ... Why is it so desolate and empty’ After abandoning her husband and daughter, she married a famous filmmaker, and soon broke up. After that, she had married several men. Then one day, a terrible thing happens in which her daughter kills her stepfather. Ingrid Bergman had a goal. And that goal had been achieved. But there was no purpose. Eventually, she died miserably from cancer. She lived her life with a goal but no purpose. Many people have the goal, but they don't have the purpose of their lives. If the goal speaks direction, the purpose asks meaning. ‘Why live’ is a question for purpose, and ‘Where to go’ is a question about goal. Many people confuse goal and purpose, wandering as if they were one, ruining their precious life that can live only once in this earth (Internet).

Like the actress named Ingrid Bergman, who has achieved her goal but experienced vanity, how many people are experiencing it? The representative biblical character is King Solomon, who wrote the book of Ecclesiastes. Seeing that he said in Ecclesiastes 1:2, “‘Vanity of vanities,’ says the Preacher, ‘Vanity of vanities! All is vanity’”, we can see how he really experienced how empty life is. If we summarize the book of Ecclesiastes in one word, it teaches how empty life without God is. In other words, it shows that all human labors apart from God are in vain, and in the end, only by restoring the relationship between God and man, this man can find eternal value and meaning. Apart from God, wisdom is vain (1:12-6:9), pleasure and material things are vain (2:1-11), material life is vain (vv. 12-23), oppression is

vain (4:1-3), all labor is vain (vv. 4-12), and politics is vain (vv. 13-16). The author of Ecclesiastes didn't put forth these thoughts out of thoughts or ideas, but talked about them as lessons based on his own experiences. As a result, eternal and real joy cannot be found in this world, and the real satisfaction of life can be found in a relationship with God or in God (Internet).

How are we to live in this vain and meaningless world? In order to answer that question, we must also offer God the prayer the psalmist gave to God in Psalms 90:12. That prayer is 'Teach us to number our days'. We can think of this prayer topic in two ways. The prayer 'Teach us to number our days' has two contents.

The first content is, 'Teach us the vanity of life'.

Psalms 90:3-10 teaches three ways why life is vain:

(1) Life is vain because it returns to dust.

Look at Psalms 90:3 – "You turn man back into dust And say, "Return, O children of men." God told Adam, "By the sweat of your face You will eat bread, Till you return to the ground, Because from it you were taken; For you are dust, And to dust you shall return" (Gen. 3:19). God who made Adam out of dust said to Adam, "For you are dust, And to dust you shall return". That's right. We have no choice but to return to dust. That's why life is futile. So King Solomon also said in Ecclesiastes 3:19-21: "For the fate of the sons of men and the fate of beasts is the same. As one dies so dies the other; indeed, they all have the same breath and there is no advantage for man over beast, for all is vanity. All go to the same place. All came from the dust and all return to the dust. Who knows that the breath of man ascends upward and the breath of the beast descends downward to the earth?" As King Solomon said, everything is vain because all is made of dust and everything will return to dust.

(2) Life is vain because it is short.

Look at Psalms 90:4-6: "For a thousand years in Your sight Are like yesterday when it passes by, Or as a watch in the night. You have swept them away like a flood, they fall asleep; In the morning they are like grass which sprouts anew. In the morning it flourishes and sprouts anew; Toward evening it fades and withers away." Life is like falling asleep and grass which sprouts anew. Time and life that comes and goes quickly is vain. Life is like being swept away by a flood, the lives of people die quickly. Life is like falling asleep for a while and then waking up. When a person sleeps, it passes unconsciously. So time passes faster than when a person is awake. Not

only that, as there are many dreams when sleeping, and there are many empty plans like dreams throughout life (Park). Like the psalmist said, life is like grass which sprouts anew. Just as flowers bloom and grow in the morning and dry up in the evening, life is also empty. So the apostle James said: “Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away” (Jam. 4:14). Especially in the light of the word that “Even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God” (Ps. 90:2), life cannot be compared with the eternal life of God. Truly, life is very short. Life is meaningless and futile that can only be a moment.

(3) Life is vain because its' pride is labor and sorrow.

Look at Psalms 90:10 – “As for the days of our life, they contain seventy years, Or if due to strength, eighty years, Yet their pride is but labor and sorrow; For soon it is gone and we fly away.” For as long as our years are seventy, if strong is eighty, life is vain because soon it is gone and we fly away and there is only labor and sorrow. That’s why King Solomon also said: “For what does a man get in all his labor and in his striving with which he labors under the sun? Because all his days his task is painful and grievous; even at night his mind does not rest. This too is vanity” (Eccle. 2:22-23). The Bible tells us that since a life is full of sorrow, full of pain and suffering, and full of labor without rest at night, this is also vain. That’s why King Solomon says, ‘Vanity of vanities, Vanity of vanities! All is vanity’ (1:2).

Like the psalmist, we must pray to God, “Teach us to number our days’. In particular, we must learn that Psalms 90 teaches three things about why life is vain. We must have deep understanding. We must understand deeply that life is vain because it returns to dust, it is short and its' pride is labor and sorrow.

The second content is, ‘Teach us how to live a short life worthwhile’.

Knowing the vanity of life, we should never waste our lives. In other words, we have to think about how to live a short life worthwhile. We can receive three lessons from Psalms 90:

(1) In order to live the short life worthwhile, we must fear God.

Look at Psalms 90:11 – “Who understands the power of Your anger And Your fury, according to the fear that is due You?” In order to fear God, we must seek “a heart of wisdom” as the psalmist asked God (v. 12). What is the reason? The reason is because the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom (Prov. 1:7). That is why King Solomon said in Ecclesiastes “Vanity of

vanities,” and conclusively in Ecclesiastes 12:13, “The conclusion, when all has been heard, is: fear God and keep His commandments, because this applies to every person.” The Bible tells us that man's duty is to fear God and obey His commandments. Therefore, in order to live our short lives worthwhile, we must seek God for wisdom and live a life that fears God.

(2) In order to live the short life worthwhile, we must be satisfied with God's lovingkindness.

