

**The Kingdom of God is
The Kingdom of Opportunity!**

James Kim

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Introduction

The kingdom of God is the kingdom of the Lord, the Lord is the King, and is ruled by the Lord and reigned by the Lord.

The mission statement of our church, the Lord's church, Victory Presbyterian Church, that the Lord allows me to serve is "Build His Church, Build His Kingdom" (Mt. 16:18). The Lord, who is faithfully fulfilling this mission, is raising the Kingdom workers, which is the vision of our church. He is raising the Kingdom workers, by answering our prayers, who are the Christ-centered visionary leaders and sends them into this world to expand the Kingdom of God. The Lord is sending our church leaders to the nations and leading them to meet the precious young workers among the locals of the country, so that they could have a relationship like Apostle Paul and Timothy. Furthermore, the Lord is using our church to help them in ways, prayers and financial support, so that they can preach the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ to those parts of the country.

As the Lord's instruments, we pray to God as Jesus has taught us, "Your kingdom come Your will be done, On earth as it is in heaven" (Mt. 6:10). In other words, we are praying for the kingdom of God to come and for God's will to be done on earth where we live, as it is already done in heaven. As we pray for the kingdom of God to come on this earth, we want to remain faithful to our responsibilities of that prayer. We devote ourselves to living a life of first seeking His kingdom and His righteousness as Jesus said (v. 33). That is, we first seek the kingdom of God and the righteous Lord who is its King. We are committed to living in obedience to the Word of God by faith, under the reign of the Lord, King of the God's kingdom, for the sake of Jesus and His gospel (Mk. 8:35).

As I prayed for the kingdom of God to come on this earth, and devote myself to the Lord, the King of the God's kingdom, to be faithful in taking my responsibility, I thought, "The Kingdom of God is the Kingdom of opportunity." Under the title, I selected only few meditations on the words of God that I did so far and compiled them. I hope and pray that all of us who live in this wilderness-like world can experience that the Kingdom of God is the Kingdom of opportunity.

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James Kim

Time and Opportunity

I read an interesting article on CNN News last week. The article was written by a 35-year-old man named Mitchell Heidsman who lived at Harvard University's Camps apartment and committed suicide at 11 am on Saturday, September 18, the day of the Jewish Atonement (Yom Kippur). Before he took his own life, he wrote a 1,905-page suicide note. That note was called "Suicide Note". The Suicide Note mentions people like Socrates, Newton, Einstein, and also about the wisdom about freedom, nihilism, God, Judaism, Jewish symbols, Jewish IQ, and history of Anglo-Saxon. I have not read all of the notes, but one thing that I agreed with what he said was "Life is meaningless". As I was reading this in an Internet news article, the words of Ecclesiastes 1:2 came into my mind: "Meaningless! Meaningless!" says the Teacher. "Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless." I was saddened as I read the man who wrote "Life is meaningless" in his own suicide note and took his own life. The reason is that he may have realized the vanity of life, but he did not realize the meaning of life in Jesus and took his own life. If he understood the meaning of life in Jesus, he would surely have not committed suicide, and that he would have lived for the Lord by living the best of his life. And if he realized the meaning of life in Jesus and lived a meaningful life for the Lord, he would never have had a vain death. Rather, I think he could have met the beautiful death of the saints before God's sight.

I'm thinking a bit about "timing" these days. In other words, I think about those who are suffering from illness who try to live their best for the loved ones but when should they let go of the effort and leave the world comfortably. The reason is because of my beloved father-in-law. His doctor told me that he should prepare for the end. In some ways, it is advisable to give up on him and send him to the hospice program until the last day of his life in this earth because the doctor and the hospital cannot do any more medically. Nonetheless, my mother-in-law is doing her best for him since she loves him most dearly. So I came to think about timing. Of course, nobody know the timing exactly. The reason is that even though the doctor tells us to give up and make the final preparations, we who believe in Jesus can continue to pray for him by believing in the God of healing. And we pray because we do not know whether God will spare him or take him Home. One example is that when King David's first baby born to Bathsheba was sick, David fasted and prayed to God. He apparently received God's word through the prophet Nathan, "But because by doing this you have made the enemies of the LORD show utter contempt, the son born to you will die" (2 Sam. 12:14), he still fasted and pleaded with God for the child (v. 16). Why did he do that? This is what 2 Samuel 12:22 says: "... While the child was still alive, I fasted and wept. I thought, 'Who knows? The LORD may be gracious to me and let the child live.'"

When we look at Ecclesiastes 9:11, King Solomon said, "... but time and chance happen to them all." What is the meaning of this word? Before we know the meaning of this word, the first thing we need to know is that in God's sovereignty, there can be no coincidence. There is no coincidence as everything is happening in God's sovereignty and providence. We believe that everything is done in the sovereign will of God. So I personally do not accept the word "good luck". Then what does it mean by "chance"? According to the Internet Naver dictionary, chance is defined as 'appropriate time or occasion for doing something'. And the Internet Naver Korean-Chinese dictionary says chance is 'the expected time, the appropriate time for doing work.' Generally speaking, what do we usually expect when we catch an opportunity and work? Isn't it a success? What should those who wait for a chance to succeed do? They need to prepare. They must prepare their own abilities in order to be successful by making the most of their opportunities when they come.

In Ecclesiastes 9:11, King Solomon speaks of five kinds of prepared people, or people who are capable. We can say that these are people who are well prepared in developing their own abilities for their own life opportunities. Those five kinds of people are:

(1) They are the fast racers.

What do the fast racers want? Of course it would be the first place in the race. To do so, the fast racers train themselves to run faster. And when they are given a chance to race, they will do their best and run hard towards the goal line. The reason is so they can enter the goal line and make the first place.

(2) They are the warriors.

What would the warriors want? Of course it will be to win the war. And to win the war, the soldiers have to be truly brave soldiers. That will require a lot of training.

(3) They are wise men.

The wise men should be able to use their knowledge effectively in their lives so they can contribute to the living. I am sure there will be no wise men who want to live their lives without being able to afford themselves with their useless knowledge.

(4) There are the discerning people.

Those who are discerning will also work hard with their smart brains to earn a lot of money and be rich.

(5) They are the intellectual people.

They want to be acknowledged and graced by many people with their knowledge and hard work.

But the problem is that even though these five types of prepared and capable people expect success in their own way, and seize the opportunity and do their best, the results cannot be guaranteed. This is what King Solomon says in Ecclesiastes 9:11 – “I again saw under the sun that the race is not to the swift and the battle is not to the warriors, and neither is bread to the wise nor wealth to the discerning nor favor to men of ability; for time and chance overtake them all.” No matter how fast the racer is running he may not win the race. No matter how brave the warrior is he may not win the war. The meaning of this is that we cannot understand and explain it. In other words, all of these things happen as a result of God's intervention, and we cannot explain them (Park Yun-sun). This is what Dr. Park said: ‘Therefore, man should not be arrogant as he will succeed by self-sufficiency, even if he has the necessary conditions there to achieve a certain purpose. He must always look to the Lord.’

There is arrogant in our human sinful nature that keeps on saying that we succeed with our own efforts. For example, our arrogant hearts want to boast that we have made a lot of money with our own strength and ability. But this is what Deuteronomy 8:17-18 says: “Otherwise, you may say in your heart, 'My power and the strength of my hand made me this wealth.' But you shall remember the LORD your God, for it is He who is giving you power to make wealth that He may confirm His covenant which He swore to your fathers, as it is this day.” The Israelites did not gain much wealth because of their ability. But God fulfilled the covenant that he made to their fathers. God has to give us power to make wealth. So the apostle James says in James 4:16 – “But as it is, you boast in your arrogance; all such boasting is evil.” Why are we not to boast in our arrogance? This is because the day of disaster

can happen to us unexpectedly. Look at Ecclesiastes 9:12 – “Moreover, man does not know his time: like fish caught in a treacherous net and birds trapped in a snare, so the sons of men are ensnared at an evil time when it suddenly falls on them.” What does it mean? It means that even though we have done our best to prepare for hard work and strive to do our best, unexpected things can happen to us. What is that unexpected things? It is a day of calamity that comes suddenly. The Bible tells us that the day of disaster can come suddenly, as if a fish caught in the net and the bird caught in the snare, and we cannot do anything with our own power. What should we do then?

We must remember. There is a time for everything (3:1-8). There is a proper time and procedure for every matter (8:6). As we remember these words of truth, the truth that we should not forget in the days of disasters we come upon is the words of Ephesians 3:11 that God makes everything beautiful in its time (Wiersbe). Although all the things that are happening in our lives are not going as we expected but is painful and difficult like a day of disaster, we should not put down a hope in the Lord. We must believe that everything that happens in our lives is happening in God's sovereignty. Furthermore, we must believe that God will ultimately make everything beautiful through all of this. We must believe that, even though in our human sense, the plight of the disaster is so dark and not at all beautiful, God who loves us will work together even in this calamity to make good in the sight of God. In doing so, we will see the glory of God.

In John's Gospel, Jesus often said many times that ‘My hour has not come yet’ (2:4, 7: 6, 8, 30, 8:20, 12:4, 23, 27, 13:1, 17:1). What does Jesus mean by "my time"? That is the time when Jesus was crucified and died to redeem us. In other words, the time of Jesus refers to the time when glory can be revealed as the Son of God. The Bible promised us that Jesus, who died and resurrected, will surely come again. The Bible says that only God knows that time (Mt. 24:36). Then God will make all of us who are living in this dark world and all the people of God beautiful with the completion of salvation. I hope and pray that we be ready for that time.

Remembering the grace of God, who beautifully showed the glory of God through the death of the first baby,

Pastor James Kim

Crisis is an opportunity!

How should we view the crisis in our lives?

When we encounter a crisis, we often think, "Why did this crisis come to me?" When we do that, we sometimes blame another person for thinking that the crisis has come to us because of that person. If we do so, then we tend to focus on the crisis that we have faced. As a result, we don't see others other than ourselves in crisis. And we are even more depressed in despair by falling into the swamp of crisis and losing the desire of salvation. Is this the reaction of the crisis that God who controls the crisis wants from us?

The lesson is that crisis is a good opportunity to hear God's voice.

When we look at the context of Acts 27:23-25, we see Apostle Paul and the 275 people who aboard with him faced a crisis. The reason why the crisis came was that the centurion of the Augustan cohort named Julius (v. 1), who was escorting Paul to Italy, believed more in the words of the pilot and the captain of the ship than Paul's words (v. 11). Here, the Paul's word was "with difficulty sailing" (v. 8) "the voyage was not dangerous" (v. 9). So Paul said to them, "Men, I perceive that the voyage will certainly be with damage and great loss, not only of the cargo and the ship, but also of our lives" (v. 10). But the centurion Julius didn't listen to Paul's words, but listened to the words of the pilot and the captain and sailed on (vv. 11-12). At that time, the centurion Julius, the pilot and the captain of the ship thought that since a moderate south wind came up they supposed that they had attained their purpose (v. 13). In other words, the centurion Julius, the pilot and the captains thought that their decision was right. "But before very long there rushed down from the land a violent wind, called Euraquilo" (v. 14). As a result, the ship was caught in it and couldn't face the wind (v. 15). Because of this crisis, the people were afraid (v. 17), and later their hope of being saved was gradually abandoned (v. 20). In the midst of this, Paul said to them, "Yet now I urge you to keep up your courage, for there will be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship" (v. 22). How could Paul have said this? It was because he heard through the messenger of God, "Do not be afraid, Paul; you must stand before Caesar; and behold, God has granted you all those who are sailing with you" (v. 24). In other words, Paul heard the voice of God in crisis. This is the first lesson that today's text gives us. The lesson is that crisis is a good opportunity to hear God's voice.

What do you think? Do you think the crisis is a good opportunity to hear God's voice? Have you ever heard the voice of God in a crisis before? When I reflect back my life, I think I heard a lot of voices of my own voice or of situation, rather than listening to God's voice in my life crisis. When my first baby was lying in the intensive care unit due to illness, I looked at the sick baby and let the situation to speak to me rather than listening to God's voice. Then, after asking whether to let the baby die slowly or die quickly from the doctor in charge, I went home and the next morning God gave me the words of Psalm 63:3, "Because Your lovingkindness is better than life, My lips will praise You." Through this word, God taught that God's eternal love is better than the 55 days life of my first baby Charis, and that I and my wife should praise Him with our lips. So my wife and I decided to let Charis go quickly and let her doctor know our decision. Then, I called my parents, my siblings and had worship. After worship, Charis' nurse took all the tubes out and turned off all the machines connected to my baby. And she fell asleep in my arms. Then, after cremating the baby, sprinkling the baby's ash into the water, as my wife and I were returning to the land, the indwelling Holy Spirit powerfully work in my heart to open my lips and praised God the gospel song "My Savior's Love". All of this was the grace that God let us enjoy in the midst of the crisis.

The second lesson is that crisis is a good opportunity to love our neighbors.

We become self-centered when we face crisis. When we meet a crisis, we become self-absorbed. My wife and I were like that when my first baby Charis was in the children hospital intensive care unit for 55 days. I didn't know I was self-absorbed until my wife told me that we seemed to be "self-absorbed". At that time, even though I knew that my fourth uncle and my youngest uncle were in a very difficult situation with their business, I was concentrating on my first baby. And my excuse was that the life of a person is more important than a difficult situation of a company. But this was because of my insecurities and immaturity and I couldn't see the crisis as an opportunity. But a truly mature Christian can use his or her crisis as an opportunity to love his or her neighbors. That is what the apostle Paul did.

Apostle Paul loved his neighbor as Jesus commanded when he met the crisis. He encouraged the 275 people who were with him (v. 37), when their lives were in danger. Paul urges them to keep up their courage (vv. 22, 25). He was able to do so because he heard the voice of God through the messenger of God, and he believed God that it would turn out exactly as he had been told (v. 25). In other words, because Paul believed what he heard from the angel of God, "Do not be afraid, Paul; you must stand before Caesar; and behold, God has granted you all those who are sailing with you" (v. 24), he was able to encourage the 275 people who were with him to keep up their courage. Those who have confidence in salvation can reassure those who are afraid of the uncertainty of salvation.

Those Christians who have received the God's saving love reach out to those who have no hope of salvation and share Christ's love. Those Christians who enjoy the God's saving love obey Jesus's command "Love your neighbor as yourself" by comforting, exhorting and encouraging those who don't enjoy His saving love. In other words, those Christians who experience the Gods' saving love and have assurance of salvation make their crisis as an opportunity to love their neighbors.

The third and last lesson is that the crisis is a good opportunity to experience the glory of God's salvation.

Apostle Paul comforted those who had no hope of salvation because he had confidence in salvation. In the assurance and hope of salvation, he encouraged them to take some food, saying, "not a hair from the head of any of you will perish" (v. 34). After he said this, Paul took bread and gave thanks to God in the presence of all. And he broke it and they began to eat (v. 35). All the others were encouraged and ate the food (v. 36). How amazing is this? How can we thank God in the midst of a crisis at the crossroads of life and death?

We Christians can give thanks to God even in circumstances that seem ungrateful. The reason is that we have experienced the God's saving love and we have a hope and assurance of salvation. Furthermore, we can thank God even in circumstances that seem ungrateful for us because we see the glory of God's salvation and experience the presence of God in His actualizing the hope of our salvation. We cannot but give thanks, praise, and worship God when we experience the glory of God's salvation. In the end, the crisis in our lives is a good opportunity for us to be raised as true worshipers whom God seeks. In other words, through crisis in our lives, God is raising us up as true worshipers who give thanks to God.

We must take the crisis as an opportunity. We must make the crisis in our lives as the opportunity to hear the voice of God. We must be quick to listen to God's voice in the crisis. Also, we must make the crisis as the opportunity to love our neighbors. We must reach out to our neighbors in crisis and comfort them and encourage them with faith in God that it will turn out exactly as we have been told. In particular, we should give hope and assurance of salvation to our beloved neighbors who are suffering in despair with the assurance and hope of salvation even in crisis. Finally, we must make the crisis in our lives as the good opportunity to experience the glory of God's salvation. Our God is a good God. Our God uses even our crises and works together to do good. Our God is a faithful God who fulfills the promises which He has given to us. And this faithful God is the God of salvation

who will surely deliver us from the crisis. Let us all experience the glory of God's salvation in expectation, waiting, and praying for the grace of salvation.

Who wants to take crises as opportunities in faith in God, looking in situations where they can't be appreciated,

Pastor James Kim

Impossible is an opportunity

Although the French hero Napoleon said, “Impossible is a word to be found only in the dictionary of fools,” I want to say, “There are so many impossible in my life.” It is because I realize more and more that as I live my life, I can't do a lot of thing with my own strength and ability. For example, I cannot change my bad habits, I don't act as I think, and my heart is not changing as I want to. I cannot help but to admit that they are so many things that I cannot do with my own strengthen and ability. Is this just it? No. There are so many things I can't do as I live in this world. How about you? Don't we have so many things that we cannot do with our own strengthen and our ability? How many things do we fail to fix and overcome? It can be very discouraging to face these realities. It is frustrating and sometimes even despairing. What should we do? What should we do when we encounter something impossible?

