

**"The Way to Heaven" Isaiah 7:14 / Matthew 1:20-23 (07/14/2024)**

Before I came to our church, thankfully, I could have a long vacation with my family. Of course, I was busy with lots of document work for graduation and the first appointment, but I did not need to attend any classes, and there were no more assignments to do. While I was enjoying my last long vacation, many people advised me. "Paul, you should write and prepare at least 4 or 6 weeks of sermons. You will be very busy during and after the move." I agreed with their advice, and I already prepared many exegesis of the Bible on my computer. But I could not have any feeling of, 'Oh, I am ready, and I am so comfortable to start my new ministry!' Something came up deep in my heart instead of the feeling of 'I am done! I am ready!' And this little willing deep in my heart was something that I should not have. 'For the first preaching, I want to deliver the voice of God what God really wants to say to the congregation.' After I found this voice deep in my heart, my mind, heart, and spirit started to be complicated. I prayed a lot to listen to God's voice. 'God, is this your message? Should I say this to them? What do you think about this message? I think it is really good!' My mind and spirit were full of many thoughts, and I suffered from many complicated thoughts. And as usual, God did not say to me until the end of the suffering. Finally, when I gave up on thinking about something last week, God gave me two messages. The first message was, 'You should go and say,

“Thank you”” And the second message was, ‘Why don’t you share your story with them?’ For the first message, God told me, ‘They are my people who stayed in the church to protect my church during the Covid and disaffiliation. They suffered from the Covid and disaffiliation. My house survived because they kept their position in the church during the Covid and disaffiliation. So, you should say Thank you to them.’ Of course, I cannot give you any evidence that this voice was God’s real voice. But I surely believe God told me this message during my prayer. It is true. During the Covid and disaffiliation, many churches were closed. Because you overcame this very challenging time, this beautiful God’s house was not closed. So, I really want to say, “Thank you.” I want to share more about God's first message with the Scripture at the end of this month or next month.

For God's second message, I hope to share my faith story, what I believe, and ministry thoughts for a few weeks. If someone asks me, “Paul, what is Christianity?” I will say, “God is with us.” I believe that to become a good Christian and to believe in God well, we should know the gospel well. Today’s Scripture shows the main point of the gospel well. “Immanuel, God is with us.” Normally, Christians think that the gospel is good news, ‘People could have forgiveness of sins and have eternal life through Jesus Christ.’ But the gospel cannot be perfect with just this sentence. We should fully understand the gospel. ‘We could have forgiveness of sins and have

eternal life, and could be with God through Jesus Christ.’ We were separated from God because of the sin. God gave us many methods and ways to solve the sin problem, but we disobeyed. Finally, God sent the only Son, Jesus, to us to solve the sin problem. Our Christ Jesus took his cross and showed his sacrifice to save us from sin. And he resurrected and sent us the Holy Spirit. God did all of these things for only one reason. To be with us. Through Christ, now we can be with God.

Matthew wrote the gospel to let Jews know who Jesus was. He wanted to make Jews know Jesus was the Messiah. So, he used many passages from the Old Testament, which was their Holy Scripture at that time, to show how Jesus fulfilled the message of the prophets. The interesting thing is that Matthew linked his writing about the name of Jesus to Isaiah. In Matthew 1:21, Angel said, “You shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” Matthew then said that Isaiah’s message was fulfilled through the birth of Jesus: “They shall call his name Immanuel (which means, God with us).” Jesus came to us not only for the forgiveness of sins but also to show God is with us.

I was born into a Buddhist family, so I was a Buddhist until I was 17 years old. I converted to Christianity when I was 18. Then, I was baptized in New Zealand when I was 20. After my baptism, I went back to South Korea to become a pastor. When I was a seminarian in South Korea, even though I knew that Jesus saved me,

I had a feeling of a gap between God and me. I struggled a lot because of the unknown gap between God and me. I felt a crisis, and I could not continue to be a minister if I could not solve the gap problem. One day, I decided to go to an island to find the answer. I prayed to God when I arrived on the island, “God, give me the answer. I believe in Christ. And I believe Jesus saved me. But I am still struggling with sins and still feel the gap between you and me. If you do not show me the answer here, I will die here.” On the third day, while I was struggling with hunger and tiredness, God gave me inspiration in my heart. ‘I saved you because I want to be with you. I forgave you to be with you. I died on the cross to be with you.’ After this inspiration, I felt an unbelievably fresh feeling, and I could feel that my heart was free from the unknown pressure. Also, I could surely have the assurance of God’s presence in me. I realized that I used the gospel just to solve my sins, just to be a perfect person who did not commit any sins. However, after this experience, I knew that the gospel is, ‘God is with us.’ I was confident that I could do everything in God and was full of joy that day.

However, the next day, I was full of annoyance in the morning. Other backpackers in the room made a lot of noises early in the morning, and the weather was really hot and humid. The sunlight was too strong and burned my skin. I was so disappointed. ‘How can this experience of grace not continue a night?’ When I fell

into despair, God told me in my heart again. ‘Do you want to continue your journey with me?’ Since then, I have realized that life is a journey with God. Through the gospel, I became a person who walks the Way to Heaven with God. Through the gospel, we can have the assurance of God’s presence. We can live our lives in God’s presence. Our lives have become a journey with God. We have become people who walk the Way to Heaven with God.

If someone asks me, “Paul, how do you want to explain your ministry?” I will confidently answer, “I want to guide people to walk the Way to Heaven with God.” I do not know how many years I will be here. However, I hope we can walk the Way to Heaven together in God’s presence.