Look at Psalms 90:14 – “O satisfy us in the morning with Your lovingkindness, That we may sing for joy and be glad all our days.” God has given and is still giving true joy in Jesus Christ to us who had no choice but to live our lives in vain in our sorrows throughout our lifetime. That joy comes from the Lord's lovingkindness. In other words, when we are satisfied with His lovingkindness, we can live this whole life with true joy. And we can live our lives worthwhile when we love God and love our neighbors with His love as Jesus commands.

(3) In order to live the short life worthwhile, we must live for God's glory.

Look at Psalms 90:16 – “Let Your work appear to Your servants And Your majesty to their children.” The psalmist asked God to “Make us glad according to the days You have afflicted us” (by the number of years being afflicted) (v. 15). In order to do so, the psalmist prayed for the Lord's work and His glory to be appealed to them. In order for us to enjoy the joy that God gives us for a lifetime of labor and sorrow, God's works must be appeared in our lives. In other words, when the glory of God appears in our lives, we cannot help but rejoice in the Lord. The reason life is bound to suffer amid toils and sorrows is because we live for our own glory, not God's glory, and only our glory appears. In order to live a truly worthwhile life, we must live for the glory of God. Then, when God's work appears in our lives, that life will be truly rewarding and worthwhile.

(4) In order to live the short life worthwhile, we must seek God's favor.

Look at Psalms 90:17 – “Let the favor of the Lord our God be upon us; And confirm for us the work of our hands; Yes, confirm the work of our hands.” At the morning prayer meeting on Tuesday morning yesterday, I meditated on the “the kindness of God” (2 Sam.9:3) that David gave to Jonathan's son, Mephibosheth, who was crippled in both feet, based on 2 Samuel 9:1. David, who was faithful to the covenant he made with Jonathan, said to Mephibosheth, son of Jonathan, “I will surely show kindness to you for the sake of your father Jonathan” (v. 7). He restored to him all the land of his grandfather Saul (v. 7) and made him to eat at David's table regularly like

one of the princes (vv. 7, 10, 11, 13). Then, David made Saul's servant Shiba, along with him his fifteen sons and twenty servants to serve Mephibosheth (v. 10). At that time, this was Mephibosheth's response: "What is your servant, that you should regard a dead dog like me?" (v. 8) As I meditate on these words, the conclusion is that we are only grateful and thankful for the fact that God has given me the grace of salvation and every spiritual blessings in Jesus Christ. That's why I sing this hymn "Since Christ My Soul From Sin Set Free" to the Lord: "Since Christ my soul from sin set free/ This world has been a Heaven to me/ And 'mid earth's sorrows and its woe/ 'Tis heaven my Jesus here to know/ O hallelujah, yes, 'tis heaven/ 'Tis heaven to know my sins forgiven/ On land or sea, what matters where?/ Where Jesus is, 'tis Heaven there" (v. 1 & chorus).

I would like to share with you a poem I found on the Internet while meditating on Psalms 90: 'The stream flows, wherever it goes, it shows off its beauty before the fallen leaves fall. There is only a moment when we show off our dazzling beauty, and our lives also show off our youth in no time. As the sun turns into a lonely fallen leaf, the late autumn comes, only in vain. Even when we cried out that life was difficult, it made us think of the true meaning of life in the gloom of all the passing and falling leaves watching the last moments of life. Like the color of beautiful autumn leaves, the lingering lingering sound of life disappears without a trace. Whatever the meaning of life in this land, our life becomes the color of beautiful autumn leaves, dyeing our hearts with memories' (Internet). We desperately need to realize the vanity of life in this vain world. Therefore, we must learn and practice how to live a life worth living once through the Bible. Let us live in fear of our God and be satisfied with His lovingkindness. And let us seek His favor. I hope and pray that we live our short life for the glory of God.

Wanting to live my short life worthwhile before God while thoroughly feeling the vanity of life,

James Kim

(Having been taught by the Lord the death perspective)

Day 37: A lifetime of shadows

[Ecclesiastes 6:7-12]

I went to the Hollywood Presbyterian Hospital yesterday. I went to see one of our church member whose lungs weren't doing good. The hospital seemed to continue to inspect his lungs and try to identify the cause in order to treat it. When I visited him yesterday, he told me that when he reflected back his 85 years of life in this earth, the conclusion is everything is false. So I told him what King Solomon said in Ecclesiastes 1:2 – "'Vanity of vanities," says the Preacher, "Vanity of vanities! All is vanity.'" Listening to his conclusion of his 85 years of life, I have come to think once again how to live in this this vain life.

In Ecclesiastes 6:12, King Solomon speaks of "a lifetime of shadows". What does it mean by "a lifetime of shadows"? I hope you will think about it. What do you think when I say "shadow"? When I say "shadows," the first thing I can think of is that we can not catch them. Another thing that I think of as "shadows" is that shadows do not stay long and disappear quickly. When King Solomon said "a lifetime of shadows", it can be interpreted in two ways: (1) First, the word "a lifetime as a shadow" means life flees quickly. Look at Job 14: 1-2: "Man born of woman is of few days and full of trouble. He springs up like a flower and withers away; like a fleeting shadow, he does not endure." Like this words of Job, our life in this world is short, full of trouble and its goes quick as a shadow. Look at Psalm 90:10 – "The length of our days is seventy years-- or eighty, if we have the strength; yet their span is but trouble and sorrow, for they quickly pass, and we fly away." The psalmist Moses is telling us that our life's span in this world is seventy or eighty but it is trouble and sorrow. (2) Second, "a lifetime of shadows" means a short and futile life in the world. Look at Ecclesiastes 6:12 – "For who knows what is good for a man during his lifetime, during the few years of his futile life? He will spend them like a shadow. ...". Looking back what King Solomon repeatedly said in Ecclesiastes 'vain' (1: 2; 2:15, 19, 21, 23; 3:19; 4: 7, 8; 5:10), 'vanity and striving after wind' (1:14, 17; 2:11, 17, 26; 4: 4, 16), 'what is profitable' and 'uselessness' (1: 3; 2:11; 4) : 8; 5:11, 16). It is a vain life to spend in the lifetime of shadows that go quickly, doing unprofitable and

useless things things. Of course, this is not a word that refers to those whom God is pleased with. The reason is that those whom God is pleased with live a meaningful and profitable life in the sight of God, even though the life is short and goes quickly. Rather, it refers to the sinner (6:1-6). Here, the sinner refers to a person who is worse than a miscarried baby. Who is worse than the miscarried baby? Those whom God blessed with wealth, riches, honor, and children's blessings and longevity, but not able to enjoy all of it and in their death their bodies can not be buried properly. These sinners' lives are like shadows and that they have spent the short and meaningless days in this world.