One day, while I was reading the Bible, the book of Numbers, I read Numbers chapters 13-14. The two chapters show that two of the twelve leaders who came back after exploring the land of Canaan, Caleb and Joshua, reported by faith, but the other ten leaders reported a bad report which was the report of unbelief. In other words, these ten leaders spread among the Israelites the bad report about the land by saying, “The land we explored devours those living in it. All the people we saw there are of great size. We saw the Nephilim there (the descendants of Anak come from the Nephilim). We seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes, and we looked the same to them” (13:32-33). As a result, all the people of the community raised their voices and wept aloud and grumbled against Moses and Aaron (14:1-2). And they said to each other, “We should choose a leader and go back to Egypt” (v. 4). Hearing this, the Lord told Moses, “How long will these people treat me with contempt? How long will they refuse to believe in me, in spite of all the miraculous signs I have performed among them?” (v. 11) As I meditated on these words, it seemed like God was asking me, ‘How long will you not believe in me?’ When I consider that unbelief is a sin that despises and distrust God and eventually leads to disobedience to God's commandments, I realize that disbelief is not the sin that should be taken lightly.

I personally like to sing the hymn “Encamped Along the Hills of Light”. I especially like the chorus lyrics: “Faith is the victory! Faith is the victory! Oh, glorious victory, That over-comes the world.” The reason why I like this hymn is because faith in the Lord is the only way we can win the spiritual battle. What is faith? We can find the answer in Hebrews 11:1 – “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.” Faith makes us to hope and believe against all hope (Rom. 4:18). Faith means ‘believe, trust’ and shows clearly that there is the object of faith. The three important elements of faith in the New Testament are to recognize and fully acknowledge the grace God has shown, to give up and have fellowship with the Lord, to rely on the Lord completely, and to undoubtedly trust and hope in the Lord, the God of salvation. However, this belief is not the emotion we create. It is our entire response to God's revelation of His Word. Faith makes us see things we can't see. The Bible says that faith is “the conviction of things not seen” (Heb. 11:1). Faith is the inner conviction of things not seen. It is inner conviction that God clearly does what He has promised. But this conviction also comes from God. It means that we cannot just believe in God by saying "I believe! I believe!" We cannot be forced to believe. Faith causes us to do things we can't do. All those men and women of faith in Hebrews chapter 11 are people who have done by faith in God what we cannot do with our own strength and ability. The ancestors of our faith are those who worked with the conviction that “With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God” (Mk. 10:27). Faith is grace and blessing that is from and through God. This faith creates new works and opens up the impossible as possible (Internet).

Reading Romans 4:9-17, I thought of Abraham's faith in two ways:

(1) Abraham's faith was faith in God who gives life to the dead.

Look at Romans 4:17a – “As it is written: "I have made you a father of many nations." He is our father in the sight of God, in whom he believed--the God who gives life to the dead” Abraham believed that God would be able to raise his son Isaac even from the dead, even as he reached out his hand and took the knife to slay Isaac as God commanded (Gen. 22:10, Heb. 11:17, 19).

(2) Abraham's faith was faith in God who calls into being that which does not exist.

Look at Romans 4:17b – “... calls into being that which does not exist.” Although Abraham didn't have a son even when he was around 100 years old, he nevertheless believed in God's promise to him, that his descendants would be like the stars at the heavens and the sand which is by the seashore (Gen. 15:5; Heb. 11:12).

In short, I would like to say that Abraham's faith is ‘the faith against all hope’ (Rom. 4:18).

What was Abraham's hopeless situation? Look at Romans 4:19 – “... 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.” In other words, the hopeless situation that Abraham faced was that medically it was impossible for him and his wife to have a baby. In fact, their bodies were good as dead. What did Abraham hope in the Lord in this impossible situation, when the hope of having a baby was impossible in human perspective? It was the fulfillment of the word of promise God gave to Abraham. The word of that promise is said in Romans 4:18 (quot: Gen. 15:5): “... So shall your offspring be.” Although Abraham knew that his body and his wife Sarah's body were as good as dead (v. 19), he believed in God who could raise the dead would fulfill His promise to him by giving him descendants and they would prosper like the stars of the sky and the sand of the sea (Gen. 15:5; Heb. 11:12). In this seemingly truly impossible situation, Abraham's faith was not weakened (v. 19) but rather he was strengthened in faith and gave glory to God (v. 20). 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.” What an amazing faith? Normally, the harder the situation, the weaker the faith would be, and the heart would shake more and more in doubt as to the God's promise. But in Abraham's case, he was strengthened in his faith even in the impossible situation. How was this possible? It was because Abraham was fully persuaded by God. Look at Romans 4:21 – “being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised.” God gave Abraham the word of promise and persuaded him to believe it firmly. Thus, in the impossible situation, Abraham became more solid in faith. This solid faith of Abraham was credited to him as righteousness before God (v. 22). In other words, Abraham didn't have his righteousness, but God's righteousness was given to him only by the faith that God graciously gave him. These words were written not just for Abraham alone (v. 23), but also for us, “to whom God will credit righteousness” (v. 24). The Bible writes about Abraham, the father of faith, who believed against all hope for not only the Roman church saints, “who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead” (v. 24) but also for us who live in this age. What do we believe? We believe in the death of Jesus on the cross and his resurrection. More specifically, the object of faith we believe is Jesus who “was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification” (v. 25). In short, we believe in the death and resurrection of Jesus. By that faith we are justified by God. And now we enjoy the blessing of justification.

Do you believe that Jesus died on the cross and resurrected in three days from the grave? Do you believe that Jesus died on the cross to forgive all your sins? Do you believe that Jesus rose from the dead to justify us? Those who have heard the gospel of Jesus Christ and believe in Jesus' death and resurrection have already been regarded as righteous to God. And God, who raised Jesus from the dead, is leading us to the heaven in this hopeless

world with faith in Jesus Christ and with the hope of resurrection and of eternal inheritance. I hope and pray that our hope will be greater because we believe in the Savior's covenant even when everything that we believed in this world is cut off. "When He shall come with trumpet sound, Oh, may I then in Him be found; Dressed in His righteousness alone, Faultless to stand before the throne" (Hymn "My Hope is Built on Nothing Less" v. 4).

Only by faith,

Pastor James Kim

Failure is an opportunity

One day during the morning prayer meeting, I praised God, “Yield not to Temptation”: (v. 1) “Yield not to temptation for yielding is sin, Each victory will help you some other to win; Fight man-fully onward, dark passions sub-due, Look ever to Jesus, He'll carry you through. Ask the Savior to help you, Comfort, strengthen and keep you; He is willing to aid you, He will carry you through.” The reason I offered this praise to God was because I believe that the life of faith is spiritual battle. And I praised God because this spiritual battle required our Savior's help, comfort and strength. I remember before I entered the seminary my father told me that I had to guard against three temptations: money, woman, and fame. I also remembered “the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does” in 1 John 2:16. Satan frequent attacks us in order to make us to stumble with these temptations. And we see and hear us falling into these temptations and sin against God. Clearly, we want to win this spiritual battle against ourselves, sin, the world, and Satan. But why do we keep falling into the Satan’s temptations and sin against God and hide God's glory? Why do we keep on failing?

In Matthew 26 we see Peter denying Jesus three times. When Jesus told his disciples, “This very night you will all fall away on account of me, for it is written: ‘I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered’” (v. 31), Peter said to Jesus, “Even if all fall away on account of you, I never will” (v. 33), “Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you” (v. 35). Why did Peter say these words? It was because Peter didn’t have in mind the things of God, but the things of men (Mt. 16:23). Although Jesus had to die on the cross to redeem the sins of God’s chosen people, Peter didn’t want Jesus to die (v. 22). In other words, Peter didn’t want the God's will to be done by believing and obeying God's written words, but instead he wanted his will to be done. As a result, Peter denied Jesus three times and sinned against God. He failed. Although Jesus clearly said, “This very night you will all fall away on account of me” (26:31), Peter didn’t believe in the fulfillment of that word. I think Peter refused to believe His word to be fulfilled. I think he was drawn to his thoughts, feelings, and wills rather than believing in God's Word and being led by it. As a result, he denied Jesus three times. Another reason why he denied Jesus three times was that he didn’t watch and pray so that he would not fall into temptation as Jesus said (v. 41). Peter was sleeping (vv. 40, 43) when Jesus was overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death (v. 38) and was crying out to his Heavenly Father (v. 39). How could Peter, who was willing to die with Jesus and who said he would never disown Him, fall in sleep when Jesus was about to be crucified according to the will of Heavenly Father, saying, “My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me” (v. 38)? Shouldn’t Peter watch and pray with Jesus who was about to be crucified on the cross? How could he fall in sleep in that crucial moment? The reason was because as Jesus said “The spirit is willing, but the body is weak” (v. 41). In the end, Peter disobeyed the Jesus' word, “Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation” (v. 41), and he “denied it before them all” (v. 70), “denied it again, with an oath (v. 72), even called down “curses on himself” and denied Jesus (v. 74). When he denied Jesus three times, immediately a rooster crowed (v. 74). “Then Peter remembered the word Jesus had spoken: “Before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times.” And he went outside and wept bitterly” (v. 75). After Peter saw Jesus’ crucifixion, he went back to his old job, fishermen (Jn. 21). Wasn’t he supposed to live as a fisher of men instead of fisherman? How could he go back to the fisherman? Was it okay for him to do that? What did Jesus do to Peter who denied Jesus three times, who failed Him?

I still remember a pastor who preached the Word of God based on John 21:15ff. Jesus asked Peter, who failed Jesus three times, “Simon son of John, do you truly love me?” three times (vv. 15, 16 17). And then Jesus gave him greater mission than before [“I will make you fishers of men (Mt. 4:19)], that is “Feed my lambs”

(Jn.21:15), “Take care of my sheep” (v. 16), “Feed my sheep” (v. 18). Why did Jesus give the greater mission to Peter, who had denied Him three times? Do you understand? Isn’t this God’s grace?

Not only did the Lord give Peter, who had failed, freedom from sin after he mourned and truly repented (vv. 15ff), the greater mission, He also fulfilled Peter’s determination that “Even if all fall away on account of you, I never will” (Mt. 26:33), “Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you” (v. 35) after He filled him with His Spirit on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4) when he prayed together with a group number about 120 people (1:15). What a grace and love of God? Having experienced this grace and love, Apostle Peter said: “The end of all things is near. Therefore be clear minded and self-controlled so that you can pray” (1 Pet. 4:7), “Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings” (5:8-9). What should we do?

At the early Morning Prayer meeting today, I shared my sins that God revealed and repented with those who came to the prayer meeting. After I preached the word of God, my heart was filled with his grace and I had to shed tears. I am amazed by God’s grace of not forsaking me but forgiving me and giving me a greater mission to such sinner like me who not only keep on denying Jesus, but also seeking my own will instead of God’s will, not watching and praying in order not to fall into temptation but sleeping and keep on failing and hiding God’s glory. My heart was filled with tears when I thought of God’s wonderful grace and His unfailing love. I just thanked God for His grace and love. And I had to confess that I came thus far by His grace alone. By that grace, I prayed that I could live until the day of meeting the Lord face to face.

“I will call on him as long as I live” (Ps. 116: 2),

Pastor James Kim

Weakness is an opportunity

I became a pastor without knowing anything. My experience of associate pastor is only one year. It is also an experience that I have been serving as a pastor for only one year while my father is serving as pastor in Victory Presbyterian Church where I grew up all along. And after one year, I was burnout and disobeyed my father's word and fled to Korea like Jonah. When I went to Korea, I served as an educational part-time pastor in Seohyun Church, responsible for English Ministry and newly wedded couple group. And I only served there about two years and nine months. Of course, I know that being a pastor is not just an experience. But that was how much I was lack in not only experience but a lot of thing. In year 2003, the Lord gave me the promise of Matthew 16:18 through the guest speaker at the church renewal pastor association retreat, so I came back to Victory Presbytery Church again. And my father retired and I became a new senior pastor. It is already more than 15 years ago. When I think about the past years, I still remember what my wife said to me: 'James, you have changed'. My wife told me that I changed after I became a senior pastor. Not only I didn't deny what she said, but I couldn't deny it. That's because I knew I was different. For some reason, the position of being a senior pastor seemed to have made me into someone else. When I saw myself, I couldn't speak with my brothers and sisters in the Lord as before, and I couldn't even have fellowship with them. Instead, I stayed in my shepherd room most time. So I wondered why I was like that. I couldn't believe what the senior pastor position could do to me. I think one of the reasons was the pressure being a senior pastor. I think there were many mental pressures in particular of being senior pastor. As a senior pastor, I felt more responsibility than ever, and I felt that I had a lot of pressure on myself. Often I had more things to worry about and a lot of stress that made my heart very heavy. To put it another way, there were a lot of daily pressure before me and even now too. And yesterday night as I was preparing for the Morning Prayer meeting, I happened to read 2 Corinthians 11:28.

In 2 Corinthians 11:28 we can see that Apostle Paul facing daily pressure. It was a concern for all the churches. Paul had intense concern about the weak believers led into sin. Look at 2 Corinthians 11:29 – “Who is weak without my being weak? Who is led into sin without my intense concern?” In such Paul's intense concern and worries, there was fear. Paul was afraid that, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, Satan might tempt the believers to be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ (v. 3). He was afraid that the believers might depart from the true gospel of Jesus Christ that he preached and might accept a different gospel (v. 4). The reason why he had to worry about this was because there were false apostles who disguised themselves as apostles of Christ and were deceiving the church members (v. 13). Since Satan disguised himself as an angel of light, it wasn't surprising for Paul that if his servants also disguised themselves as servants of righteousness (vv. 14-15). And Paul was afraid that Satan and his servants would deceive the believers and would make them to depart from the truth and their faith. Because of this, there was the daily pressure on Paul of concern for all the churches (v. 28).

We the senior pastors must have this kind of pressure. We must have this daily pressure of concern for our church members. We must worry and be afraid that disguised Satan and his servants may deceive our church members, especially those who are weak in faith, and make them to depart from the truth and their faith. Of course, besides this concern, there are many other concerns when we are in ministry. But what we need to worry about most is their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Our greatest interest must be in their salvation. We should be very interested in whether our beloved brothers and sisters in Christ are standing firm in their faith. In doing so, I am sure there are many worries and fears because of the daily pressure of concern for them. But I believe that the Lord will restore our souls and will refresh us. The Lord will bring revival in our hearts.

Apostle Paul was afraid that there might be quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, factions, slander, gossip, arrogance and disorder among the Corinthian church saints (12:20). Also, he was afraid that they might be impurity, sexual sin and debauchery in which they had indulged (v. 21). Furthermore, after these sins, Paul was afraid that he would be grieved over many who had sinned earlier and had not repented (v. 21). Because of these concerns and fears, Paul's heart was pressured. In the meantime, Paul realized his own weakness. And he went further and boasted his weakness (11:30). In addition to boasting, Paul delighted in weakness for Christ's sake (12:10).

I wonder how we can boast and rejoice our own weakness when we face daily the pressure of our concern for our church. Personally, I often feel discouraged and distressed in disappointment by myself when God reveals my weaknesses. Whenever I experience this, I speak the word of God Psalms 43:5 to my soul: "Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God" Sometimes, my soul is still downcast and my heart is still discouraged even though I pray according to Psalms 43:5. Then my heart hurts and I refuse to be comforted by anyone. However, the Bible says that Paul boasted his weaknesses and rejoiced (11:30, 12:10). How is this possible?

When there is daily pressure on our concern for the church, we should consider doing these seven things:

(1) Pray:

When our heart is depressed due to anxiety and worry, we must come to God in prayer by realizing and acknowledging our own weaknesses. When we go to God in prayer, we must come to God in faith that God's power is perfected in our weakness. And we must seek for the full power of God. And we must seek his sufficient grace.

(2) Put your hope in God:

We can be discouraged and despaired by the weakness of our hearts that is being pressed down and is pressuring us. Nevertheless, in despair we should make it an opportunity to seek God. Like the psalmist, we must cry out to our own soul, "Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God" (Ps. 43:5). In other words, we must look to God in anxiety and discouragement. Our hope is only the Lord Jesus Christ.

(3) Preservation:

When we are concerned about the faith of our dear brothers and sisters in Christ in the church, we must offer them to God in prayers. We must believe that God will protect them from false pastors and false teachers. The church is the Lord's church. The Lord builds His church (Mt. 16:18). And the Lord will protect His church.

(4) Press on :

This is what Paul said in Philippians 3:14 – "I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus." Outwardly, Paul considered preaching the gospel more important than his life (Acts 20:24). Inwardly, he existed in this world for the progress and joy of the faith of the church saints (Phil. 1:24). Even when we are pressured due to our concern for the church and the saints, we must press on toward the goal sense of calling and mission.

(5) Perfection:

The Bible says, “Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Mt. 5:48). In addition to ourselves, we must seek for the perfection of our brothers and sisters in Christ who have become one in the Lord. By the power of God being perfect in our weakness, we must seek for the perfection of our Heavenly Father. The church of the Lord must be perfect.

