

**"The Next Chapter" Psalm 42:1-5 / John 6:35 (08/04/2024)**

Have you watched the movie 007? It is one of my favorite movies. Since I was young, I have liked to watch 007, and I ran to the movie theater when a new one was released. I liked watching lots of new technologies and watching the fantastic action of 007. 007, James Bond always completed impossible missions in any challenging situation. He had never given up his mission. Most of the 007 series have a similar story structure. After James Bond completed his mission, the next chapter was always the same. The movie showed a pick of tension to the audience, and then, after the mission was completed, the atmosphere of the movie changed to peaceful and relaxed. At the end of every 007 movie, James Bond hid himself in a place even his boss could not find and had a very peaceful vacation. He had time to rest and restore after he completed impossible missions.

In the past 5 years, our church has had a very challenging time. COVID changed everything, and we experienced how the church can suffer from a disease. However, as I shared last week, we overcame this challenging time well. We loved our church and stayed at the church. So, our church could not be closed. Our church's chapter of the challenging story is finished, and God opened our church's new chapter. Then, what will our church's new chapter be? I believe that God will open

the chapter of restoration for our church. Then, what is Christians' restoration? How can Christians' restoration can happen?

We need to review the Covid season carefully. Actually, the Covid season made the church physically rest. Yes, pastors and some church staff probably became busier setting up new types of ministries, such as online services and gatherings. However, regarding church members, there were no busy events or ministries during the Covid season. The church physically took a rest during the Covid season.

But what is the result after Covid? Did you have the feeling, 'Wow! I took a very good rest for two years! Now let's start again!' or, 'Ok! I had enough energy for two years!?' I do not think so. Many people left the church during the Covid. And we felt tired and despairing after the Covid. We took enough physical rest during the Covid, then how could it happen? What is Christians' restoration?

Let me talk more about my island story. Last week, I told you that I found a light when I lost my way in the darkness. I was injured and covered with dirt while I passed bushes and an animal shed. When I got closer to the light, I found that the light came from a house. I knocked on the door, and a man wearing a medical uniform checked me through the window and opened the door. I told him I got injured during the travel and asked him to give me some medication for dressing. He

brought a towel with oil. He said, "It is tea tree oil. It helps to clean the wound." The house was an aroma therapy shop, and the man was an aroma therapist. He said he was cleaning the shop alone to close. And I made him scared because in the darkness, in the storm rain, a stranger wearing a plastic raincoat was covered by mud and dirt, and this stranger was bleeding on his legs. He said he thought I was a criminal, at least who killed somebody. So, he did not want to open the door. But somehow, he opened the door and helped me. Yes, I believe God moved the therapist's heart and healed my wound that night.

Then, he warned me to stop walking in the night. He gave me directions to the highway. I went to the highway to hitchhike a car. When I started to walk along the way, I could see a light coming toward me from afar. I was sure that it was a car, and I waved my hands toward the light. That was a car, but the car did not stop at me and just passed me. I thought the driver could not see me in the darkness. When I was about to give up catching up with the car, the car suddenly stopped and came back to me. The car was a taxi. I explained my situation, and the driver took me to a backpacker's shelter. He said the same thing as the therapist. He said I made him scared. In the darkness, in the storm rain, a stranger wearing a plastic raincoat was covered by mud and dirt. He did not want to stop at me because he was scared. But somehow, he turned back to me. I believe God provided transportation and shelter

for me that night.

The next day, I met a family with a father and a daughter. They treated me to lunch. I could eat the most famous and very expensive meals on the island for lunch. Then, I met a drunken person when I passed an ice cream cart. He was fully drunken during the daytime. He suddenly called me. “Hey, come here!” This time, I was scared so I ignored him and just passed him. But he called me again and shouted, “Hey, you! Come here! What are you doing on this hot day? Come and grab an ice cream!” Then, the ice cream seller and the drunken person started fighting each other. The seller thought the drunken man did not have money. The drunken man proudly shouted again. “I have money! Hey you! Come and grab an ice cream!” He really paid money for me, so I could eat the ice cream. On this day, I could have a great lunch and dessert.

God healed me, provided me with transportation, a safe shelter to rest, and fed me. I was fully restored by God’s provision. However, this physical restoration did not continue for a long time. In the afternoon of that day, I was hungry and tired again. I was satisfied by God’s provision, but something deep in my heart was not satisfied. My spirit was not satisfied. When I prayed to God for my unsatisfied spirit, I encountered the cross of Christ. In the afternoon of that day, God told me in my

heart, “I sent my only Son for you. Jesus Christ died for you to give you life. Now Christ is with you.” After I heard this voice in my heart, I could feel that my spirit was satisfied. In John 6:35, Jesus said, “I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.” On that day, I realized that the true restoration comes from Jesus Christ.

This is a very simple and basic knowledge of Christians: Jesus Christ came to us, died for us, was resurrected for us, and is now with us. It is simple but very powerful. It is enough to give us restoration. Then, why are we still tired and unable to experience God's restoration? Why can we not experience the presence of God in our lives? That is because we do not seek the presence of God like a thirsty deer.

Right before I finished my military service, my last mission was to Catch wild deer at the Airport base. To catch deer, I hired a deer farmer. I also learned from the farmer that a deer can survive for a bit long time without food but cannot survive even a day without water.

Let's imagine today's Scripture, Psalm 42. The author of this Psalm seems to be in despair. “Day and night my tears are my only food, Sorrow floods my heart, everyone keeps asking, where is your God?” This author, who is in sorrow and despair, is thirsty for God as a deer gets thirsty for streams of water. The author seeks

God like a thirsty deer. This means that the author cannot live even a day without God. Then the author confesses in verse 5, “I should trust you, LORD. I will praise you again because you help me, and you are my God.”

I believe that our church’s next chapter will be the restoration. The true restoration from God. However, I want to ask one question. Do we really seek and pursue the restoration like a thirsty deer? I saw and heard many churches want restoration like before Covid. Our church is probably also one of those churches. Are we really seeking the restoration of our church like a thirsty deer? Do we really believe that Jesus Christ is the only Savior who gives us the life of bread and the life of living water? If so, God will show us God’s restoration in our next chapter. Amen.