Then why is the lifetime of shadows vain? Why is it meaningless? Why are the reasons? (1) First, the reason that lifetime of shadow is meaningless and useless is because there is no satisfaction. King Solomon said, "All things are wearisome; Man is not able to tell it. The eye is not satisfied with seeing, Nor is the ear filled with hearing" (1:8). What does it mean? It means there is no satisfaction with our eyes and ears even though we see and hear. That's why King Solomon said that the world is vanity because there is no satisfaction in greed of human being. And this is what King Solomon said in Ecclesiastes 6:7 – "All a man's labor is for his mouth and yet the appetite is not satisfied." Here a "man" referred to "the man" in verse 3. And "the man" is regarded as unhappier than the miscarried baby because there is no satisfaction in his soul (Park Yun-sun). This man's appetite cannot be satisfied no matter how hard he works for his mouth. There is no satisfaction in his soul. Why isn't he satisfied with his soul? The reason is that our soul can only be satisfied with one God, but he wanted to leave God and fulfill his appetite. A person who is not satisfied with the soul is unable to enjoy life but keep on working and live a vain and meaningless life and die later on. (2) Second, the lifetime of shadows is futile and meaningless because it can not be saved. Look at Ecclesiastes 6:8 – "For what advantage does the wise man have over the fool? What advantage does the poor man have, knowing how to walk before the living?" Here King Solomon is saying that those who are not saved, whether they are wise or fool, are same (Park Yun-sun). No matter how humble we are in this world to deal with things wisely, the point is that we do not know God and have no salvation and this is useless. In Ecclesiastes 2: 12-17, King Solomon spoke of the wise and foolish, and the key lesson was that: "For there is no lasting remembrance of the wise man as with the fool, inasmuch as in the coming days all will be forgotten And how the wise man and the fool alike die! So I hated life, for the work which had been done under the sun was grievous to me; because everything is futility and striving after wind." Whether people are wise or foolish, their destiny is death. The problem is after death. It is important whether their souls will have eternal life after death or eternal condemnation. No matter how much people are wise and humbly dealt with things of this world, if they do not walk in the way of salvation, what will happen to the soul after death? There is nothing meaningful unless we walk in the path of salvation by believing in Jesus.

How then shall we live this lifetime of shadows? What is a meaningful and useful life in God's sight?

First, in this lifetime of shadows, the meaningful and useful life in God's sight is to be satisfied only by the Lord alone.

The usefulness and meaning of life is to be satisfied only by the Lord alone and walk in the path of salvation by faith in Jesus. We must abandon our greed and be content with only Jesus. Jesus is the only One who is able to satisfy our souls while living in this lifetime of shadows. Only Jesus can satisfy our souls. It is because our soul desires eternity and only eternal Jesus can satisfy our eternal souls. We, like Apostle Paul, must learn to be content in abundance and poverty, "whatever it is" (Phil. 4:11). Therefore, we must be satisfied with only Jesus. And if we are satisfied with Jesus alone, then we will obey His Word, and pursue eternal things. This is a meaningful and useful life in God's sight.

Second, in this lifetime of shadows, the meaningful and useful life in God's sight is to handle the Lord's work humbly and wisely (Park).

Look at Ecclesiastes 6:8 – “For what advantage does the wise man have over the fool? What advantage does the poor man have, knowing how to walk before the living?” This verse is talking about those who have not been saved. But if we apply this to we who have been saved, in order for us to live the meaningful and useful life in God's sight in this lifetime of shadows, we must humbly handle the Lord's work wisely.

At the morning prayer meeting yesterday, I thought about King Saul in 1 Samuel 15:17, who had considered himself small (1 Sam. 15:17), but eventually became proud and set up a monument for himself (v. 12) after winning the battle against the Amalekites. And although he had sinned by disobeying God's word, he still wanted Samuel to honor him before the elders of “my people” and before Israel” (v. 30). As I thought about King Saul, I compared myself in the past when I used to consider myself small and now when I wanted to be honored or exalted in front of people. Then the Holy Spirit worked in my heart to mourn for my own sins and enabled me to confess them and repent. The Holy Spirit worked in my heart to help me to put down my prideful heart in front of the cross. What was the reason for this abundant grace of God? It was because the Lord wanted me to humbly serve the Lord's church. It was because the Lord wanted me to serve His church with His humility and His wisdom (not depend on my own understanding). How about you? We should serve the Lord and His church humbly and with the wisdom that the Lord gives us. Such life of service with humility and wisdom is a life that is meaningful and useful to God.

Third, in this lifetime of shadows, the meaningful and useful life in God's sight is to enjoy the present good (Park).

Look at Ecclesiastes 6:9 – “What the eyes see is better than what the soul desires This too is futility and a striving after wind.” One scholar translated this verse like this: “It is better to enjoy the present good than to think of other good things.” What King Solomon is telling us is to enjoy the present and give thanks to God (Park Yun-sun). In Ecclesiastes 6:1-6, King Solomon saw the grievous evil in this world that even though a man to whom God has given riches and wealth and honor so that his soul lacks nothing of all that he desires but God has not empowered him to enjoy them. How about you? Are you enjoying and satisfied with every spiritual blessings that God gave us in Christ Jesus (Eph. 1:3)? We should enjoy the blessings God has already given to us in Jesus Christ in our present life. For example, when we think about God adopting us to be his children, one of the spiritual blessings that God gave us in Christ Jesus, we must enjoy this blessing humbly and wisely at this time, so that our souls may enjoy his blessing. To do that, we must seek our Heavenly Father. We should pray to our Heavenly Father, calling him "Abba Father" (Rom. 8:15). As we don so, we must hear and obey Heavenly Father's voice. Therefore, we must learn the heart of Heavenly Father. In doing so, we will be able to live a meaningful and useful life in the sight of God. Let us enjoy the joy that the Lord gives us in this lifetime of shadows.