(6) Persevere:

Even when we have pressure in our hearts by concern for the church, we must be patient and persevere. Since the Lord has promised to build His church (Mt. 16:18), we must pray as we hold onto that promise Word and be patient, persevere and wait in expectation. It will certainly bear fruit of patience and perseverance.

(7) Praise:

When our hearts are pressed down with concern for the church, we can praise God for the Lord builds and governs His church. We should praise God with gratitude for his grace of salvation.

Apostle Paul was able to boast of his weakness when his heart was pressed down by his concern for the church because he had tasted God's sufficient grace in his weakness (1 Cor. 12:9). In other words, Paul boasted and rejoiced in his weakness because he knew that God's power was made perfect in weakness (v. 9). Therefore, Paul boasted all the more gladly about his weaknesses (v. 9). He boasted of his many weaknesses, “so that Christ’s power may rest on me” (v. 9). Therefore he could confess: “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” (Gal. 2:20). Paul, who served the church by relying on God’s power that was made perfect in weaknesses, laid down all his weaknesses, emptied himself and served the Lord with God’s sufficient power that was perfected in his weaknesses. Like Paul, I want to serve the church as the Lord fills me with His power as I boast and rejoice in my weaknesses.

Relying on God's sufficient power when I am weak,

Pastor James Kim

Being in need is an opportunity

The first time in my life, I asked myself a bold question during the Christmas. That bold question was, 'Did the baby Jesus born with two hands firmly held up like ordinary babies?' The reason I asked this question was because, in 1 Timothy 6:7, the Bible says, "For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it." This is similar to what we often hear in the world: 'Come empty-handed and go empty-handed.' Nevertheless, when we see babies are born, they hold their hands together. And when we see them growing up and start talking, they say, "It's mine" even though no one taught them. And as they grow older, they try harder and harder to gain something in this world. After all, when they get old, they die and leave this world empty-handed. Eventually, people try to gain something in this world, but I think Christian life is trying to lose things of this world. I think the Christian life is to keep on getting rid of greed, pride, and so on. Then, just as Jesus died with open hands on the cross, when we die, we open with both hands and die with nothing to grab. So how should we live?

This is what the Bible 1 Timothy 6:8 says "But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that." Are we contented with food and clothing, or are we discontented because we don't have anything except food and clothing? I think we keep on complaining and grumbling in discontentment like the Israelites in Exodus. The Bible tells us to be content with food and clothing (v. 8), we are trying to get rich and then fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge us into ruin and destruction (v. 9). Moreover, we are eager for money and have wandered from the faith and pierced ourselves with many griefs (v. 10). When greed is conceived, it gives birth to sin, and when sin is full-grown, it gives birth to death (Jam. 1:15). When I reflect myself on these words, I have a lot of food to eat, but I am guilty of throwing it (Jn. 6:12). Also, I have so many clothes to wear so I had to donate to Goodwill. In a word, I live and eat in abundance by God's grace. That's why I often tell people, 'I live more than I deserve.' Nevertheless, when I look at myself dissatisfied with the things I have and looking for other things that I don't have, these words of God are striking my conscience. I see myself living very pathetic. I just need to eat and wear. What more should I ask for. Perhaps because of God's abundance grace and blessings that I enjoy, there is a lot of fat attached to my heart and conscience. Although I have to get fat spiritually and be thankful in contentment, I am getting fat physically so that I am discontented rather than contented. So I think God is telling me to lose some weight. I think He is instructing me to remove some fat from my heart and conscience. I need to exercise and control my eating. I need to eat my spiritual food, the Word of God, well, digest it and faithfully obey it so that I can remove some fat in my heart and conscience. Therefore, I should live a life of contentment and gratitude, focusing on what God already has given me instead of focusing what I don't have. I should thank God for giving me daily food and clothes that don't wear out (Dt. 8:4). If I have something to eat and wear, I should be grateful. I should know that the rest is given by God's grace as a bonus, so I should live with gratitude for His grace.

In the Bible, Ruth 1:1-5, three people who were at the crossroads of choice come out. The first person to stand at the crossroads of choice was Elimelech. Elimelech, who was a Jew living in Bethlehem, Judah (v. 1), was in abundance (v. 21) and was at the crossroads of choice when there was a famine in the land at the time of the judges (v. 1). Either to live in the land of Judea where there was a famine or to move to another place that had no famine. And his choice was to move to another place. So he moved to Moab with his wife, Naomi, and his two sons, Mahlon and Kilion (vv. 1-2). It seems that Elimelech didn't plan to live in Moab for long time. How do we know this? We know this when we look at the phrase "for a while" (v. 1). In other words, Elimelech moved to Moab for a while in order to escape from famine. What was the result of his practical choice? In Moab, he eventually lost his life.

When I think about Elimelech, who was at the crossroads of choice, he lost his life in order to keep his abundance during the famine. In addition to this thought, I think that in God's sovereignty He allows us to go through "famine" in our lives. Not only that, I believe we need "famine" in our lives. The reason is because there is God's good, pleasing and perfect will in God's given famine whether it is financial famine, circumstantial famine or real natural famine. What is the will of God? This reminds me the story of the prodigal son in Luke 15. In that story, the prodigal son gets his share of the estate from his father and set off for a distant country (Lk. 15:12-13). And there he squandered his wealth in wild living (v. 13). "After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need" (v. 14). Was it a coincidence that after the prodigal son had spent everything there was the severe famine in that whole country? I don't think so. I believe that Creator God caused the severe famine in that whole country where the prodigal son was living. The purpose was to make the prodigal son to be in need. Why did God do so? It was because God wanted the prodigal son to repent and return to his father.

We also need a "famine" in our lives. We shouldn't make a foolish choice in God's eyes where there is "famine" in our lives, making the choice just to escape the crisis and to preserve our abundance. In other words, we shouldn't make a wrong choice by just relying on our own understanding (Prov. 3:5) rather than relying on God in order to escape the crisis in our lives. The reason is because our wrong choice will prevent us from enjoying God's blessing in the crisis. What is God's blessing that is hidden behind the "famine," the crisis of our lives? It is the blessing of repentance. The "famine" that comes in our lives makes us to be in need and long for the arms of our abundant Heavenly Father. And being in need causes us to rethink the abundant grace that God has bestowed in the past and make us to thank God. But a foolish person loses his thoughts and minds in the past, longing for the rich times of the past. But a wise person give thanks to God as he remembers when his past was abundant, and confronts reality with his grateful heart. And he struggles to find God's will as to why this need came upon him. He cries out to God. And he tries to listen to the voice of God through His Word. Then he realizes by the work of the Holy Spirit through the Word of God, like the story of the prodigal son that one of the God's will is repentance. Therefore, he repents his sins and return to his Heavenly Father.

Of course not all "famine" comes because of our sin. One example is the story of Joseph in Genesis 42. There was a famine in the land of Canaan where Joseph's father Jacob and his sons were living (Gen. 42:5). Not only was there a famine in the land of Canaan, but there was a famine in all the other lands (as Joseph interpreted the Pharaoh's dream) (41:54). There was a famine in the whole land of Egypt (v. 57). But even in this situation, there was food in all the land of Egypt (v. 55). Due to severe famine in all the world (v. 57), Jacob, who was living in the land of Canaan, sent his sons to Egypt (42:2-3) because he heard that there was grain in Egypt (v. 1). And as we already know, the prime minister of Egypt at that time was Joseph. Why did God cause famine even in the abundant land of Canaan, where milk and honey were flowing? Maybe God tried to make Joseph's ten brothers, who tried to kill Joseph (37:20) because they hated him (v. 8) but sold him to the Ishmaelite merchants (v. 28), to repent their sins. But what we can know for sure is that God used famine to bring Jacob and his family down to Egypt. And in order to save and preserve their lives and the lives of their descendants (45: 5, 7), God worked, in His providence, in the life of Joseph and made him the prime minister of Egypt. The reason why God caused famine not only in the land of Canaan where Jacob was living, but also in the land of Egypt was to move the Israelites to Egypt in God's providence and plan so that they might be fruitful and multiplied greatly and became exceedingly numerous even though they were oppressed for about 400 years living in Egypt and then to deliver them out of Egypt through Moses and to lead them to the promised land, the land of Canaan. In a word, the purpose of God's famine in Joseph's story is salvation rather than repentance [even though Joseph's brothers seem to repent (42:21-22)]. Isn't it amazing? The "famine" in our lives is a good opportunity to experience God's great salvation. Who can think of it as a good opportunity to experience God's great salvation in the ever-increasing "famine"? Isn't that only those who fully trust in God think so? Do you think so?

When we face the crisis of “famine” in our lives, we must make right choices according to God's will. We should never, like Elimelech, make the wrong choice as we wish to escape the crisis and keep our abundance. Of course, in times of need, we often don't know what God's will is and we don't have conviction in our hearts. What should we do? Although we don't know why the "famine" has come into our lives and thus we are in need, we must believe that we are in the sovereign will of God and we must accept the "famine" of our lives by faith. Although we don't know whether it is God's will for us to repent like the prodigal son, or for us to save our family members like Joseph, we must know that God is good and He will carry out His sovereign will even through wrong choice like Elimelech's. And with that faith, we must go through our crisis of “famine” and being in need. The reason is because being in need with God is much better than abundance without God. Then God will give us the precious grace He has already prepared for us. Let us win by faith!

Experiencing God's abundance in need,

Pastor James Kim

Conflict is an opportunity.

How should we view church conflict and disputes? Why are the churches fighting instead of loving one another? What is the cause of the church's conflict and dispute? One of the reasons is the lack of recognition of diversity. In other words, there is a conflict and dispute in the church because we don't accept the fact that there are people with various gifts in the church.

Often we look at marital disputes and say: 'You and I are just different, not wrong.' But when we think about marital relationships, we are prone to say "You are wrong" instead of "You are just different" and admitting and accepting the differences between a husband and a wife. As a result, the couple argues and fights. Likewise, I think that all human relationships are quarreling with each other because they think "You are wrong." The reason for conflict, dispute and fighting in human relations in the church is because we treat each other with the thoughts and attitudes that "You are wrong" even though we are just different. In this thought and attitude I think there is a bitter root of pride saying, "I am right." In other words, since we have the deep-rooted thought "I am right, you are wrong," we criticize the other people and even slander them. After all, the profound cause of the conflict is pride.

Apostle Paul exhorts in Romans 12:16, "Be of the same mind toward one another; do not be haughty in mind," The reason why we cannot be the same mind toward another is because of our proud heart. In other words, we quarrel and fight because we are wise in our own estimation (v. 16). If we look at ourselves with our own eyes and think that we are wise, we will have conflict and dispute in the church because we are looking at the other person with the attitude "I am wise and you are foolish." "This wisdom is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic" (Jam. 3:15). If we have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in our heart, we must not be arrogant (v. 14). If we are arrogant, then we are lying against the truth (v. 14). What is the wisdom in the Bible? Look at James 3:17 – "But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy." If we truly have the wisdom that God gives us, we must have tolerance as peacemakers in the church (v. 18). But if we do not recognize the various gifts the Lord has given to each of us and judge and criticize the gifts given to other members on the basis of "my gifts," there will be conflict in our church. The church also has conflict because we are "worldly". In other words, there is jealousy and conflict in the church because we are "mere infants in Christ" (1 Cor. 3:1). There is conflict and dispute in the church because we are not able to eat "solid food" but only drink "milk" (v. 2).

Those who are worldly are not taught by the Holy Spirit (2:13). They don't accept the things of the Spirit of God because they are foolishness to them (v. 14). They cannot understand the things of the Spirit because they are spiritually appraised (v. 14). Therefore, they don't participate in or do what the Holy Spirit does in the church. One of the works of the Holy Spirit is to keep the unity of the church (Eph. 4:3). Although the Bible clearly commands us to keep the unity of the Spirit, those who are worldly don't obey this command. They don't obey because they are still fleshly and don't follow the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 3:3). Like the saints in the church at Corinth who said "I am of Paul" and "I of Apollos" (1:12), those who are still fleshly in the church say 'I am of the senior pastor,' 'I am of the assistant pastor' and so on even though they are just "Servants through whom you believed" (3:5). I think the bigger problem is the church leaders, not the laymen. Although we, the church leaders, are just the Lord's servants, like Paul and Apollos, who have been entrusted with the Lord's flocks, we tend to forget this and cause the church to be in conflict, dissension and division. In other words, even though we are just like Paul and Apollos who plant and water (v. 6), that is, we are nothing (v. 7), we are guilty of dividing the church, the body of Christ. We are just planting and watering. It is only God who causes the growth (vv. 6, 7). We are nothing. We must not be mistaken to think that we are something. God is everything. But forgetting this fact, we are causing

church conflict and division. In the end, we are seeing the conflicts and divisions of the church through our church leaders who are worldly and fleshly rather than the laymen who are worldly and fleshly.

In order to prevent church conflict, we must all be “spiritual” (v. 1). In other words, we must all grow up in Christ to do away with childish things (13:11). We should no longer be drinkers of milk (3:2). We must be spiritual people who can eat “solid food” (v. 2). We must live according to the guidance of the Holy Spirit, who searches all things, even the depths of God (2:10). The Holy Spirit who dwells in us enables us to know the things freely given to us by God (v. 12). We must discern the divine grace that God has given us (vv. 13, 14). We who have known the mind of the Lord (v. 16) must love the church as Jesus loves His body, the Church. We should love “Thy Kingdom,” “The house of Thine abode,” “The Church our blest Redeemer saved With His own precious blood” (Hymn “I Love Thy Kingdom, Lord” v. 1). We are to humbly serve His church with the heart of Christ. Although we may have many troubles when we humbly serve the Lord, we must handle it with the strength of our Savior).

The church is one because of Jesus. There is unity in the church, the body of the Lord. At the same time, there is diversity in the church. The members who received various gifts gathered to form one body in the Lord. Therefore, we have responsibility to keep unity in diversity. The responsibility is that we should all share our mind. How can we share our mind together? There is only one way. That is, we all embrace the mind of Jesus Christ (Phil. 2:5). In emptying ourselves and humbling ourselves, we must recognize and acknowledge each other's gifts. And we must strive to keep to the unity of the Holy Spirit by using the various gifts given to each other in peace and with wisdom from above.

Want to keep unity in diversity

Pastor James Kim

Complaint is an opportunity

I don't like it. I'm not comfortable. It is inconvenient. So I keep complaining when I speak without my knowledge. I should not complain. .

In Exodus 17:3, we see the Israelites complaining to Moses. The reason they complained to Moses was because there was no water for them to drink (v. 1). It was then when the Israelites “set out from the Desert of Sin” and “camped at Rephidim” (v. 1). At that time, they argued with Moses, “Give us water to drink” because they had no water to drink (v. 2). Upon hearing this, Moses said to the Israelites: “Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you put the LORD to the test?” (v. 2) But the thirsty Israelites complained to Moses, “Why did you bring us up out of Egypt to make us and our children and livestock die of thirst?” (v. 3) To what extent they complained to Moses was they were almost ready to stone Moses (v. 4). Why did the Israelites complain to this extent? I find the answer in verse 7: “... because they tested the LORD saying, “Is the LORD among us or not?” The Israelites complained to Moses because they didn’t trust God. Although the Israelites had already experienced the miracle of God making the bitter water into sweet water at Marah when the Israelites went into the Desert of Shur and were traveling in the desert without finding water for three days (15:22-25), they complained to Moses because they didn’t trust God (17:3). Upon hearing the complaint, Moses cried out to God: “What am I to do with these people?” (v. 4) At that time, the Lord answered Moses, “Walk on ahead of the people. Take with you some of the elders of Israel and take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. ... Strike the rock, and water will come out of it for the people to drink” (vv. 5-6). “So Moses did this in the sight of the elders of Israel” (v. 6).

In Psalm 37: 1, 7-8, the Bible tells us three times not to complain. In other words, the Bible tells us not to envy the evildoers and the workers of iniquity who are prosperous in their own ways (vv. 1, 7). As I meditated on this, I remembered Psalms 73. The reason is that many years ago before an elder died he asked me. 'Why the righteous suffers and the wicked prosper?' and God led me to meditate on Psalms 73 and enabled to answer his question. So whenever I meditate on the theme of “the prosperity of the wicked,” I remember Psalms 73. The reason is because the psalmist Asaph was envious of the arrogant when he saw the prosperity of the wicked (Ps. 73:3). When Asaph saw that the wicked have no pain in their death and their body is fat (v. 4), they are not in trouble as other men not are they plagued like mankind (v. 5), the evil conceits of their minds know no limits (v. 7), he had nearly lost his foothold (v. 2). In particular, when he saw that the wicked were always carefree and increase in wealth (v. 12), he said, “Surely in vain have I kept my heart pure; in vain have I washed my hands in innocence” (v. 13). When the righteous suffer and the wicked prosper, we Christians can envy the wicked enough like Asaph or David. Not only can we be envious, but we can even be angry by seeing the prosperity of the wicked (37:8). And we can complain in dissatisfaction (vv. 1, 7, 8). However, in Psalms 37: 1, 7, 8, the Bible tells us not to complain for three times. What is the reason? The reason is because “it leads only to evil” (v. 8; cf. 73:15). In other words, we should not complain because when we see and envy the wicked, we will complain in dissatisfaction and commit sins against God. The reason why we should not complain about the prosperity of the wicked is because the wicked will be cut off (37:9, 22, 28, 34, 38) quickly (vv. 2, 36). To what extent it will be cut off quickly, the wicked will soon be cut down like the grass (v. 2). In Psalms 73, the psalmist Asaph came to realization that when he entered the sanctuary of God (73:17). What did he realize? It is the final destiny of the wicked (v. 17). What is the final destiny of the wicked? It is ruin (v. 18). The wicked will be destroyed suddenly (v. 19). Like we despise a dream after we awake from sleep, the Lord will despise the wicked as fantasies (v. 20). Those who are evildoers will surely be cut off (37:9). Those who are cursed by the Lord will not only be cut off (v. 22) but their offspring will be cut off as well (v. 28). “The posterity of the wicked will be cut off” (v. 38). We will see the wicked being cut off (v. 34). That is why we must not look at the prosperity of the wicked and envy them and complain to God.

What should we do without complaining? First we must trust in the Lord (v. 3). And we must dwell in the land and cultivate faithfulness (v. 3). And we must delight ourselves in the Lord (v. 4). Then God will give us the desires of our heart (v. 4). We must commit our way to the Lord (v. 5). If we trust in Him, He will do it (v. 5). We must rest in the Lord and wait patiently for Him (v. 7). This is because we are waiting for the Lord (v. 9). And we must be humble (v. 11) and blameless (v. 37). Then we will inherit the land and will delight ourselves in abundant prosperity (v. 11; cf. v. 37).

If we don't like it, we will be dissatisfied. When dissatisfaction builds up, we start complaining. And when we start complaining, we habitually complain without knowing ourselves. The reason why we habitually complain is because of dissatisfaction in our hearts. And the reason why we are dissatisfied is because we don't have what we need or want. And when we don't have what we need or want, we are finally complaining to God because we don't trust that God will provide what we need and want. If we live with confession of faith that "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not be in want" (Ps. 23:1), then we will not complain in unbelief even when we are in need. And if we have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation (Phil. 4:12), then we will not complain even when we are in need. We will not complain even when we have "a thorn in my flesh" (2 Cor. 12:7). The reason is because God's grace is sufficient for us (v. 9). I hope and pray that we give thanks to God because of God's sufficient grace in our lives rather than complaining.

"Thanks for prayers that Thou hast answered, Thanks for what thou dost deny!
Thanks for storms that I have weathered, Thanks for all Thou dost supply!
Thanks for pain, and Thanks for pleasure, Thanks for comfort in despair!
Thanks for grace that none can measure, Thanks for love beyond compare!"

("Thanks to God", verse 2).

With gratitude for the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is the condition for thanks in all circumstances,

Pastor James Kim

Anxiety is an opportunity

One of my concerns nowadays is brothers and sisters in Christ who are suffering from depression, panic anxiety and dementia. I also worry when I think of family members who take care of them with love. When I think about how hard it must be for both who are going through depression, panic anxiety or dementia and those family members who love them, I become anxious and keep on worrying about them. Even though I know that the Bible says “Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you” (1 Pet. 5:7), I still worry. Even though I keep on trying to hold on to this Word of 1 Peter 5:7 and pray for them, I still worry after I have prayed for them when I think about them. It is because I am not casting all my anxiety on the Lord as the Bible says. It is because of my lack weak faith.

When we look at the context of Luke 12:26, which is verses 22-34, Jesus is saying to his disciples, ‘Do not worry.’ Jesus is also saying to us, “do not worry about your life, as to what you will eat; nor for your body, as to what you will put on” (v. 22) and “And do not seek what you will eat and what you will drink, and do not keep worrying” (v. 29). Why? What are His reasons? I think there are at least five reasons: (1) It is because we cannot add a single hour to our life’s span by worrying (v. 25). What’s the use of worrying about this and that. It’s no use. It doesn’t help us at all. We know this but we still worry. We cannot help ourselves from worrying. (2) It is because we cannot do even a very little thing (v. 26). I don’t know why I worry about other things because I cannot do such a small thing (v. 26). (3) It is because the non-believers run after all these things (Mt. 6:32). (4) It is because Our Father knows that we need them (Lk. 12:30). Heavenly Father knows what we need, so we shouldn’t be worried. But we still worry. The reason is because we have little faith (v. 28). Because we have little faith, we worry about our lives, what we will eat; or about our body, what we will wear (v. 22).

What should we do? We should consider the ravens (v. 24). We should look at the birds of the air (Mt. 6:26). I still remember. Last time I went to a mountain for the English ministry retreat, I looked at the birds sitting on a tree in the morning as I sat on a chair in the porch outside the house and the Bible Matthew 6:26 came in to my mind: “Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?” So when I looked at the birds and meditated for a while, I thought to myself: ‘Since Heavenly Father raises the birds, will He not raise me who is much precious and honorable than these (Isa. 43:4).’ Actually all my life, God has provided me daily food for me so I have never been without food. Also, Heavenly Father always has provided me something to wear, so I had never been naked. Rather, God allowed me to live in abundance and overflowing with food and clothes. Nevertheless, I worry about things like this. Also I worry about what to say to the other person in a relationship (Mt. 10:19). I am also concerned with the affairs of the world, that how I can please my wife (1 Cor. 7:33). Beside these things, I am concerned about our church (2 Cor. 11:28; cf. Lk. 10:41). I am very concerned and worry about a church member may not only leave the church but also leave Jesus (Deut. 29:18). Especially I worry that I will fall into the Satan’s temptations (1 Tim. 3:7). All these worries of life weight my heart down (Lk 21:34) and chock the word of God so that I cannot be fruitful (Mk. 4:19). Even though I know that I shouldn’t be like this, I am still worry about many things. To me this is what the Lord says: “Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own” (Mt. 6:34).

I don’t want to worry about tomorrow. I want to live with all my worries left to the Lord. I don’t know why I’m keep on worrying even though I know it’s not going to get better. I don’t know why I worry about other things even though I cannot do even the smallest thing. It is because of my little faith. I want to firmly believe in God who knows best what I need. So I don’t want to worry about what to eat, what to drink and what to wear like

non-believers and be busy in pursuing them. Rather, I want to seek first His kingdom and His righteousness (Mt. 6:33). And I want to prioritize my heart and my prayer straight in seeking His kingdom and His righteousness first as I trust His word that “all these things will be given to you as well” (v. 33). In order to do so, I want to devote myself more to meditating on the Word of God for the growth of my faith as well as for my firm faith in God (Rom. 10:17). As I do so, I want to see the birds flying in the air often. I also want to think about how the lilies of the field grow (Mt. 6:28). The reason is because I want to live by seeking God’s kingdom and His will day by day with the conviction that the Father God will continually feed and clothe me, much more than birds and flowers.

Despite the situation of the worries of this life (Mk. 4:19), I commit all my anxieties to my Heavenly Father who cares for me (1 Pet. 5: 1) and decide not to worry about tomorrow,

Pastor James Kim

Sadness is an opportunity

I need to know how to be sad ... When I started the year 2019, there was heavy sadness in my heart that I couldn't handle because of the death of my loved ones. In addition, I had tears of love in my heart when I thought about my beloved child. Then the Lord gave me the word of promise: "And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast" (1 Pet. 5:10). From then on, I held onto this word of promise and prayed to God. Although my beloved child has suffered "a little while," I prayed to the Lord that He would restore her, make her strong, firm and steadfast. Then later I realized that God was fulfilling the word of promise He gave me not only to my child but also to me as well. So in December of 2019, even though the Lord made me to rethink about "death," my heart wasn't heavy sorrow at all, instead I enjoyed the grace of asking the Lord for a gift of martyrdom. I prayed that I can be slain because of the word of God and the testimony I had maintained (Rev. 6:9-11).

The Christian who experiences God's grace of restoration shed tears of thanksgiving. He shed the tears of thanksgiving because of God's grace in answering the prayers of such sinner like him by revealing God's love and faithfulness to him. Also, the Christian who experience God's grace of restoration shed tears of prayer. He shed the tears of prayer because God embraces such sinner like him from that pain and enables him to enjoy peace and rest. The Christian who experience God's grace of restoration shed tears of commitment. He sheds tears of commitment in obeying God's commands because of the covenant God's abundant love and grace that that is given faithfully to such unfaithful sinner like him.

The Bible Jeremiah 50:4-5 prophesizes that "the people of Israel and the people of Judah together will go in tears to seek the LORD their God" (v. 4) and will return to Jerusalem and will bind themselves to the Lord in an everlasting covenant that will not be forgotten (v. 5). How do those who are bind themselves to the Lord in the everlasting covenant live? He will never shed only tears of thanksgiving and tears of prayer to God's grace. He will certainly shed tears of devotion to God as well. The tears of devotion are his obedience to covenant God's command. That God's command is especially the first commandment of the Ten Commandments, "You shall have no other gods before me" (Exod. 20: 3). In other words, those who are united with God in an everlasting covenant don't commit sins against God by disobeying God's command and worshiping idols. They will never go from one mountain to another mountain to serve idols (Jer. 50: 6, Park). And they don't hear from unbelievers that they have sinned against the Lord, their true pasture, the Lord, the hope of their fathers (v. 7). Yet they don't say to themselves, "We are not guilty" (v. 7). Therefore, those who are united with God in the eternal covenant enjoy the rest that God gives (v. 6). Are we enjoying the rest that God gives?

We can be grieving when we think of those who fell asleep (dead) in Jesus. But our sorrow is hopeful sorrow because we believe that Jesus died and rose again. That hope is that "we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him" (1 Thess. 4:13-14). Thus the Lord does not waste even our sorrow in Him. When we experience God's restoring love in turning our sorrow into joy, we should shed tears and walk the way the Lord has walked. As we walk, we must walk on the path of the Lord with tears of thanksgiving, tears of prayer, and tears of devotion. We must shed tears of thanksgiving and prayer for the grace of God's restoration, and tears of devotion that obey God's commands. Since we do not sin against idolatry by obeying God's commands, we should not be told that we are Christians who sin against God through the mouth of unbelievers.

Wanting to walk on the Lord's path as I shed tears of gratitude, tears of prayer, tears of devotion,

Pastor James Kim

Blockage is an opportunity.

God sometimes blocks us. For example, the Holy Spirit not only blocked Apostle Paul from preaching the word in the province of Asia, but also blocked him to enter Bithynia (Acts 16:6, 7). Likewise, I think the Holy Spirit often block our way. Of course, as the Holy Spirit blocked Paul from going to Asia but led him to Macedonia (v. 10), the same Holy Spirit sometimes closes the door we want to go, but also open the door for us to go in God's time. I once received grace through a sermon of our church education pastor. That grace is the realization of God's grace in blockage and the application of that Word of God and its principle in my life and in the church.

First, the realization of God's grace is that God blocked David from building a house for God's Name where God would dwell (2 Sam. 7:13) because David had shed much blood on the ear in God's sight (1 Chron. 22:8). God who blocked David from building the house of God who was eagerly willing to build the temple for God's name opened the door for him. That door was the door of hope (Hos. 2:15). God who didn't listen to David's wish who had eager desire to build the house of God wanted to fulfill His wish for David whom He loved. And His wish was to reveal Himself to David (2 Sam. 7:5-7) and to give David great blessings (vv. 8-16).

God who blocked David from building the temple of God that he really wanted to build opened the door for David to understand how great his God is. God who didn't dwell in the house from the day He brought the Israelites up out of Egypt to this day, had been moving from place to place with a tent as His dwelling (v. 6) and didn't ever say to any of their rulers, "Why have you not built me a house of cedar"? (v. 7) The reason is, "The heavens, even the highest heavens, cannot contain you. How much less this temple I have built!" (2 Chron. 6:18)

By blocking David from building the God's temple, God opened the heart of David and blessed him greatly. Of all the great blessings, of course, there was God's blessing of promising David to cut off all David's enemies from before him (2 Sam. 7:9) and to give him rest from all his enemies (v. 11) and make his name great, like the names of the greatest men of the earth (v. 9), the greater blessing was that God, who had blocked David from wanting to build God's house, promised to build a house for David (v. 11). After David's death, God promised to raise up his offspring to succeed David, that was Solomon, who would come from his own body, and God would establish His kingdom (v. 12). And God promised David that Solomon "is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever" (v. 13). God promised to be his father and Solomon to be God's son (v. 14). He promised that when Solomon "does wrong, I will punish him with the rod of men, with floggings inflicted by men" (v. 14) but God's love "will never be taken away from him, as I took away from Saul, whom I removed from before you" (v. 15). The greater meaning of this great blessing of God is the promise to send Jesus Christ through David's descendants and to strengthen the God's kingdom through Jesus Christ, King of kings. How great is this blessing? Although God blocked David from building His house, God prepared a greater blessing after that blockage. Could David complain and resent God's blocking?

There are many times when we cannot understand with our limited mind why God blocks our way to walk for His glory. Therefore, we often don't understand why God is blocking the way when we are trying to live for the Lord and His glory. In the midst of that, we often pray and wait for what the Lord's will is and trying to find it. This is because we learned that God had a great plan for Paul when the Holy Spirit blocked him from going to Minor Asia to preach the gospel but opened the door for him to Macedonia so that eventually used Paul to evangelize Europe (Acts 16). Since we believe that God is the God who opens the way He has prepared when He blocks the way, we pray by faith, expect and wait upon the God's will be done. What is God's great will in blocking us? I personally pray for the fulfillment of the word of God's promise to me, John 6:1-15 (the two fish and five loaves

miracle). But many times, I feel like God is blocking my way of fulfilling it even though I earnestly have been crying out to Him. But in light of this Word of God, God reveals and make to acknowledge how small I am by reminding me of His greatness. Also, God enables me to hope and to assure me through His Word that there are certainly His great blessings. When I apply the today's message to our Victory Presbyterian Church, I could not help but ask why God is blocking the way for our church to move to different location. I believe that's because God wants our church to evangelize Hispanic (Latino) souls in our church area (Acts 11:19ff). Therefore, God wants to expand the kingdom of God through our church. God wants our church to be an example of the Jesus' true community of love by keeping unity in diversity. And as the Lord has promised that He will build His church (Mt. 16:18), the Lord wants to build Victory Presbyterian Church as such a church. Clearly, God will bless our church with great blessings. He will build our Victory Presbyterian Church on the rock and build it as a triumphant church that the gates of Hades will not overcome it (v. 18). In addition, the Lord will continue to build our church as a missionary church. I hope and pray that the Lord continue to build our church to be the mission church, driven by the Holy Spirit. Then, what is the mission church that is driven by the Holy Spirit? Based on Acts 16:6-10, I was taught in two ways:

First, the mission church that is driven by the Holy Spirit stops when the Holy Spirit blocks a way.

Look at Acts 16:6-7: "Paul and his companions traveled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia. When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to." Apostle Paul, along with his co-worker Silas, met Timothy, a disciple of Jesus who was spoken well by his brothers at Lystra and Iconium during the second missionary journey (vv. 1-3). "As they traveled from town to town, they delivered the decisions reached by the apostles and elders in Jerusalem for the people to obey" (v. 4). As a result, "the churches were strengthened in the faith and grew daily in numbers" (v. 5). Then, in verse 6, Paul, Silas, and Timothy tried to go to Asia for a mission, but the Holy Spirit didn't allow them to preach the word in the province of Asia. Thus, they traveled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia (v. 6) and came to the border of Mysia and tried to enter Bithynia (v. 7). But again, the Spirit of Jesus didn't allow Paul and his companions to go to Bithynia (v. 7). Isn't it strange that the Holy Spirit blocked them from preaching the word in the province of Asia and Bithynia? Obviously, Paul and his companions had the right purpose, but don't you wonder why the Holy Spirit blocked them from doing so? Don't you wonder why the Holy Spirit blocked them from preaching the gospel? Here what we have to think about is a priority in God's perspective. In other words, the Holy Spirit didn't block Paul and his companions from preaching the gospel in the province of Asia and Bithynia because He didn't want them to preach it, but because He had already planned for them to preach the gospel elsewhere. That elsewhere was Macedonia (v. 10).