Fourth, in this lifetime of shadows, the meaningful and useful life in God's sight is to live in obedience to the truth in fearing God (Park).

Look at the text Ecclesiastes 6:10 – “Whatever exists has already been named, and it is known what man is; for he cannot dispute with him who is stronger than he is.” Dr. Park Yun-sun said: ‘This words means that since the position and degree of man has already been confirmed before God, he only obeys truth in his real life one step at a time in fearing God.’ Those who live in vain and meaningless life do not fear God. They struggle with God and go too far beyond their boundary. Having struggles with God, they ignore God, who has determined their existence and boundary, and do whatever they want. This is futile (v. 11). Living this lifetime of shadows apart from God is vanity (v. 12) (Park Yun-sun). But the life of fearing God is meaningful and useful in God’s sight. Therefore, we must be obedient to the Word of God. In fact, this is the conclusion of the Book of Ecclesiastes. Look at Ecclesiastes 12:13 – “The conclusion, when all has been heard, is: fear God and keep His commandments, because this applies to every person.”

As I meditate on Ecclesiastes 6:7-12, I asked this question to myself: ‘How shall I live the rest of my life in this lifetime of shadows?’ During this lifetime of shadows which goes quickly, I want to live a meaningful life. I want to be satisfied with the Lord alone. And I want to live humbly and wisely in doing the work of the Lord that the Lord has entrusted to me. I also want to enjoy all the spiritual blessings God has already given to me in Jesus Christ. And I want to live in obedience to the Word of God in fearing him, as King Solomon had conclusively stated in Ecclesiastes 12:13. I hope that this prayer of devotion will be with us today, here and now.

Hoping to humbly and wisely bear the work of the Lord, satisfied with only the Lord for a lifetime spent like a shadow,

James Kim

(Enjoying another day in the grace of God)

Day 38: God who will guide us until death

[Psalms 48]

Looking back on the past, what crisis have you faced? Do you still remember deep in your heart the moment that you experienced God's guidance and the grace of salvation even in the middle of crisis? Today I went to a nursing home and met my church grandmother named Jang Eul-soo and spent time together. While having conversation with her, I told her about my first baby, Charis. It was because I wasn't able to stand in the Charis' position and thought my greed as her father had made the baby more troubled in her illness. As I shared about Charis with Grandma Jang, I shared that life is more about the process and the end of life than the beginning. When we remember God's grace in the midst of past crises, we can overcome the present crises with the grace of the Lord.

One of the hymns I often sing is "My Jesus, as Thou Wilt". The background of this hymn is this: 'There was a pastor who prayed in tears when all of Germany was ruined by a 30-year religious war. He went to the homes of persecuted believers and delivered messages of comfort. To make matters worse, the Black Death spread across Germany, killing more than 10 million people. It was said that Germany was like a "giant grave". One day, this pastor and his wife visited the family who had a seriously ill believer, and when they returned home, they witnessed a disastrous sight. Their church and house were burned and turned into ashes. Their two beloved sons were dead hugging each other. It is said that these couples hugged their son's body and prayed silently in tears: ".My Jesus, as Thou wilt! O may Thy will be mine; Into Thy hand of love I would my all resign. Through sorrow, or thro' joy, Conduct me as Thine own; And help me still to say, My Lord, Thy will be done". The pastor's name is Benjamin Schmolck. It is true faith that he obeyed even in the midst of great pain and trial (Internet).

As I meditated on Psalms 48, I meditated on the text, especially focusing on verse 14: “For such is God, Our God forever and ever; He will guide us until death.” With the title of “God who will guides us until death”, I would like to think about this God in four ways and our four responsibilities.

First, God who will guides us until death is the great Lord.

Look at Psalms 48:1 – “Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised, In the city of our God, His holy mountain.” The God who will guide us until death is the great God. And the great God is the God who is “the great King” (v. 2). That is why the way our great God saves us is great (Park). But we tend to think too little of this great way of salvation of God. In other words, we don't see the big picture, so our hearts are filled with thoughts and expectations about God's way of salvation in our own way. And if God doesn't deliver salvation according to our thoughts and expectations, we may complain or be discouraged. At the time of the Exodus, the Israelites did that. They blamed God and Moses. They didn't understand the will of the Lord in God's way of salvation, why God had made them walk in the wilderness for 40 years. The Lord's will was “that He might humble you and that He might test you, to do good for you in the end” (Deut. 8:16).

At some point, while meditating on Joseph, I was amazed at God's way of salvation. It is nothing other than God saved Joseph from one difficult situation to another, and eventually made him the ruler of Egypt when he was 30 years old. God saved Joseph in His way. When Joseph was about to get kill by his older brothers, God let him to be sold as a slave of Potiphar in Egypt. And at the house of Potiphar, God saved him from Potiphar's wife's temptation by letting Joseph to be imprisoned. God saved him from one suffering to another suffering. However, God eventually made Joseph the ruler of Egypt and saved the Israelites. In God's great plan, He wasn't trying to save only one man Joseph. His great plan was also to save the Israel and his whole family (which was the nation Israel) by allowing or leading him from one suffering to another suffering. How great was this God's way of salvation?

Let us keep in mind that our great God is the God who saves and guides us in His great way of salvation. Let's not forget that, when He leads us into the wilderness, into the valley of Achor, what He finally wants to give us is "blessing."

Second, God who will guides us until death is the God of fortress.

Look at Psalms 48:3 – “God is in her citadels; he has shown himself to be her fortress.” The God who guide us to death is the God who is our fortress. Just as the holy city of God is “beautiful in its loftiness” (v. 2), God who is our fortress is a stronghold (v. 3). And God, our stronghold and our fortress, protects us. So David also confessed: “Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I

fear no evil, for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me” (23:4). Even though we walk through the valley of the shadow of death, we will not fear because God, our fortress, protects us and comforts us.