Preaching the gospel is what God wants and it is our responsibility. Therefore, the Holy Spirit will not prevent us from preaching the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is the fact that in God's providence, there is the priority of the region to preach the gospel in God's perspective that may be different from our perspective. But many times I think we can't discern God's priorities. There is certainly a good motive for doing everything for the glory of God, but we often confuse God's priorities when we must decide which one is first and what is next. That's why there are many times when we ponder and pray for the will of the Lord. We must keep in mind that our priorities must be aligned with God's. The God's priority for Paul and his companions was not Asia or Bithynia. The God's priority was Macedonia. So Paul and his companions, who didn't know this, they worked hard to find a mission field, but both Asia and Bithynia were blocked by the Holy Spirit. We don't know how the Holy Spirit blocked them from going to Asia and Bithynia because the Bible doesn't mention about it. The important thing here is that Paul and his companions didn't try to carry out their will when the Holy Spirit blocked them, but obeyed the Holy Spirit's blocking. The lesson we need to learn here is that when the Holy Spirit stops us, we must know how to stop. In short, we need to be "yes" and obey when the Holy Spirit "stops" us. But somehow we work hard on the

Lord's work as if we step on the accelerator pedal too deeply and speed up too quickly, so when the Holy Spirit stops us, I think we are not good at pressing our spiritual brakes pedal well. We must know how and when to stop. We must not keep on running by just being busy looking ahead and not able to discern when to stop. If the Holy Spirit tells us to run, we should run. But if the Holy Spirit tells us to stop, we must stop. In order to do that, what we need is spiritual sensitivity. If we are always spiritually sensitive, we can realize the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Our Holy Spirit is the God who clearly shows us the Lord's will. He is not just the Holy Spirit who reveals the Lord's will in blurrily. He is the Spirit who makes black and white clear and makes "yes" and "no" clear. But why do we sometimes not realize that the Holy Spirit is blocking us? The reason is because we are spiritually dull. I think this is because we are not diligent in sharpening our minds with the Word of God. That is why Apostle Paul urges us not to conform any longer to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of our mind in Romans 12:2. Then we can discern what God's good, pleasing, and perfect will is (v. 2).

Second, the mission church that is driven by the Holy Spirit obeys when the Holy Spirit opens the way.

Look at Acts 16:10 – “After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.” When the Holy Spirit blocked Paul and his companions from traveling to Asia and Bithynia, they passed by Mysia and went down to Troas (v. 8), the gateway to Macedonia. “During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, ‘Come over to Macedonia and help us’” (v. 9). After Paul saw the vision, he and his companions got ready to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called them to preach the gospel to them (v. 10). Our Holy Spirit is the God who opens the other door when He blocks the door we tried to go. Although the door that Paul and his companions sought to go were Asia and Bithynia, the Holy Spirit had blocked that way but opened the door to Macedonia, that is Europe, through the vision. The fact that the Holy Spirit opened the door to Macedonia through visions makes us wonder if the Holy Spirit still reveals the Lord's will to us in visions. According to Dr. Park Yun-sun, vision is a visible revelation with the focus on the visible form (Park). I personally believe that in this age of our lives, the Holy Spirit reveals His will by the Word of God rather than through visions, unlike in the days of Apostle Paul. In other words, I believe that the Holy Spirit reveals what the will of the Lord is to the heart that holds onto the Word of God and pray to Him. Therefore, I don't accept the claim that we can realize the will of the Lord through dreams.

One thing to think about is the word “concluding” in verse 10. Paul and his companions concluded that God called them to preach the gospel to the Macedonians. What is the meaning of this word more specifically? According to the Word Pictures in the New Testaments, the word “concluding” means “to make go together, to coalesce or knit together, to make this and that agree and so to conclude.” As I consider the meaning of this word, Paul and his companions agreed and concluded that it was the will of the Lord to go to Macedonia and preach the gospel as a result of using their reason to discuss the God's given vision together. In John Calvin's words, Paul and his companion were fully persuaded that it was the Lord's will to go to Macedonia and preach the gospel there. Here, what we can think of is that in discerning the will of the Lord, the first thing we should do is not to conform any longer to the patter of this world, but to be transformed by the renewing of our mind (Rom. 12:2). By doing so, in spiritual sensitivity, we must distinguish between the door that the Holy Spirit blocks and the door that the Spirit opens. The next important thing is that when we agree together using the reason God has given us, that is, the reason filled with the Word of God, we must pray together whether it is the will of the Lord or not. And if we are persuaded by the Spirit that it is His will to go, then we must go.

In order for us to be led by the Holy Spirit in missionary work, we must be sensitive to the Spirit and discern the door that the Holy Spirit blocks and opens. We must not try to carry out our will and try to open the door that the Holy Spirit blocks. Rather, when it is concluded that the Holy Spirit is blocking, we must try to find a new mission field by believing and praying that the Holy Spirit will open another door. Then in the Lord's time the

Holy Spirit will open the door of His new mission field in His way. The important thing at that time is to obey the Holy Spirit. When we obey the Holy Spirit, the Lord will accomplish His will through us.

By faith in the greatness of God who blocks and hope of His great blessing,

Pastor James Kim

Trapped is an opportunity

There are times when our hearts are very heavy and painful. This is mainly when loved ones are suffering from disease and seeing themselves at the crossroads of life and death. When we see them going to unimaginable physical pains and sufferings with our own eyes, our hearts is very heavy and painful. What I can do is to be beside them, pray for them, share the word of God and praise God. Nevertheless, I sometimes find it hard to bear the tears of my heart when I pray for them. Then, when those dear ones leave me, I lead their funeral services with the power of God's great grace. But my heart longs for them in their memories when I come to the church on Sunday morning and see their empty seats. However, the amazing grace is that God is giving His love more deeply in times of difficulty and hardship. Particularly at the end of last year, I sent brother in Christ Ahn Dok II to God the Father and experienced greater and deeper love of God. It is the grace of God. The little realization God gave me is that the harder the heart, the more God gives His love.

Look at Exodus 14: 3-4: "Pharaoh will think, 'The Israelites are wandering around the land in confusion, hemmed in by the desert.' And I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and he will pursue them. But I will gain glory for myself through Pharaoh and all his army, and the Egyptians will know that I am the LORD." So the Israelites did this." This is what God said to Moses that Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, would think that the Israelites would be hemmed in by the desert so he would pursue them, but God would gain glory for Himself through Pharaoh and his army, and the Egyptians would know that He is the Lord. And according to the God's words, even though Pharaoh and his officials changed their minds (v. 5) and pursued the Israelites (vv. 6-8), God revealed His great power (v. 31) and gained glory for Himself through Pharaoh and his army so the Egyptians knew that He is the Lord (vv. 17-18). That is, God made the water flowed back and covered the entire army of Pharaoh that had followed the Israelites into the Red Sea, so that none of them survived (vv. 27-28).

There are times when we can't see any solution to our problems of our lives no matter how much we look at the north, south, east, and west. We are constantly trying to get out of that trapped situation amid fear, anxiety, and extreme stress. But as we keep on doing so, we sometimes get into deeper swamps and become desperate and even are in despair. At that time, we even feel and experience our helplessness and powerless deeply. So God enables us to look only to the Lord and cry out to Him (Jon. 2:4). The blessing is that God speaks loudly to us with megaphone in the midst of the crisis and enables us to hold onto the word of God's promise and to endure in faith. And eventually, God works all things for the good of us who love Him (Rom. 8:28) and fulfill His promise to us so that we can praise God. I believe that sometimes the Holy Spirit blocks our way so that we may be trapped, just as God lead the Israelites around by the desert road toward the Red Sea, even though there was shorter way, the road through the Philistine country (Exod. 13:17-18), and made them to be trapped in front of the Red Sea (14:3). For example, the Holy Spirit not only blocked Apostle Paul from preaching the word in the province of Asia, but also blocked him to enter Bithynia (Acts 16:6, 7). Likewise, I think the Holy Spirit often block our way. Of course, as the Holy Spirit blocked Paul from going to Asia but led him to Macedonia (v. 10), the same Holy Spirit sometimes closes the door we want to go, but also open the door for us to go in God's time. However, the doors are often closed and open, but sometimes we are trapped in our lives from north, south, east and west.

When I thought of a person who had been trapped, I remembered Joseph in Genesis 39. Since Joseph was well-built and handsome (v. 6), the wife of his master Potiphar who was one of Pharaoh's officials, the captain of the guard (v. 1), kept on saying to Joseph, "Come to bed with me!" (vv. 7, 10) "day after day" (v. 10). But Joseph not only refused to go to bed with her, but also he refused to even be with her (v. 10). But one day Joseph went into his master's house to work and none of the household servants was inside except his master Potiphar's wife (v. 11).

When she caught Joseph by his cloak and said, “Come to bed with me!” Joseph left his cloak in her hand and ran out of the house (v. 12). “When she saw that he had left his cloak in her hand and had run out of the house, she called her household servants” and lied that Joseph came in to sleep with her (vv. 13-14). When her husband Potiphar returned home, she said the same lie to him as well (vv. 16-18). As a result, Joseph was put in prison, “the place where the king’s prisoners were confined” (v. 20). But the Lord was with Joseph and extended kindness to him, and gave him favor in the sight of the chief jailer (v. 21). So the “chief jailer committed to Joseph's charge all the prisoners who were in the jail; so that whatever was done there, he was responsible for it” (v. 22). And the chief jailer didn’t supervise anything under Joseph’s charge because the Lord was with Joseph; and what he did, the Lord made to prosper (v. 23). God made Joseph to be prospered by not only helping Joseph to interpret the dream of the Pharaoh’s cupbearer (ch. 40) but also the dream of Pharaoh so that he eventually not only was delivered from the prison but also to be exalted him and made him prime minister of Egypt (ch. 41). Thus, God prospered Joseph, a slave who was in prison (39:2, 3, 21, 23) and exalted him to be the prime minister of Egypt (41:41).

When I thought of other people who had been trapped, I remembered Paul and Silas in Acts 16. They were also imprisoned in prison unfairly like Joseph, but Paul and Silas prayed and praised God at about midnight (Acts 16:23-25). It makes sense that they prayed to God, but how could they praise God in that imprisonment situation? In particular, if we were to praise the things that God had done in our lives as Pastor Hong Sung-kun said, how could Paul and Silas praise God in that situation where they were not yet miraculously delivered from prison? When I thought about Paul and Silas praised God in the imprisoned prison, I thought about the power of praise. And I personally believe in the power of praise. Eventually, when they praised God in prison, suddenly there was a violent earthquake that the foundation of the prison were shaken and all the prison doors flew open and everybody’s chains came loose (v. 26). Then the jailer who saw the prison doors open he was about to kill himself because he thought the prisoners had escaped (v. 27). But eventually he had come to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ through Paul and his whole family as well so that he was filled with joy (vv. 31-34). As a result, the God of salvation not only delivered Paul and Silas from the prison, but also saved the jailer and his whole family and revealed His power of salvation and His glory.

Therefore, even though we are trapped like Paul and Silas, Joseph, and the Israelites, I hope and pray that we can pray and praise God so that we may experience not only God’s deliverance but also we may see the power of God so that we may be able to glorify God.

Experiencing God's love more, greater, and deeper by God who extends His kindness when I am trapped, so that through His love I endure any kind of hardship, and finally praise the Lord for His loving-kindness is better than my life,

Pastor James Kim

Burnout is an opportunity

Psychologists say that stress can have disillusion, self-deprecation, and cynicism when it exceeds the threshold. There's an article that summarizes the seven signaling signs of stress (Internet): (1) He considers himself to be indispensable, (2) He tries to do too many things and has not time to deal with important things (3) He has constant pressure on himself, (4) He feels uneasiness that he is always behind and is not the best, (5) He habitually sits long while he is working, (6) He feels guilty when he gets home early, and (7) He takes his worries home. If we ignore these danger signals and continue working then we will eventually be burnout. What is burnout? Burnout is a feeling of fatigue and asthenia throughout the emotional, physical, and social life, literally devoid of power and energy. When a pastor gets exhausted and burnout, he loses his motivation for ministry and causes physical illness and conflict between husband and wife. How many ministers are suffering from this burnout now?

In 1 Kings 19:1-14, we see the prophet Elijah who is burnout. After the victory against 450 prophets of Baal and 400 prophets of Asherah on the Mount Carmel (1 Kgs. 18), Elijah ran away in fear because Queen Jezebel, the wife of King Ahab, threatened to kill him (19:2-3). And he himself went into the desert and prayed that he might die: "I have had enough ... Take my life" (v. 4). In this image of Elijah who prayed for his own death, we can no longer see Elijah on Mount Carmel. As I see this Elijah, I thought about four symptoms of burnout:

The first symptom of burnout is a fear.

Prophet Elijah was afraid when he received the message of the threat from Queen Jezebel (1 Kgs. 19:2-3). This image of Elijah is in stark contrast to the image of Elijah in 1 Kings 18. Elijah, who received the Word of the Lord and boldly went to present himself to Ahab (18:1-2) ran away for his life when he was threatened by Ahab's wife Queen Jezebel (19:2-3). Elijah was afraid. He was afraid of death. So he fled for his own life (v. 3).

This first burnout of Elijah appeared after the great victory on Mount Carmel. When I meditate on this fact, I thought about devoting myself in keeping God's grace that I received from the Lord. If we don't keep our heart after receiving God's grace, then we will be at risk of being tempted and sin against God. Also we will be like Elijah running away from our fearful situations. We will avoid or escape our problems.

The second symptom of burnout is despair.

Prophet Elijah fled and came to Beersheba in Judah, where he left his servants there while he himself went a day's journey into the desert (vv. 3-4). And in the desert, he sat down under a broom tree and prayed: "I have had enough, LORD ... Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors" (v. 4). How disappointed and discouraged that he petition to die? He prayed to God, "I have had enough, Lord", which means "It is enough" (NASB). Elijah was no longer able to minister as a prophet. He was exhausted and depressed and fell to the ground and begs God to take his life.

For the minister, disappointment or despair is truly dangerous. However, I also think that it cannot be avoided for some reason. I am sure all ministers have experience disappointment and despair at least once in their ministries. But I cannot understand Elijah's burnout to the point of asking God for his own death since I have not yet experienced it personally. However, I expect that I will experience despair like Elijah at least once in my future ministry.

The third symptom of burnout is the weakness of the physical body.

When Prophet Elijah went into the wilderness himself and was sleeping under the broom tree, an angel touched him and woke him up and said "Get up and eat" (v.5). And the angel gave Elijah a cake of bread baked over hot coals and a jar of water (v. 6). Elijah ate the bread and drank the water and laid down again (v. 6). After that, the angel came back a second time and touched Elijah and said "Get up and eat" (v. 7). This shows that Elijah was exhausted physically. So he got up and ate and drank. He was strengthened by that food (v. 8).

Many pastors are physically tired and exhausted. And they are suffering from many kinds of diseases. As a result, they cannot but to lay down their ministries for a while. When we think about them, we can understand little bit why Elijah was physically exhausted from burnout.

The fourth symptom of burnout is extreme loneliness.

After Prophet Elijah ate and drank that were supplied by the angel, he gained strength and traveled 40 days and 40 nights until he reached Horeb, the mountain of God (v. 8). There he went into a cave and talked to God. Then he repeated this to God two times: "I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too" (vv. 10, 14). Elijah told God that the Israelites killed all the prophets of the Lord and he was the only one left. When I thought about this, I felt like Elijah blaming God in extreme loneliness. When Elijah was alone in the cave in Horeb, he seems to have had extreme loneliness.

So what should we do about our burnout?

First, we must go into the desert.

Look at 1 Kings 19: 4a – "while he himself went a day's journey into the desert." When we are burnout, we must go into our own desert where we can remain silent before God alone. We need to put down our ministries too. We should not be too busy to work like Martha. We need to leave a bit of a complicated living environment and go to a quiet place. We need time and space alone. We must stop everything and go quietly before the Lord and have time to meditate on the Word of God and pray to Him.

Second, we need physical rest.

Look at 1 Kings 19:5-7: "Then he lay down under the tree and fell asleep. All at once an angel touched him and said, "Get up and eat. He looked around, and there by his head was a cake of bread baked over hot coals, and a jar of water. He ate and drank and then lay down again. The angel of the LORD came back a second time and touched him and said, "Get up and eat, for the journey is too much for you." We need to know when and how to rest in order to prevent the weakness of our bodies which is one of the signs of burnout. To those work-oriented ministers like Martha, resting can be a pain in itself. But we must lay down our work like Mary and sit quietly before Jesus to hear His voice. And when we have to sleep, we should sleep. How many ministers are physically tired because they cannot get enough sleep, so their body and mind are sick? Like Elijah, we need to go into our own desert and sleep. And we should eat well. We must be faithful in taking care of our health care as God's stewards for the glory of God. We must strive not to offer the sick body to the Lord. Of course, as the time goes on, our physical bodies will become more and more fragile, but we still need to take care our bodies as much as we can and live well for the glory of the Lord.

Third, we must listen to God's gentle whisper.

Look at 1 Kings 19:12 – “After the earthquake came a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper.” Prophet Elijah was physically strengthened and went to Horeb, the mountain of God (v. 8) and heard the God's gentle whisper (v. 12). We must go into our own desert and quietly stay in the presence of God. And we need to listen to the voice of the Lord in the midst of meditation of His Word and prayer. There is no joy except the voice of the Lord. We must hear the voice of the Lord and rise again to fulfill His mission.

A righteous man falls seven times, and rises again (Prov. 24:16). The reason is that although we are burnt out and fallen, the Lord will raise us up again. We must get up and move forward. When we fall, the Lord will raise us up again. Even though we may be afraid, discouraged and lonely, the Lord will raise us up again. Let's go into our own desert by ourselves and listen to the Lord's gentle whisper as we have our physical rest so that we may be recharged and fulfill the Lord's mission wholeheartedly. Victory!

Wanting to pursue the spirituality of the wilderness,

Pastor James Kim

Suffering is an opportunity

As we celebrated Family Month, May, today I heard the news that is very confusing and heartbreaking. A 34-year-old father stabbed his 8-year-old daughter and a 9-year-old daughter's friend 20 times and 11 times, respectively, in a small town in Chicago. When I heard the news that the father stabbed even in his daughter's eyes, I couldn't believe how cruel this act of crime was and I was very angry inside, thinking that this was an evil that humans could not commit. 'Is that person a human?', 'Is he a father?'

In order to drive a car, we must obtain a driver's license. But there is no such thing as a license to be a father. That's why there's nothing special to study about becoming a father or a mother. I remember again this night that I heard about the news that the mother who had beaten her daughter's head and let her die in the living room for two days, eventually cut off the neck of her pretty daughter. I wonder if we the parents are qualified to be parents.

The Bible Ephesians chapters 5 and 6 teach us that men, as husbands and fathers, have a responsibility to "nourish" their wives (Eph. 5:29) and children (6:4). It's interesting that there is a meaning "narrow" in the Greek word "nourish." This meaning teaches us that we, the husbands and fathers, should show our wives and children that we are walking the narrow path of Jesus Christ, the path of the cross. In other words, we must take our own cross and follow Jesus on the path of suffering. But we have an instinct not wanting to walk on the path of suffering. That's why we try to avoid that path deliberately. This is because we don't know the benefits of suffering, but only the pains and suffering. Furthermore, because we have not experienced the benefits of suffering, we aren't willing to walk the path of suffering while enduring suffering by faith.

I thought about two benefits of suffering based on Psalms 119:65-72:

First, the benefits of suffering is suffering awaken us to the fact that we are going astray.

Look at Psalms 119:67a – "Before I was afflicted I went astray" There are so many times that we don't know that we are going astray until we suffer. Of course, it is true that sometimes we knowingly go astray even though we know it is a wrong way for us to walk on. However, many times we are often blind and deaf, and we don't walk on the narrow path of the cross that the Lord walked on and just wondering and going this way and that. Then, through the suffering that the Lord allows us to go through, we wake up. Like a shepherd who strikes a sheep with a stick when the sheep goes the wrong way in order to make the sheep to walk on the right way, the Lord, our Shepherd, uses the stick of suffering to guide us who are walking on the crooked way to the right way. Prophet Isaiah said, "All of us like sheep have gone astray, Each of us has turned to his own way;" (Isa. 53:6). We who are foolish sheep are busy going astray, not the narrow way of the Lord, but the broad way of the world. At that time, the suffering given to us can be a reminder for us that we are going astray.

Second and last, the benefits of suffering is suffering makes us to obey the word of the Lord.

Look at Psalms 119: 67b – "... but now I obey your word." Here we must think about six things how our suffering makes us to keep the word of the Lord:

(1) Suffering makes us to believe in the Lord's commandments.

Look at Psalms 119:66b – “... for I believe in your commands.” The Lord uses the suffering to make us not only to realize that we are going astray but also to make us U-turn and to make us believe that the Lord’s commandments are the true way. We choose to live in one of two ways every day: the narrow path of the Lord and the broad path of the world. In other words, we live each moment in making choices between the two, whether we follow the Lord's commandments or follow Satan's words or the words of the world. The Lord uses the suffering not only to makes us to realize that we are going astray but also He uses the pains, which is the consequence of going astray, to make us to believe in the Lord’s commandments, His right way and enables us to walk that way.

(2) Suffering teaches us knowledge and good judgement.

Look at Psalms 119:66a – “Teach me knowledge and good judgment” How many of us Christians have lost our understanding, that is our good discernment, and is walking on the wrong path in ignorance? The loss of spiritual discernment brings confusion, not conviction. Eventually, it prevents us from walking the way of the Lord's commandments consistently. Rather, the loss of spiritual discernment causes us to wander the way of the world, the path of confusion. But the Lord delivers us through suffering from the swamp of our ignorance and the loss of good discernment. In the end, the Lord gives us good spiritual discernment and the knowledge of the Lord's will, causing us to run toward His word.

(3) Suffering makes us taste the goodness of the Lord.

Look at Psalms 119:68a – “You are good, and what you do is good” The greatest benefit of tasting (experiencing) the Lord's goodness through suffering (Ps. 34:8) is we are experiencing goodness of God who works for the good of us who love him (Rom. 8:28). Especially when we are in our extreme painful circumstance and are exhausted, the blessing of suffering is that the glory of the good God shines brighter in our lives. That is why we can praise God “God is so good, God is so good, God is so good, He so good to me” even in the midst of hardship.

(4) Suffering makes us to hate the lies of the arrogant.

Look at Psalms 119:69a – “Though the arrogant have smeared me with lies” Before we suffer, the lies of the arrogant are so clearly heard in our ears that we often walk in the false way of the arrogant. Since the lies of the arrogant seem so true, we tend to receive them as the truth and choose to go astray in confusion. Aren’t we busy in running this way of lies now? Aren’t we busy in running the way of false success, fame and the way of material pluripotency that the worldly arrogant people show us? But after we have suffered, we hate all the false way of the arrogant. The reason is because we know the true way, the way of the Lord, through suffering. The way of the Lord is the narrow path of the cross that the humble Jesus showed us in the Scriptures. And the end of that path is death. How this path and its’ end is so different from the end of the world's path? Are you spiritually attracted to this path? Are we attracted to the fact that the climax of our narrow path is death? Are we attracted to the fact that such sinners like us can be martyred for the glory of the Lord? Not everybody can accept this truth. The arrogant people not only don’t accept this truth but they also cannot accept it. But the Lord is planting this truth in our hearts through suffering. In the process of planning it, the Lord enables us to hate the lies of the arrogant through suffering.

(5) Suffering removes fat from our hearts.

Look at Psalms 119:70a – “Their hearts are callous and unfeeling” In the United States, obesity is a big problem these days. So many people are doing diet and are exercising to lose weight. Many people are even having operation to get rid of fat. In the midst of so many efforts to get rid of fat in the flesh, we Christians should be committed to get rid of fat in our hearts. How much discomfort and endless adult diseases do we have because of our body fat? But the fatness of our hearts makes us to experience the sinful consequence of our uncomfortable life. And that sinful consequence of our discomfort causes us to commit the greater sin of taking the sinful consequence of our discomfort lightly. I think suffering is the best medicine necessary to remove fat from our heart. We must get rid of fat in our hearts through suffering.

(6) Suffering gives us a deep understanding of the best value of the Word of God.

Look at Psalm 119:72 – “The law from your mouth is more precious to me than thousands of pieces of silver and gold.” In the days of Exodus, through the 40 years of suffering in the wilderness, the Israelites came to realize that “man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord” (Deut. 8:3). Likewise, we must also realize that in this wilderness-like world, as we walk through the narrow paths of the Lord, the path of the cross, encountering many and various sufferings, we must learn that we live only by the Word of God. When we realize this truth, we will confess that the value of the Word of God is more valuable than our lives. How can the eternal Word of God compare with our human life on this earth? Suffering makes us to realize the preciousness of the words of God and the highest value of them, rather than the riches of this world.

In this socially chaotic world which heads toward the End, there will be greater hardships and sufferings to us than before as we walk the narrow path of the Lord Jesus Christ. However, we must receive the grace and blessings at the time of suffering by learning the benefits of suffering. We must even enjoy the benefits of suffering. As the psalmist said in Psalm 119:65, we will be able to confess from the depths of our hearts, "God is good," as we experience the Lord's goodness. I hope and pray that we may have this blessing of suffering in our lives.

How should we respond to the sufferings 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 Jonah 2:1ff in four ways:

(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 an 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 step with the dancing God,

Pastor James Kim

Fear is an opportunity

Are there any of you who are in a fearful situation in these days? If you are, why are you afraid? The reason we are mostly afraid is that fear, anxiety, and worry cause fear in our hearts. One of the bible passages that comes to my mind regarding "fear" is Isaiah 41:10 – "Do not fear, for I am with you; Do not anxiously look about you, for I am your God I will strengthen you, surely I will help you, Surely I will uphold you with My righteous right hand." Also, when I think about "fear", I personally like 1 John 4:18 – "There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves punishment, and the one who fears is not perfected in love." Obviously the Bible says that there is no fear in love. But why are we afraid? The reason is lack of perfect love. Although the Bible says that "perfect love casts out fear", the reason we have fear is because God's perfect love has not been made perfect in us.

According to the "Letters for Christian Business Leadership Development" (No. 64), unconscious fears within us can largely devastate our lives in four ways: (1) First, fear paralyzes our potential. It ties us down and makes us reluctant to use the gift that God has given us, so that we cannot use it for the glory of God. Like a man who received one talent in a talent parable. (2) Second, fear destroys our relationship. Fear prevents us from being honest with others. Fear makes us to be afraid of being rejected, so it makes us to wear a mask, to pretend to be someone else and to deny our true feelings. Fear never lets us make perfect love. (3) Third, fear interferes with the happiness we enjoy. Happiness and fear cannot coexist. (4) Fourth, fear interferes with our success. We often prepare for failures by focusing on what is going to happen, rather than focusing on what we want to happen. Fear creates fear (Internet).

How should we overcome the fear that devastates our lives? When we look at Psalms 27:1-6, we see David in a fearful situation. I want to think about what David did in that fearful situation in three ways. I hope and pray that we may be able to learn these three lessons and apply them in our lives.

First, David was confident in his fearful situation.

Look at Psalms 27:3 – "Though a host encamp against me, My heart will not fear; Though war arise against me, In spite of this I shall be confident." How could David be confident in the fearful situation?

(1) The first reason is because David looked at God. Therefore, we must look to God in our fearful situation in order for us to be confident.

David looked at God quietly, who is his light and his salvation, the defense of his life, in the fearful situation (v. 1). The first way in which we can be confident in our fearful situation is to look at God, who is our light, our salvation, and the defense of our life. David's situation was really dark. Look at Psalms 27:2-3: "When evildoers came upon me to devour my flesh, My adversaries and my enemies, they stumbled and fell. Though a host encamp against me," David was in trouble (v. 5). In the day of trouble, David looked at God. And he acknowledged that God is God, and he wasn't afraid but was confident in the day of trouble.

It is not easy to be in a fearful situation like David. We cannot help but be afraid at the moment when we encounter the fearful situation. It is our weakness that we worry, be anxious and be afraid. Like Jesus' disciples who were afraid when they saw wave even though Jesus was with them inside the boat, we cannot

help but be afraid when the sinful waves of life surges in our lives. There are times when we are afraid of the inside but pretend to be casual on the outside. The reason is that we don't like to acknowledge our fears in front of others. But we must remain quietly in the presence of God as we honestly acknowledge all our fears in our hearts. As we do so, we must look to God who is the light. Here, the "light" implies that it automatically drives away darkness. Here "darkness" refers to David's enemy. David said his enemies in a war situation are darkness. David was confident that this darkness would be driven away by the light of God. Like the darker the darkness is the brighter the light is, the more fearful the situation is, the more glowing God causes the darkness to go away. David, who looked at the God of salvation and of light, was confident that God would save him by giving him victory in the battle against his enemies. It was because he completely relied on God who was able to give him victory. And he looked at God, the defense of his life and his refuge and his stronghold. In other words, David was confident that God would protect him in any battle situation. We must look to God, who is the Light, no matter how dark the situation we are in. Like the darker the situation is the brighter the light of God's salvation is, we must rely on the power of God's salvation more. Then the power of God that enables us to win will guard our minds, emotions, thoughts and our whole personalities in Christ Jesus. Therefore, we will not be afraid, but we will be confident in the Lord.

(2) The second reason is because David looked back at the past grace of God's salvation. Therefore, we also need to remember the experience of victory (salvation) of the past in order for us to be confident in the fearful situation.

Look at Psalms 27:2 – “When evildoers came upon me to devour my flesh, My adversaries and my enemies, they stumbled and fell.” As David looked back at the past of the dark situation that he faced and remembered how God made his enemies to stumble and fall, he was confident in his fearful situation. Like David, in order for us to be confident in our fearful situation, we should reflect back and remember God's salvation in the past instead of thinking about our present dark situation and worry about our future. By doing so, we must have conviction of God's salvation and victory.

(3) The third reason is that David relied entirely on God. Therefore, we must leave our future to God in order for us to be confident in our fearful situation.

David said that “Though a host encamp against me, My heart will not fear” (v. 3). The reason is because he trusted God completely, who is the light, the savior, and the defense of his life. Like David, we must be confident in our fearful situation. I have confidence in my heart. It is Philippians 1:6 – “For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.” Also, I am confident in the Lord's promise that He gave to our church, ‘I will build my church’ (Mt. 16:18). I am sure that the faithful Lord will surely accomplish His promise to us. It is my prayer and hope that whatever dreadful situation that I may face, the Lord leads me with His promise word that is in my heart so that I may stand firm and be courageous in participating His ministry in building up His church.

Second, David sought God in his fearful situation.

Look at Psalms 27:4 – “One thing I have asked from the LORD, that I shall seek: That I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, To behold the beauty of the LORD And to meditate in His temple.” In his fearful situation, David asked God for one thing. And that one thing was that he may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of his life and to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord. Why should we seek the house of the Lord in our fearful situation?

- (1) We should seek the house of the Lord in our fearful situation because when we look at the face of our Heavenly Father, the fear of our hearts will fade away and there will be peace in our hearts.

David meditated on the beauty of the Lord in all his days of life, even in fearful circumstances. Those who meditate on the beauty of God's revelation, who is full of grace, experience the peace of God in their hearts in fearful circumstances (Park, Yun-sun).

- (2) We should seek the house of the Lord in our fearful situation because we long for God's protection.

Look at Psalms 27:5 – “For in the day of trouble He will conceal me in His tabernacle; In the secret place of His tent He will hide me; He will lift me up on a rock.” The reason why David sought to dwell in the house of the Lord and to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord was because he longed for the protection of Heavenly Father. The reason why David wanted to have fellowship with the Lord in the temple of God (v. 4) was because he believed that it was the way to be saved in all its dangers (Park Yun-sun).

When my first baby Charis was suffering from her diseases and slowly dying, I enjoyed listening to the gospel song “Under the Shadow of Your Wings”. This is the text of the song: “Under the shadow of your wings Here in the secret place of your holiness I will wait on You, O Lord, my God and King Here in the Holiest of All You draw me near with love To abandon all for the sake of knowing You, my God and King Hide me in the shelter of your love Deep in the centre of your heart, my Lord How I want to know You more And keep me in the shadow of your wings Safe in the secret place of Holiness How I need You more and more.” Every night when I came out of the hospital intensive care unit after I saw Charis, I heard this song and sang along as I looked at the sky. This was my earnestly prayers to God that when I and my wife couldn't be with her I hoped that God protected her under the shadow of His wings, “Here in the secret place of your holiness”.

- (3) We should seek the house of the Lord in our fearful situation because we hope God to bring victory to us by defeating our enemies.

David sought the house of the Lord in his fearful situation because he hoped the Lord to bring victory to him by defeating his enemies. Look at Psalms 27:6 – “And now my head will be lifted up above my enemies around me,” This is what Dr. Park Yun-sun said about his verse: ‘This means that he will not fall down before many enemies, but rather live in perfectly calm life in hope.’ We cannot live in a dark environment without hope. But we have the Lord who is our hope. Therefore, we must lift our heads and look to Him in hope.

Like David, we must ask God in fearful situation. We must seek God in the hope of dwelling in the house of the Lord and looking at the beauty of God. Especially, we should pray to God in our fearful situation as we remain quietly before God and earnestly seek the glory of God. The more sinful waves hit us, the more we cannot help but seek God and his house. I remember the words in hymn that say “My heart has no desire to stay Where doubts arise and fears dismay; Tho' some may dwell where these abound, My prayer, my aim, is higher ground.” In this world there are many troubles and death. How can we not ask God for His beauty and glory? We must ask God in fearful circumstances like David.

Third and last, David praised God in his fearful situation.

Look at Psalms 27:6 – “... And I will offer in His tent sacrifices with shouts of joy; I will sing, yes, I will sing praises to the LORD.” David, in fearful circumstances, longed for the temple of God and desired his protection and victory (v.5). And by faith he vowed thanks and praise for the fulfillment of his future wishes (v. 6, Park Yun-sun). This was the act of offering sacrifice of thanksgiving to God by the victors (Park, Yun-sun). How was this possible? How could David vow to give praise to God in thanksgiving as the victor in the midst of dark afflictions because of his enemies of evildoers? It was because David was confident that God who saved him before was able to save him and to give him victory not only in his present fearful situation of darkness but also in his future fearful situation. Isn't it amazing? The situation has not changed, but David's heart has changed. The fear in his heart has changed to confidence. This is the attitude of the true believer who seeks God.