This God declared Himself “a stronghold” (48:3). Our God is the God who appears as Savior every time and saves His people. Look at the work of salvation of the Israelites in the Old Testament. Did God save the Israelites once or twice? When we think about the name “Jesus”, that is “God is salvation”, our God is the God who is pleased to save us. This God is our fortress. Therefore, we must escape to God, who makes Himself known as a refuge. So David prayed like this: “Incline Your ear to me, rescue me quickly; Be to me a rock of strength, A stronghold to save me. For You are my rock and my fortress; For Your name's sake You will lead me and guide me” (31:2-3).

Third, God who will guides us until death is the God who makes us triumph.

Look at Psalms 48:4-5: “When the kings joined forces, when they advanced together, they saw her and were astounded; they fled in terror.” This means that foreign kings tried to invade and occupy Jerusalem, but it passed by like fog. At that time, the invaders saw the power of God and fled in terror (Park). In the end, just as God broke the ships of Tarshish with the east wind of those invaders, the Lord destroyed the power of the nations. Therefore, He gave Israel victory. Our God is the God who brings us victory by defeating our enemies for us. Look at Deuteronomy 20:4 – “for the LORD your God is the one who goes with you, to fight for you against your enemies, to save you.” That is why the psalmist didn’t rely on his own bow or sword, but on the Lord who saved him from his enemies (Ps. 44:6-7).

Personally, I remember the word of 1 Corinthians 10:13 while watching our church retired pastor’s mission in another country: “No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it.” When I hear the news that God delivers him from every dangerous moment in the mission field, I see that our God is truly the God of salvation and the God who makes us triumph. Let us keep in mind that our God is the God who gives us victory. Therefore, we must live by faith with the assurance of victory.

Fourth and last, God who will guides us until death is the God who is filled with righteousness.

Look at Psalms 48:10 – “Like your name, O God, your praise reaches to the ends of the earth; your right hand is filled with righteousness.” The word “your right hand is filled with righteousness” means that God will undoubtedly execute the justice of the punishment to the evil, and finally repay the

true believer's false charge (Park). When we tell our God our false charge, the God who is filled with righteousness is the God who repays our false charge.

The practical example is the case of Pastor G's son. Two weeks ago, I heard about his accusation case. It seems like the other person hit his car while he was driving. But even though he did wrong, he actually sued the Pastor G's son. And I think the other person was a powerful politician. That is why the police, who wrote the report when the car accident happened, also lied in court and supported that politician. And it is said that the company where Pastor G's son works has made a statement against him. It is said that Pastor G and his wife prayed to God earnestly in this very difficult time. What's interesting in the midst of that is that Pastor G had a dream, in which a fire from heaven came down on the politician and the police and businessmen who made false reports about his son. In the end, about two weeks ago, the judge sided with Pastor G's son in court. After winning the trial, Pastor G's son's lawyer made two proposals: One was that Pastor G's son was unable to work while he was suffering in court, so the other party gave the money that he couldn't earn. And the other was to sue the other person and have them decide in court that they lied. However, Pastor G said his son didn't pursue it anymore. I see a wonderful faith here. Of course, as in Psalms 48, I experienced the truth that God, who is full of righteousness, repays our believers for our false accusation. But what's even more surprising is that Pastor G's son could sue the politician and the police who lied, but he didn't. What I felt is that we must leave our revenge to God, that is, we must stop and when we need to stop. What is the reason? The reason is that we must entrust revenge to the righteous God. God who is full of righteousness will do it for you. God, who is full of righteousness, will defeat our enemies. We must believe in this God and receive His guidance.

The God who will guide us until death is the great God, the God who is our fortress, the God who makes us triumph, and the God who is filled with righteousness. What should we do, who are guided by God? There are four things we can think of.

(1) We should praise God greatly.

Look at Psalms 48:1 – “Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised, In the city of our God, His holy mountain.” We should sing praises to God, sing praises to our King (47:6), who is the Lord Most High (v. 2), who loves us (v. 4) and who reigns over us (v. 8). We must experience the great salvation of the great God by praying and praising God with faith even in narrow prisons like Paul and Silas. Therefore, we must ascend to the holy temple of God and praise God, who is great.

(2) We should think about God's lovingkindness.

Look at Psalms 48:9 – “We have thought on Your lovingkindness, O God, In the midst of Your temple.” Here, the phrase “We have thought” in Hebrew is “dimminu” which means ‘long-awaited’. The psalmist took refuge in God and long-awaited His grace instead of being discouraged in the midst of trouble. As a result, the psalmist realized the greatness of the Lord (Park). We must not be discouraged during trouble but long-awaited the Lord’s grace in His temple. In long-awaiting for His lovingkindness, we must realize the greatness of God.

(3) We should be glad and rejoice.

Look at Psalms 48:11 – “Let Mount Zion be glad, Let the daughters of Judah rejoice Because of Your judgments.” We can be glad and rejoice because of the righteous judgment of God who is full of righteousness. We should be glad and rejoice because He is the God who makes us triumph. Also, we can be glad and rejoice in His salvation because of God’s righteous judgement and because we experience His salvation.

(4) We should tell what God has done to the next generation.

Look at Psalms 48:13 – “Consider her ramparts; Go through her palaces, That you may tell it to the next generation.” The psalmist is telling us that since God is in Zion (Jerusalem), we should look closely at the safe and beautiful place and tell it to the next generation. One of the things that the first generation of Israel did at the time of the Exodus was that they didn’t teach the God’s work of salvation to the next generation. As a result, the next generation went into the land of Canaan and committed a sin of worshipping idols against God. Therefore, we must remember the words of Deuteronomy 6:6-7: “These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. ‘You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up.’”

The God who will guide us until death is the great God and our fortress. He is also the God who makes us triumph by opposing our enemies. He is just God who is filled with righteousness. Therefore, we must praise God greatly and long-await His lovingkindness in His temple. We also need to be glad and rejoice, believing that He will give us victory. In the midst of that, we must tell the next generation our God who will guide us until death.

As I look to the Lord who will guide us until death,

James Kim (God who guides us and make us victorious!)

Day 39: The blessed people

[Psalms 84]

Abraham Lincoln had several nicknames, and one of them was ‘honest Abraham’. This is the story of his teenage years when he was working as a store clerk. After a customer came and paid for a thing that he bought, Lincoln later learned that he had not paid back 10 cents. He struggled all night with 10 cents, then visited that customer who was living three miles away, the day after the holiday, and returned the 10 cents. People around him praised him for his honesty. But Lincoln rather said, ‘I don’t know why I should be praised. I will not be a person praised for what I should do, but I will be a person who is praised for doing more than I should.’ After Lincoln became a lawyer, the first thing he did was give free services for unjustly treated people who couldn’t sue because they had no money. On the first day of the lawsuit, he said, ‘I am happy to keep my promise to God that I swore when I was a teenager’ (Internet).

I think Abraham Lincoln was the channel of blessing that God used. This thought came to me when I thought about the blessing of freedom for many: ‘God has given me abundant blessings by using my parents and parents-in-law as channels of blessing.’ Because of the blessings God has given me through them, I also want to be a channel of blessing to others. To do so, I would like to meditate on the words of Psalms 84. In Psalms 84, the word ‘blessed’ appears three times (vv. 4, 5, 12). When I think about this word, I would like to meditate on three things about who the blessed man is. I hope and pray that all of us can be the blessed people and be used by the Lord to be the channels of blessing to other.

First, the blessed people are those who dwell in the house of the Lord.

Look at Psalms 84:4 – “Blessed are those who dwell in your house; they are ever praising you. Selah.” This psalmist may have been a priest who came to Jerusalem for a pilgrimage (Park). He longed so much to go to the temple (vv. 1-4). Why did he so long for the temple of the Lord? The reason was

because the temple of the Lord was a place to pray to God (Park). The psalmist longed for the Lord's temple deeply because he prayed to God there, met God through prayer, and communed with Him. In that longing, the psalmist confessed, "How lovely is your dwelling place, O LORD Almighty!" (v. 1) This is what Dr. Park said: 'The beauty of the church is not the building, but the fact that there is the Spirit of God' (Park). The temple of God is a house of prayer. Because God came near to him when he pray to God in that temple (Deut. 4:7), he confessed that it was very lovely because he experienced God's presence in the temple. To what extent did he yearn for the Lord's temple? Look at Psalms 84:2 – "My soul yearns, even faints, for the courts of the LORD; my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God." The psalmist yearned for God's courts so much that his body was weakened. The reason he longed for the Lord's temple was because he longed for God's presence through prayer. Therefore, his heart and his flesh cried out for the living God. As he cried out to the Lord Almighty, his King and his God, he expressed his heart like this: "Even the sparrow has found a home, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may have her young-- a place near your altar, O LORD Almighty, my King and my God" (v. 3). Here, the psalmist expressed his heart of begging to go to the temple of the Lord because he was sad by the situation in which he was far away from the temple even though the sparrow found the nest for herself, where she might have her young (Park). That was why he said: "Better is one day in your courts than a thousand elsewhere; I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of the wicked" (v. 10). Here, dwelling in the courts of the Lord refers to a life in which we can have true fellowship with God (Park). The psalmist's confession that living one day in true fellowship with God is better than thousand days living in an evil life teaches us that we should yearn for the Lord and His Church more and more.

Like the psalmist, we must yearn for God's temple, the church. We must go up to God's temple and gather together, hold on to His word of promise, and experience God's presence while devoting ourselves to prayer. The church, the house of the Lord, is a house of prayer. As we experience the taste of the prayer, we must yearn for God's temple more and more. In longing, we must always praise the Lord while dwelling in the Lord's house like the blessed man (v. 4). I still remember that in 2003, at the retreat of the Church Renewal Pastors Association, after I received the Lord's promise of Matthew 16:18 "... I ... will build my church ..." and sang the hymn "I Love Thy Kingdom", I shed tears while thinking about Victory Presbyterian Church. Especially when I was singing verse 1, I couldn't control my crying: "I love Thy Kingdom, Lord, The house of Thine abode, The Church our blest Redeemer saved With His own precious blood." And as I was singing verse 3, "For her my tears shall fall, For her my prayers ascend; To her my cares and toils be given, Till toils and cares shall end," I determined to come back to Victory Presbyterian Church and faithfully serve His church. When we think of that heaven, the eternal home of God, How much more can we not yearn to dwell there? We, like the psalmist, have already made a pilgrimage toward heaven, the true New Jerusalem temple. That's why we, like the ancestors of faith in Hebrews 11, we confess that we are strangers and exiles on the earth (Heb. 11:13). We are the ones who desire a better country (v. 16). As we go to that better country, we will see the Lord face to face (1 Cor.

13:12). And we will dwell with our Lord forever. Therefore, we must set our mind on the things above and keep seeking the things above (Col. 3:1-2). Such people are truly the blessed people.

Second, the blessed people are those whose strength is in the Lord.

Look at Psalms 84:5 – “Blessed are those whose strength is in you, who have set their hearts on pilgrimage.” The blessed man, the psalmist, longed for the temple of the Lord and wanted to receive the strength from God as he cried out to Him with strong passion to go up to the temple. This he cried out to God in prayer, longing to experience the presence of God who was his strength (18:1). Why did the psalmist so long for the strength of the Lord? Look at Psalms 84:7 – “They go from strength to strength, till each appears before God in Zion.” The reason he longed to experience God's presence and gain the strength He provided was because he knew that only with the strength God provided that he could go up to the temple of Zion (Park). Why did he need God's strength to go up to the Lord's temple? The reason is given in verse 6: “As they pass through the Valley of Baca, they make it a place of springs; the autumn rains also cover it with pools.” This is what Dr. Park said: There were pains and difficulties, such as ‘valley of tears,’ in the planning and efforts of the Israelites living abroad to visit the temple in Jerusalem once. However, if you endure it and pass through it, you will end up with “a place of springs,” that is, the comfort and joy of the soul. And there, we spiritually experience seeing God while receiving the gift of heaven like “the autumn rains” (Park). Therefore, the psalmist cried out to God, “Hear my prayer, O LORD God Almighty; listen to me, O God of Jacob. Selah” (v. 8).