Here we must think of Acts 16:25 – “But about midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns of praise to God, and the prisoners were listening to them.” Paul and Silas were able to pray and praise God even when there were imprisoned because they believed in God of salvation rather than being dominated by their fearful situation. David in Psalms 27 believed in God who controlled the situation rather than dominated by it. David praised God in faith even in the dark circumstance he faced because he had absolute faith in God. Likewise, those who pray to God in faith can praise Him. Those who pray can praise God. Therefore, we must also praise God in faith even we are in fearful situation.

God said to us, “Do not fear, for I am with you ...” (Isa.41:10). Whatever fearful situation that we may be in or we will be in in the future, let us pray to God in faith and be confident in Him. And let us praise and worship God by faith. May God raise us to be His true worshipers.

Pray that the Lord builds me up as a bold, prayerful, and praising worshiper even in fearful circumstances.

Pastor James Kim

Pain is an opportunity

What do you do when you are troubled? I liked to sing the gospel song “In these dark days lift up your eyes”: “In these dark days lift up your eyes to Jesus, lift 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. 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” (Internet). Are we lifting our eyes upon Him when we are troubled? Or are we committing sin against God in discouragement, disappointment, and pain by grumbling when we look at the painful circumstance that we are in?

In Isaiah 53:7, the Bible says that the Messiah “was oppressed and afflicted.” I want to think about what He did when He was oppressed and afflicted in three ways so that we may learn and apply them in our lives.

First, we must not open our mouth when we are oppressed and afflicted.

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.” The Messiah was silent when He was oppressed and afflicted. The Bible says “He did not open His mouth” and “like a sheep that is silent” (v. 7). How could He be silent in the midst of oppression, affliction and judgement? (vv. 7-8) Our nature is to open our mouths and defend ourselves when we are oppressed and afflicted. This is an extremely natural behavior. For example, if we didn't do anything wrong but falsely accused and charged, we will stand in court and defend ourselves through a lawyer. But Messiah didn't open His mouth, even though He who had no sin became like a silent sheep that was taken to the slaughter. This is what Henry Nowen said in his book “The Only Necessary Thing: Living a Prayerful Life”: ‘I am so afraid to hear the words of the curse, or whether I am useless or inferior, I soon overtake the temptation to open my mouth again. It is to overcome my fear.’ We have the instinct to open our mouths and to keep on talking when we are troubled because we are being oppressed and afflicted. But Messiah Jesus didn't open His mouth. He had acted beyond human instincts. How is this possible? I looked up the answer in Isaiah 30:15 – “... in quietness and trust is your strength” When we are oppressed and afflicted, our strength is to quietly trust God.

We must learn to be silent when we are oppressed and afflicted. To do so, we need to listen to Henry Nowen's words in his book, "The Only Necessary Thing: Living a Prayerful Life": ‘The Word leads to silence, and silence leads to the Word. The Word is born in silence, and silence is the deepest response to the Word.’ The phrase ‘silence is the deepest response to the Word’ is challenging to me. We must learn to be silent while quietly trusting the God's promise Word when we are oppressed and afflicted like Jesus and are troubled. We may hear many voices and we would like to say a lot, but we should be silent when we are oppressed and afflicted. In silence we must hear God's quite voice. And that voice is the voice of Heavenly Father which Jesus heard: “You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased” (Mk. 1:11). This is what Henry Nowen said: ‘It is not easy to listen to a small and intimate voice of God saying, ‘You are my child, whom I love; with you I am well pleased’ as we enter into silence and turn away the noisy and troublesome voices of the world. However, if we embrace solitude and make silence as our friend, we will know the voice.’ We must boldly embrace solitude and make silence as our friend.

Second, we must think when we are oppressed and afflicted.

Look at Isaiah 53:8 – “By oppression and judgment he was taken away. And who can speak of his descendants? For he was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgression of my people he was stricken.” The Jewish people at the time of Jesus thought wrongly that Jesus was “stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted” (v. 4). But actually He was stricken because of “the transgression of my people” (v. 8). In other words, Jesus, the Messiah, is desperately despised and persecuted for our transgressions. Jesus Christ is without sins who was oppressed and judged on our behalf and died on the cross in order to atone our sins.

We need to think about this. We must meditate on the sufferings of Jesus and the death of the cross in silence and think biblically. Especially when we are oppressed and afflicted, there is a danger of not being able to think biblically. So when we are oppressed and afflicted, we must think biblically in silence. Usually, when we are oppressed and afflicted, it is easy for us to grumble and complain. Also, we are more likely to be angry and be emotional than to think logically. Instead of thinking in terms of the Word of God, we are more likely to be guided by our emotion and commit sin against God. But when we are oppressed and afflicted, we must think of the Word of God. We must think about Jesus. We must meditate on Jesus' suffering and His death in silence when we are oppressed and afflicted.

Lastly, we must not commit sin when we are oppressed and afflicted.

Look at Isaiah 53:9 – “He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death, though he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth.” It is easy for us to commit sins when we are oppressed and afflicted. We can sin against God with our lips and also with our actions. But Jesus did not sin when he was oppressed and afflicted. The Bible says that when Jesus was oppressed and afflicted, there was no deceit in his mouth. That is, Jesus didn't sin with his lips when he was suffering. Jesus also didn't do violence. Jesus did not sin with words or deeds when he was oppressed and afflicted. Jesus did not sin until death. Though his grave was with the wicked and buried in the tomb of a rich man named Joseph of Arimathea, Jesus did not sin against God in any way, either in lips or action. Is this really possible? A possible example is Job in the Bible. He didn't sin with his lips and actions by the grace of God. Since Job did it by God's grace, we can do it too by His grace. This is what the Bible Job 1:22 and 2:10 say: “Through all this Job did not sin nor did he blame God. ... But he said to her, ‘You speak as one of the foolish women speaks. Shall we indeed accept good from God and not accept adversity?’ In all this Job did not sin with his lips.” Rather, Job worshiped God when he was suffering (1:20).

Therefore, when we are suffering, we must not sin against God in our lips or actions. Rather, we must be silent. And we should hear in silence the Heavenly Father's quiet voice, 'You are my beloved child, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.' We must remain silent before the throne of God's grace to hear the word of God's promise. In such a situation, we should be driven by the Word of God rather than by our emotions in response to our agonizing environment. We need to look at the painful situation with biblical thoughts. In particular, we must overcome our suffering environment by looking at Jesus who suffered. Victory!

Praying to hear the God's quiet voice in silence when I am in pain,

Pastor James Kim

The voice of resentment is an opportunity

In any organization, at work, at home, or at church, we hear resentment. This is because some people are not satisfied at work, at home, or even in church. And the reason why they are dissatisfied is because they think there is something wrong at work, at home, or in the church. One of those wrong things may be due to injustice. It seems that the voice of resentment we hear at work, at home, or at church is result from dissatisfaction with unfair treatment. However, the problem is that when we guess the facts, we often feel uncomfortable when we hear the voice of resentment at work, at home, or at church. And there are many times when we don't know what to do. What should we do? We should take this opportunity as God gives us when we hear the voice of resentment. What is the opportunity?

In Acts 6:1, the disciples were increasing due to the Spirit-filled apostles who kept right on teaching and preaching Jesus Christ every day, in the temple and from house to house (5:42) in the midst of persecution and suffering (v. 41). But when the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint arose (6:1). The complaint arose on the part of the Hellenistic Jews against the native Hebrews, because their widows were being overlooked in the daily serving of food (v. 1). I think there can be this kind of voice of resentment among us as well. The reason is that we see injustice. For example, there may be resentment among the believers when the relief offering is not divided evenly among the difficult church members in the relief ministry of the church. At that time, we the church leaders must humbly listen to that voice of resentment. Then, how should we respond?

First, when we hear their voice of resentment, we the church leaders must return to the original mission the Lord has given us as an opportunity to carry out that mission.

In Acts 6: 2, the twelve apostles who were the early Church leaders called disciples and said: “It is not desirable for us to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables.” Doesn’t this sound little bit strange? Shouldn’t they confirm the unfair dealing in the relief ministry and then take steps to ensure that the Hellenistic Jews widows had been in relief every day? Isn’t this our primarily the response? If we know a problem in the church, isn’t it our responsibility to solve it quickly as possible so that we can prevent disputes and divisions within the church and to promote reconciliation? But the twelve apostles didn’t respond like that. Instead, they told the congregation of the disciples that it was not desirable for them to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables (v. 2). Why did they proclaim like that? The reason was because they were in charge of the relief work, even though their primarily duty was to preach the word of God, the gospel, which the Lord gave them, they were hampered in their spiritual duties (Park). So they listened to the Hellenistic Jews’ voice of resentment and used it as an opportunity to return to their original mission that the Lord called them to carry out. How wise and the Spirit-filled they were?

These days, we pastors are too busy. Our mind is busy too. It seems like we are so busy that we forget to obey the Lord’s command “Feed my lambs” and “Take care of my sheep” (Jn. 21:15, 17, 18). The reason is because we are driven by the situation rather than the mission. Although we should be devoted to preaching and teaching God’s Word, we are spending too much time on other incidents. Of course, there will be a valid reason for each of us to do so. One of that valid reasons is probably because they do not faithfully serve with their gifts and according to their offices. In other words, in the church organization there are roles of elders and ordained deacons in addition to the pastor or associate pastor. Nevertheless, I think most of the burden goes to pastors when those who serve in the church don’t know their roles and cannot do their responsibilities. What is serious about this is that probably the wrong consciousness that we all have. And that wrong consciousness is that we think it’s okay to leave our responsibility to the pastors. Just as children in our homes evade their responsibilities and just leave everything to

their parents, I think the spiritual children in the church leave their responsibilities to their spiritual father, the pastors, so that the pastors don't have enough time to devote themselves to the ministry of God's Word. But that doesn't mean that we the pastors should never think that such a situation may allow us to focus on the relief work or other church work, rather than the ministry of the Word of God. If we think so, we should lay down our priorities while listening to resentment in the church, humbly accept the Lord's priorities as spoken by the Holy Spirit, and prioritize the ministry that He wants us to do.

Second, when we hear their voice of resentment, we the church leaders should use that as opportunities to raise up workers whom the Lord has attached to us.

In Acts 6:3-4, the twelve apostles who were the early Church leaders called their disciples and said: "Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word." The twelve apostles of the early church convened all the disciples, proclaiming to them that it was not right for them to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to serve tables. So they told the disciples to choose seven men from among them who were known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. This pleased the whole group, they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit; also Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas from Antioch, a convert to Judaism (v. 5). When the disciples presented those seven people to the apostles, they prayed and laid their hands on them (v. 6). The apostles then commissioned those seven people for the relief ministry. In other words, they delegated relief ministry to those seven people. Then the apostles gave their attention to prayer and the ministry of the word (v. 4). How precious is this grace of God? When the apostles were listening to the voice of resentment because of the improper distribution of food, the Holy Spirit caused the apostles to raise up seven ministers of the early church to share roles with them. In other words, the twelve apostles of the early church used the voice of resentment as an opportunity to raise up the ministers. The twelve apostles entrusted the relief ministry they were doing to the seven people who were filled with the Holy Spirit and wisdom.

I think we the pastors aren't good at delegating our works to others in the church. And we are trying to do all the church works by ourselves. Although we should raise the lay ministers up to serve the Lord's body, the church, other with us, we are not raise them up. In other words, we, the pastors, are not making the lay members of the church to do the Lord's work to the fullest. What is the reason? Is it because of the greed of work in us? Isn't it because of the false authoritarianism in us? Isn't it because we don't trust the lay members? In some ways, this may be because we don't trust our lay members because we believe in only ourselves. The important thing is that we the pastors need to know that God's workers are commissioned by God to work together with us so we should learn how to delegate our work to our church lay members. When we hear the voice of resentment in the church, we should use it as an opportunity to discover and build up the workers the Lord has sent us.

Because of the voice of resentment heard in the early church, the twelve apostles who were church leaders took that as the opportunity to return to their original mission, which was the ministry of the word of God, as the Lord had called them. Also, they took that as the opportunity to choose and raise up the seven people who were filled with the Holy Spirit and wisdom to do the ministry of relief. As a result, the word of God spread and the number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith (v. 7). As we meditate on this amazing work of the Lord, we the pastors who are in charge of pastoral ministry in the 21st century should take it as an opportunity when we hear the voice of resentment. What kind of opportunities? We should take it as an opportunity to return to the mission the Lord has given us and make it an opportunity to carry out that mission. Also we should take the opportunity to raise up the lay ministers. Therefore, we sincerely hope and pray that as we who are fill with the Holy Spirit and wisdom work together in the service of the body of the Lord, we can experience the result of the Word of God being spread and the increase of number of disciples of Jesus.

Wanting to take the voice of resentment as an opportunity to hear God's voice and to obey,

Pastor James Kim

Anguish of heart is an opportunity

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 we have anguish of hearts like David by the devil's evil forces, how should we fight them? I want to receive four lessons from Psalms 61:

First, when we have anguish of heart, 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 we have anguish of heart, 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 we have anguish of hearts, 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 we have anguish of heart, 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.

Taking the disappointment and despair as an opportunity to long for God,

Pastor James Kim

Persecution is an opportunity

“Faith of our fathers! Living still In spite of dungeon, fire and sword; O how our hearts beat high with joy Whenever we hear God’s glorious Word ... Faith of our fathers! We will love Both friend and foe in all our strife; And preach thee, too, as love knows how By kindly words and virtuous life” (Hymn “Faith our fathers”, verses 1 and 3).

We cannot but admit that it is God’s grace and love that we Christians are able to keep our faith even in persecution because we cannot do so with our own strength and power. That’s why we cannot help but be glad when we think about our faith that God has kept. Furthermore, when the believers love even their enemies and preach with kindly words and virtuous life even in their persecution are the wonderful work of the Holy Spirit. Not only that it is impossible for our power and ability to keep faith in persecution, but also it is impossible for our power and ability to preach this faith to those who persecute us. Nevertheless, when we see the Almighty God makes us to preach this faith with joy, we cannot but admit that this is clearly the work of the Holy Spirit. This amazing work of the Holy Spirit in spreading the gospel even through the martyrdom of the believers expends the Kingdom of God throughout the world - from Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth! (Acts 1:8).

In Acts 11:19, the Bible talks about the persecution that occurred in connection with Stephen. (1) The first thing that happened was the people who were scattered went about preaching the word (8:4). Philip, one of those scattered people, went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed Christ to the people, so that the crowd would hear the words of Philip and watch the miraculous signs and wonders of his work, and many heavily demonized and paralyzed people were healed. As a result, there was much rejoicing in that city (vv. 5-8). When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent them Peter and John to Samaria and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit (vv. 14-15). And they had solemnly testified and spoken the word of the Lord as they started back to Jerusalem and were preaching the gospel to many villages of the Samaritans (v. 25). When an angel of the Lord spoke to Philip saying, “Get up and go south to the road that descends from Jerusalem to Gaza” (v. 26), Philip obeyed and met an Ethiopian eunuch (v. 27) and beginning from the Scripture Isaiah 53:7, 8 which the eunuch was reading Philip preached Jesus to him (v. 35) and then baptized him (v. 38). After the Holy Spirit snatched Philip away (v. 39) and he was found himself at Azotus (v. 40). As he passed through he kept preaching the gospel to all the cities until he came to Caesarea (v. 40). (2) The second thing that happened was that Saul was converted, saved and called to be an apostle to the Gentiles on the way to Damascus (Ch. 9). When I think about this, I think that the Holy Spirit God has sovereignly worked in Saul’s life to have 4 meetings: (1) Meeting with the resurrected Jesus (vv. 1-9), (2) Meeting with a disciple named Ananias in Damascus (vv. 10-19), (3) Meeting with Barnabas (vv. 26-27) and (4) Meeting with the apostles of Jerusalem (v. 28). Through these meetings, the Holy Spirit was raising Saul as the apostle to the Gentiles. (3) Then the third thing that happened due to the persecution after the Stephen’s death was the Holy Spirit fell upon (v. 44) Cornelius, a centurion of the Italian cohort (v. 1), his relatives and close friends (v. 24) when they heard the Peter’s sermon (vv. 36-43). (4) Then the fourth thing that happened, from Acts 11:19 to 26, was establishment of the Gentile church, that is Antioch Church. The Holy Spirit scattered the early Church members through the persecution that occurred in connection with Stephen, made them to preach the gospel, made Saul to be the apostle of the Gentiles, made Cornelius to hear the gospel, and built the Gentile church, the Antioch church. When we look at this, persecution is an opportunity to scatter and to spread the gospel, to raise a leader, to expand the kingdom of God, and to build a church. Especially when I meditated on Acts 11:19-26, I came to think about four kinds of opportunities persecution can be:

First, persecution is an opportunity to scatter and to spread Jesus and His gospel.