Among my favorite gospel songs, there is a song called ‘The blessed man’. If you look at the lyrics of the song, it reads: ‘You are a blessed man, who is strengthened by the Lord and has the highway of Zion in your heart. Lord is so pleased with you. You are a blessed man, who long to dwell in the house of the Lord and praise Him always. The Lord loves you very much. Your service is beautiful praise and your devotion is a fragrant prayer. Wherever you step on, the name of the Lord will be exalted.’ This song is based on Psalms 84. Whenever I listen to this song, there are many times when I get strength. When I hear or sing this praise, I am strengthened by the Lord and I am more eager to dwell in the house of the Lord. Even if I am discouraged, I will rise again with the power of the Lord and move toward heaven. Especially, when I think about the things above and think of those saints of faith who are there in heaven, I miss that heaven more and more in my heart. Perhaps such heart can be referred to as “the highways to Zion”. The highways to Zion that is deeply engraved in our hearts becomes more and more heavenly. The steps to walk that highways with the Lord are steps full of strength and hope. Therefore, we are the blessed people.

Third and last, the blessed people trust in the Lord.

Look at Psalms 84:12 – “O LORD of hosts, How blessed is the man who trusts in You!” In what kind of God did the psalmist trust?

(1) The psalmist trusted in God who is “our shield”.

Look at Psalms 84:9 – “Behold our shield, O God, And look upon the face of Your anointed.” The psalmist trusted in God more and more as the shield of the church, as there were many pains and difficulties like a valley of tears on this journey toward the temple of Zion. This is what the psalmist said: “My shield is with God, Who saves the upright in heart” (7:10).

(2) The psalmist trust in God who gives grace and glory.

Look at Psalms 84:11 – “For the LORD God is a sun and shield; The LORD gives grace and glory; No good thing does He withhold from those who walk uprightly.” The God the psalmist trusted in is the God who gives grace and glory, but doesn’t withhold anything good to those who walk uprightly. The psalmist trusted in such God.

This is what the hymn “Simply Trusting Every day” the verse 1 says: “Simply trusting ev’ry day, Trusting through a stormy way; Even when my faith is small, Trusting Jesus, that is all. Trusting as the moments fly, Trusting as the days go by; Trusting Him whate’er befall, Trusting Jesus, that is all.” We must trust only in God who is our shield and who gives grace without sparing good things and glory to those who act honestly. As the years go by, we must rely more and more on only Jesus in the midst of our fragile faith that we realize our weakness and helplessness every time we encounter difficult things. Those who trust only in the Lord are blessed people.

You are blessed people who come up and longing for the Lord's house in this rainy evening and praying and praising the Lord. You who cry out to God and receive strength from the Lord and have the highways to Zion in your heart are blessed people. As the years go by, you who trust in the Lord more and more are the blessed people. The Lord is so pleased with you. The Lord loves you so much. Your service is a beautiful praise. Your dedication is a fragrant prayer. Wherever you go, the name of the Lord will be exalted.

With sincerely wish that we become a channel of blessing to other as “The blessed people”,

James Kim (Being strengthened by the Lord and rejoicing over the blessed people who have the highways to Zion in their hearts)

Day 40: Do you know the time?

“And do this, understanding the present time. The hour has come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature” (Romans 13:11-14).

What time do you think it is now?

My Korean is short and I often make typos, so there are many times when my Korean is wrong. One of them, whenever I made a bulletin for Palm Sunday, there were many times when I wrote “종료”(which means “end”) instead of “종려”(which means “Palm”). However, I am not good at Korean, but for some reason, whenever I greet Palm (“종려”) Sunday like this, I cannot help but think of Jesus' death on the cross, which is the end (“종료”) of Jesus in this earth. In fact, Palm Sunday is the first day of Passion Week. Palm Sunday today, Passion Week from tomorrow, and Good Friday commemorating the crucifixion of Jesus on Friday. What do we think when we celebrate Palm Sunday every year?

I meditated on the word of God under the heading, ‘The God who makes beautiful in His time,’ focusing on Ecclesiastes 3:1-14. Among those words of meditation, in Ecclesiastes 3:1, King Solomon says, “There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven.” Indeed, we have to think about what time it is now that God is in the process of fulfilling His purpose.

In today's text Romans 13:11, the apostle Paul continues to write letters to the saints in Rome and says: “Do this, knowing the time, that it is already the hour for you to awaken from sleep; for now salvation is nearer to us than when we believed.” What is the “time” he is talking about? He is talking about the time in two ways:

First, that time is the time of the second coming of the Lord.

The time we are living in now is the time when the day of the Lord's return is near. Now, Paul is telling the saints in Rome, and to us who are meditating on this word, that this is the time when the second coming of the Lord is imminent. What does it mean that the return of the Lord is near? It means that the time of salvation for us who believe in Jesus is near (v. 11). In other words, now is the time of the Lord's return, and the word that the time of the Lord's return is near is the time of our salvation. In other words, it means that the final stage of our redemption, glory, is near (v. 11). And the word that our salvation is closer than when we first believed means that since we may die at some point and meet the Lord, we are closer to meeting the Lord as much time has passed since we started to believe in Jesus. So, what must we do?

Second, the time is when we must wake up from sleep.

Paul is saying that the time has come for you and me to wake up from sleep, as the time for the return of Jesus is near. What does Paul mean when we should wake up from sleep? The meaning is that now is the time to wake up from the sleep of sin (Park). In this era in which we are living, as the Lord's return is near, it is a time when sins reach the extreme. Pointing to this, Paul says, “The night is nearly over; the day is almost here” (v. 12). Here, the word “the day is almost here” means that the second coming of Jesus, who is the light, is near, and the word “The night is nearly over” means that the night of sin has deepened in this world as much as the second coming of the Lord is near. In other words, in this era in which you and I are living, the night of sin in this world has deepened because the second coming of the Lord is near.

At this time when the second coming of the Lord is near, how should we live? How should we live a life of faith at this time when our salvation is closer than when we first believed?

(1) We must love one another (vv. 8-10).

If we look at Romans 13:11 in the original Greek text, the phrase “Καὶ τοῦτο” is written at the beginning of this verse. The English NASB Bible translates this phrase as “And this do.” This phrase is ‘Also, you will have to do more of this’ (Park). What does “this” refer to here? What more should we do? It refers to ‘loving one another’ as we have already meditated on in Romans 13:8-10. What does it mean? It means that we must love each other more sincerely, knowing that the time in which we are living now is when the return of the Lord is near. In particular, as Jesus prophesied about the end of the last days in Matthew 24:12, at this time when people's love is growing cold, we must strive to love each other with the Lord's love. Indeed, how are we to love one another? We are to owe nothing to anyone except to love one another. And we must keep the commandments of God: Do not commit adultery, do not murder, do not steal, do not covet, etc.

(2) We must put aside the deeds of darkness.

Look at Romans 13:12 – “The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light.” At this time when our salvation is closer than when we first believed, we must realize that the night of sin has deepened and put aside all the works of darkness in this world. What are the things of darkness in this world that we must put aside? In today's text, Romans 13:13, apostle Paul says three things:

(a) We must put aside the works of darkness, orgies and drunkenness.

What are orgies? The original Greek word “κόμος, kōmos” was originally used in the course of a festival honoring Dionysus, the god of wine in Greek mythology. But later it came to be used negatively for excessive, unrestrained revelry, drinking revelry, and drinking parties (Cottrell). Eventually, when a person becomes dissolute, he gets drunk, loses his self-control, goes on a spree, and commits a sin. If we look at Ecclesiastes 2:3, King Solomon tried to please his body with wine while ruling his heart with wisdom in order to know what pleasure is. What was his conclusion? He confessed that his efforts to obtain pleasure from drunkenness were futile and useless (v. 11). What is the meaning of orgies and drunkenness? Are there any benefits? As we already know, Paul says in Ephesians 5:18, “Do not get drunk, for this is debauchery.” He also says that debauchery and drunkenness are works of the flesh (Gal. 5:19). We must put off the work of the flesh. Why? It is because the return of the Lord is near. It is because our salvation is closer than when we first believed.

(b) We must put aside the works of darkness, sexual immorality and debauchery.

The world we live in is like Sodom and Gomorrah. In this world full of sexual immorality and debauchery, why is it so full of sexual immorality and debauchery? I found the cause in Romans 1:24, which we have already meditated on: “Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another.” Why did God do this? The reason is that people, being proud of their own wisdom (v. 22), exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for idols in the form of corruptible man, and of four-footed animals and crawling creatures (v. 23). Looking at Romans 13:8-10, we must keep God's commandments in order to love one another, and one of those commandments is “Do not commit adultery.” After saying that, Paul says in Romans 13:13, that at this time when Jesus' return is near, we must put aside the works of darkness, and one of the works of darkness is sexual promiscuity and sensuality. Here, the Greek word “fornication” “κοίτη (koitē)” literally means “bed.” This word refers to having sex, and in today's text, it is used in the plural, not the singular, and it refers to sexual promiscuity, sexual excesses, and harlotries (Cottrell). And “sensuality” is an act of disrespectful manners and lust that appears as disrespectful words or unclean actions (Park). Paul gave this exhortation not only to the saints in Rome, but also to the saints in Thessalonica. Look at 1 Thessalonica 4:3-4: “It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; that each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honorable.” God's will is our holiness. We must not pursue lust like the people of the world. This is a worldly thing. As the time of our salvation draws near, we must forsake these works of the flesh.

(c) We must put aside the works of darkness, strife and jealousy.

What is strife? Strife refers to a quarrelsome temperament, a spirit of contention and contention over trifles. Strife reflects fighting with hostile competitiveness to walk the path we want even if it harms the other person (Cottrell). Because of this fighting spirit, we are jealous of each other in human relationships. And because of envy, in the midst of strife, we eventually plan the works of the flesh rather than the works of the Spirit. Therefore, Paul is telling the saints in Rome and you and I to put off the works of the flesh and the works of darkness.

Third and last, at this time when the second coming of the Lord is near, we must put on the armor of light.

Look at Romans 13:12 – “The night is almost gone, and the day is near Therefore let us lay aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light.” What is the armor of light that we must wear that Paul is talking about here? In two ways, Paul is giving us a lesson in today's text:

(1) The armor of light we must put on is “behave properly as in the day.”

Look at Romans 13:13a – “Let us behave properly as in the day,” In other words, the armor of light that you and I must wear is to get rid of the sinful night life and live a day life. What does day life refer to here? It refers to a well-behaved life. And acting neatly refers to actions in an orderly manner (Park). The conduct of those who believe in Jesus must be modest. In other words, there must be order in our actions. Why? Of course, we must obey the command in today's text, but the fundamental reason is that our God is not a God of confusion, but only a God of peace (1 Cor. 14:33). That's why Paul says: "Let all things be done properly and in order" (1 Cor. 14:40).

(2) The armor of light we must put on is the Lord Jesus Christ.

Look at Romans 13:14 – “But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts.” What does it mean to put on the Lord Jesus Christ? In a word, it means sanctification. In other words, the word that we must put on the Lord Jesus Christ refers to the change that we who have been saved through faith become like Jesus (MacArthur). And the change to resemble Jesus means that you and I are becoming holy just as God is holy. I am reminded of the hymn “My Lord Has Garments so Wondrous Find”. Looking at the lyrics of this praise, it says that the clothes Jesus wore are wonderful (v. 1), precious (v. 3), and glorious (v. 4). We must put on this garment of glory of Jesus. At this time when the time of Jesus' return is near, we must put on the clothes of Jesus' glory and show the holiness and beauty of Jesus in this world.

Today, the first day of the Passion Week, we must meditate on the Lord, who is the Alpha and Omega, the Lord who is the beginning and the end, His suffering and death on the cross while offering Palm Sunday worship to God. In the midst of that, we have to think about what time is now. Like the word given today, we must realize that this is the time when the Lord's return is near, and our salvation is much closer than when we first believed. In the midst of that, we have to think about how we should live. At this time when the night of sin is deep and the return of Jesus, the light, is near, we must strive to love each other. And we must put off the works of darkness. We must get rid of orgies and drunkenness, sexual promiscuity and sensuality, strife and jealousy. Instead, we must put on the light armor. We must walk neatly as in the daytime. We must live in order. And we must put on the Lord Jesus Christ. We must be holy as Jesus is holy. Therefore, I hope and pray that we will all participate in the wedding banquet of the glorious Lamb of God on the day the Lord returns.

Praying, anticipating, and waiting for the day of glory,

James Kim (Amen. Lord, come quickly!)