Look at Acts 11:19-20: “So then those who were scattered because of the persecution that occurred in connection with Stephen made their way to Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to no one except to Jews alone. But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who came to Antioch and began speaking to the Greeks also, preaching the Lord Jesus.” Because of the persecution that occurred in connection with Stephen the early church members were scattered across the region and spoke the word to no one except to Jews alone (v. 19). But some of them went to Antioch and preached the Lord Jesus to the Greeks (v. 20). We need to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ as we scatter through the persecution rather than fighting and sinning in the church. We must preach the gospel to foreigners rather than just to the Korean people. Even if we cannot speak their languages, we must preach the gospel of Jesus Christ to them in the language of God's love. We need to broaden the scope of the preaching of the gospel. May the Holy Spirit enlarge the area of preaching the gospel even through persecution.

Second, persecution is a great opportunity to experience God's presence.

Look at Acts 11:21 – “And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a large number who believed turned to the Lord.” Because of the persecution that occurred in connection with Stephen, the early church members were scattered and preached the gospel of Jesus Christ. When some of them came to Antioch, they spread the gospel to the Gentiles and the amazing thing was that the hand of the Lord was with them and a large number believed and turned to the Lord. I personally think that crisis in our lives is an opportunity. And one of the opportunities is to experience God's presence. Especially when I want to give up because of hardship and adversity, I experience the God's presence that the God's right hand grabs my hand and lifts it up so that I can move on toward the goal that God has given me. At that time I truly believe that the crisis of life is one of the best opportunities to experience the presence of the Lord. When the early Church members were suffering, they preached the gospel and experienced the presence of God. They experienced the amazing power and glory of God by seeing many people believed in the Lord Jesus Christ and turned to God. May we be able to experience the God's presence even through crisis and to see the power and glory of God.

Third, persecution is a good opportunity for team ministry.

Look at Acts 11:22 and 25-26: “The news about them reached the ears of the church at Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas off to Antioch. ... And he left for Tarsus to look for Saul; and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch And for an entire year they met with the church and taught considerable numbers; and the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch.” Because of the persecution that occurred in connection with Stephen, the early church believers were scattered, preached the gospel, expand the areas of preaching the gospel and experience the presence of the Lord. The large number believed in Jesus and turned to the Lord. When this news reached the ears of the Jerusalem church, they sent Barnabas, “a good man, and full of the Holy Spirit and of faith” off to Antioch (vv. 22, 24). And the Holy Spirit worked among the preachers of the Antioch church, Barnabas and Jerusalem church to be one team in evangelizing the Antioch and nurturing the Antioch church believers. The Holy Spirit worked in Barnabas so he brought Saul from Tarsus to Antioch and for an entire year they met with the church and taught considerable numbers (vv. 25-26). As a result, considerable numbers were brought to the Lord (v. 23) and the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch (v. 26). Maybe we are all too comfortable to do team ministry. Because we, who are preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ in the church and in the mission field, cannot serve the Lord and our neighbors with one heart and one will, the evangelism ministry isn't good as Paul and Apollos (1 Corinthians 3: 5-9). What is the problem? Why can't we cope with team ministry properly? Isn't it because of our arrogance? Why are we arrogant? Is it because there is no trouble or persecution? Maybe we need persecution like the early church believers so that the Holy Spirit uses it to bring us together with one heart and one

will so that we may faithfully minister with the Lord's heart in reaching out to those dying souls and preach the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ to them.

Fourth and last, persecution is a good opportunity to build His church.

Look at Acts 11:26 – "... and the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch." The Lord used the persecution that occurred in connection with Stephen to scatter and to preach the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ even to the people in Antioch so that the Antioch church was established. As Jesus promised in Matthew 16:18, the Lord builds His church in His own way. What should we do when we see the Lord builds His church even through persecution? Should we stop participating in the Lord's ministry of building His church because of the persecution like the Israelites in the Prophet Haggai's days and run to our own houses and dwell in our paneled houses? (Hag. 1:4, 9) Maybe we need to have a sense of crisis even through persecution. Therefore, we must actively participate in the Lord's ministry in building His church by the Holy Spirit and serve diligently and faithfully for His glory. I hope and pray that the Lord builds His church as He has promised (Mt. 16:18).

Praying to be a wise Christian who knows that adversity, crisis, and persecution are special opportunity from God,

Pastor James Kim

Death is an opportunity

In this New Year, I already attended the funeral twice. That's also within a week. As I attended the two funerals, I came to think about Ecclesiastes 7:2 again. As I thought about the truth that the destiny of everyone is death and the living should take this to heart, I asked myself again "How shall I live?" In particular, after I heard my third uncle pastor Andrew Kim's doctor saying that my uncle had about two or three weeks to live, I meditated on Ecclesiastes 7:2 again. And the challenge that I got was I should live with a death perspective.

Why should we live with the death perspective? The reason is because it is beneficial to us. What are some benefits? There are several benefits, but I want to share only three.

First, when we live with the death perspective, we become more and more dependent on God because we acknowledge our inability and helplessness.

What I felt again when I attended two funerals in this New Year was the fact that we humans come from the earth and return to earth. And as James 4:14 says, I came to think again about our lives that "is a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes." In front of death, we can not help but feel incompetent and helpless. No matter how strong, no matter how famous and rich people are, before death everyone cannot but feel the inability and helplessness of human beings. Especially young people like me should go to a funeral more and more so that I can fully realize my inability and helplessness. Why should I do this? The reason is to get rid of my strength. In other words, I need to take away my strength and rely on God's strength and power.

I think we need to be humble. We need to be humble before God rather than in front of people. When we think about our coming death before God, we should not rely on our own strength but depend on God's strength and power. We must learn through funerals that God is in control of life and death. In other words, we must learn to recognize God's sovereignty. We must acknowledge that our lives depend on the Lord. To do so, we must face ourselves in terms of death.

I personally like to sing hymn titled "Simply trusting every day". This is verse 1 and chorus: "Simply trusting everyday, 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 whatever befall, Trusting Jesus, that is all." God is making how fragile my faith is through the difficulties that my beloved people are experiencing. Therefore, God is making me to depend on the Lord more and more. As the years pass, I am learning about the weakness of humanity and the strength of God by experiencing the realities of humanity, which grow old and become ill. Therefore, I would like to look back on my life with a view of death more and more.

Second, when we live with the death perspective, we pursue the eternal things rather than the temporary things.

We often say we come with empty hands and that we leave this world with empty hands. Even though we know it, we are busy trying to fill something in our hands. Then, when we participate in the funeral of our beloved, we are stimulated again little bit and think about how we should live rest of our lives in this earth. But when time passes by, we tend to forget about decisions we made after the funeral and again we make a busy life trying to grab

some things in our hands. What is the result of working hard without rest? In the end it is going to the grave with our empty hands.

At least those who believe in Jesus will look back on their lives from the point of view of death through a funeral and think about how to live for the days on this earth that God allows. In doing so, we think of things above, rather than thinking of things in the world, and we think that we should pursue eternity rather than seek temporary things. We realize that this world is not our home, and we are going to the heaven like the ancestors of faith in Hebrews chapter 11. The reason is because from the point of view of death we agree with the Word of Solomon that the things we pursue in this world are meaningless and meaningless. Also, we realize that all the temporary things will fade away and only the eternal things will remain forever. So we determine to live for the things that last forever. We live for the eternal Lord, according to His eternal Word and preach the gospel of Jesus Christ to the eternal souls with His eternal love.

I think about my death often at the beloved people's funerals as I see the bodies of the beloved who return to the dust. And I will think about what does "the day of death is better than the day of birth" means (7:1). Furthermore, I think about what King Solomon said in Ecclesiastes 7:1 – "A good name is better than fine perfume, and the day of death better than the day of birth." Will my beloved people around me remember my name "James Kim" as 'a good name'? Sometimes I imagine how many people would say, 'James Kim went to eternity after pursuing eternal things all his life'. In order to live in this world like the one who lives in the coming world, we must live with the death perspective. In other words, while living in this world with an eternal perspective, we must live for eternity.

Third, when we live with the death perspective, we can save time.

A person who lives with a view of death is a wise man. And the wise man pursues eternal things. He is very careful how he lives, not as unwise but as wise (Eph. 5:15). As an example, the wise man does not pursue debauchery like getting drunk (v. 18). It is because he knows that such a life is a foolish life (v. 17). Instead, he makes the most of every opportunity knowing that the days are evil (v. 16). Moreover, he understands what the Lord's will is (v. 17) and tries to fulfill His will. That's why, being filled with the Holy Spirit, he speaks to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs (v. 19). He sings and makes music in his heart to the Lord (v. 19). He always gives thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ (v. 20).

I think we are realizing that the time is passing so fast that the more we get older, the more we realize it. Of course, there are some people who are ignorant of this fact that the time is passing by so fast as they get older. How can we save the time that is flowing so quickly? I think one of the ways is to attend a funeral and think about our own death. If we are busy think that we will live forever in this earth, we should look at our life at least once by attending to our loved one's funeral. And we should think about how to live my life and how to finish it. The reason is because our funerals are not too far away.

I am already 40 years old. If the average life expectancy is 7-80, then I already lived half. Of course I do not know when God will call me to heaven. Somehow nowadays I think about the importance of living day by day. It is because no one knows tomorrow's work. Since God has allowed us to live today, we try to live today for the glory of God. And if God allows us to have tomorrow, we will live tomorrow in the same attitude as today. I don't think it's wise to be obsessed with the past and to worry about future too much. I think it is good to enjoy day by day in gratitude to walk with the Lord. Then I believe we can go to the Lord with thanksgiving even if we die tonight. I don't know how many years God has left me on this earth (I do not think it is necessary to know), but I just want to pursue eternity while relying on the Lord day by day. I would like to live for the glory of God while I walk with Him and be faithful in the ministry that the Lord called me to do.

My dear Pastor Andrew Kim is now in a very weak physical condition. I think of the pastor who was hard to get up on the couch himself. In the midst of that, I recall the image when he relied on God and praised “How Great Thou Art” to God in loud voice. Though his body is very fragile, his soul is like an eagle flying toward the sky. His soul was depending on the eternal God alone when he was praising God's greatness. As I want to participate in his earnest prayer of glorifying God alone, this is what I want to confess: ‘I was to live like a dead person’. I want to live with the death perspective. To do so, I would like to take the advice from the Teacher King Solomon and go to more funerals. And I want to think about the end of life that is death as the living person when I go to the funerals. I want to feel it and experience it. And I want to write it on the tablet of my heart. And from the death perspective, I want to continue living this day, pursuing eternal life while trusting the Lord more and more. I believe that when I die, I will live forever. Amen.

After my soul praises the high and greatness of the Lord,

Pastor James Kim

The wilderness is a place of opportunity

We who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ often say that this world is a wilderness. And we believe that through this wilderness we will enter into Heaven, the true Promised Land. Since there is certain hope in the eternal Heaven, we live in this wilderness-like world, persevering with endurance any difficulties and adversities. But sometimes we envy some people in this world when we go through very difficult and painful days of our lives, that is to envy their prosperity. There is time when we look at them with envious eyes in the question of why believers in Jesus should suffer but those non-believers eat well without any suffering. There are times when we envy them, wondering how they are successful and live well in this world even though they don't believe in Jesus but we the believers are suffering. As a result, we begin to complain in dissatisfaction. And we imitate the lives of the worldly people who are mixed with us and live our lives like them with hope in this world even though we are just passing by this world. Although this world is not our home, we live on earth thinking that this world is our home. We no longer consider this world as wilderness, but as a paradise.

When we look at Numbers 20:4, we see the Israelites quarreling with Moses because there was no water (vv. 1-3). They said to Moses, "If only we had died when our brothers fell dead before the LORD! Why did you bring the LORD's community into this desert, that we and our livestock should die here?" (vv. 3-4) Furthermore, they complained to Moses, "Why did you bring us up out of Egypt to this terrible place?" (v. 5) How could they complain rather than giving thanks to God for God's deliverance from Egypt? To the Israelites, the wilderness was no longer the way to pass through in order to enter in the Promised Land, Canaan. They regarded "this wilderness" (v. 4) as a "wretched place" (v. 5). What was the reason? It was because there was no grain or figs or vines or pomegranates and no water to drink (v. 5). Since there were none of these things they wanted, the wilderness was the wretched place for the Israelites. But the question is, 'Is the wilderness the wretched place, as the Israelites thought?' Eventually, after hearing the resentment of the Israelites, Moses and Aaron left the assembly and went to the doorway of the tent of meeting and fell to their faces (v. 6). They prayed to God. Then the glory of Lord appeared to them (v. 6), and God told Moses to assemble the congregation and speak to the rock before their eyes, that it might yield its water (v. 8). But after Moses gathered the assembly before the rock, he said to them, "Listen now, you rebels; shall we bring forth water for you out of this rock?" (v. 10) and struck the rock twice with his rod (v. 11). As a result, water came forth abundantly and the congregation and their beasts drank (v. 11). It was called the waters of Meribah because the sons of Israel contended with the Lord (v. 13). But Moses and Aaron, like the Israelites, sinned against God in this wilderness. God told Moses and Aaron that "you have not believed Me, to treat Me as holy in the sight of the sons of Israel" (v. 12). In other words, the Moses and Aaron's sin was unbelief and unsanctification (Park). As a result, God told Moses and Aaron that they "shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them" (v. 12). Thus, in the wilderness, the Israelites and their leaders Moses and Aaron sinned against God. Was the wilderness the wretched place, as the Israelites thought?

The wilderness is never the wretched place. Rather, the wilderness is a good place. The reason that the wilderness is good place is because we meet our good God and taste His goodness in the wilderness. In order to experience our good God and taste His goodness, our sins must first be exposed in the wilderness. The sins of our unbelief and unsanctification should be exposed in the wilderness. Our contention, resentment, and sinful acts against our church leaders should also be exposed. Our sins of greed and greed must be exposed as well. In the midst of that, we should have confession like Prophet Habakkuk in Habakkuk 3: 17-19: "Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will be joyful in God my Savior. The Sovereign LORD is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, he enables me to go on the heights.

....” We are not to complain about the lack of things in this wilderness. Rather, we must realize deeply that “I rather have Jesus than silver or gold” (Hymn “I’d Rather Have Jesus”). We must learn to be satisfied with Jesus alone and the secret of being content in any and every situation the wilderness as Apostle Paul did (Phil. 4:11-12). There is no better place to learn this secret than in the wilderness. In the midst of that we should have the confession of the hymn “O Thou, in Whose Presence”: (v. 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!” (v. 5) “Dear Shepherd! I hear, and will follow Thy call; I know the sweet wound of Thy voice; Restore and defend me, for Thou art my all, And in Thee I will ever rejoice. “

We must deeply realize that in the wilderness our true hope is only the Lord Jesus. We must be able to confess in the wilderness that He is our true joy, hope, and life. Therefore, we must intentionally enter the wilderness. And we must enter the wilderness ourselves and humbly stay before God's holy presence. We must fall before Him. And we must listen to His quite voice. There is no place like the wilderness to learn that “man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord” (Deut. 8:3). Therefore, we must be able to enjoy the wilderness life. In that enjoyment, our souls must be restored and revived. There we must experience the overflowing river of streams of living water of Jesus, the Rock (Jn. 7:38). We must be filled with the Holy Spirit in the wilderness. Therefore, according to the eschatological indwelling Holy Spirit's guidance, we must move by faith toward that high place, the true Promise Land, Heaven. As the Spirit leads us, we must move toward an eternal Heaven where there is no need and no longer thirst. There we will live there with the Lord forever.

Praying that the Lord, the Potter, molds me in the wilderness,

Pastor James Kim

Conclusion

In this world like the wilderness, there are many troubles, worries, and anxieties. We are worried and anxious about the necessities of life. Also, we suffer in poverty. Sometimes we are seriously troubled by hardships of our loved ones. Not only that, we are often surprised and frightened by unexpected difficulties and hardships. We ask why these things happen to us. But the more we do so, the more often we complain and even blame in dissatisfaction. We also try to work through ourselves in the midst of difficulties and hardships. But the more we do so, the more we get stuck and we feel a sense of failure. And sometimes we feel so trap that the solution to the problem is invisible. And when the trap situation and hardships persist, we even feel our limit of patience in suffering and pains. And we even feel despair in the thought of being humanly impossible for us to overcome those hardships. We are exhausted by the pressure and anguish of our hearts. We even feel our own weaknesses and helplessness. But this crisis of our lives can be an opportunity that God gives us. Although the crisis of our life can be a crisis that deteriorate, God is making even that crisis an opportunity for us to be transformed, to be holy and to imitate Jesus. Crisis is also an opportunity for us to repent our sins and a great opportunity for us to hear God speak loudly to us through His megaphone. Furthermore, crisis is an opportunity for us to experience God's saving power and God's presence. In other words, crisis is an opportunity to see the glory of God.

Since the kingdom of God has already come upon us (Mt. 12:28), we receive God's reign and rule. So even though we face crises such as, impossible, failure, weaknesses, being in need, conflict, complaint, anxiety, sadness, blockage, suffering, pain, the voice of resentment, anguish of heart, persecution and revelation, even death, God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose (Rom. 8:28) and makes them as opportunities for us to see the glory of God. Therefore, the wilderness is a place of opportunity, and the kingdom of God is a kingdom of opportunity!